How would you describe your role?

Michael Donnelly: My group is charged with thinking about media futures and what the landscape is going to look like more than a year or so out. We’re also tasked with global strategy and aligning marketing initiatives in different parts of the world and scaling them. We’ve got tremendous digital leaders in certain countries who are doing great work. It’s our job to spread the learning and best practices throughout the world—to inspire, educate and co-create strategies, frameworks and common solutions, and then scale them across the company. We’re focused on the people, platforms and partnerships that will enable us to do that.

“It’s our job to spread the learning and best practices throughout the world.”

The majority of my time is spent on building and establishing common solutions. By finding best-in-class solutions for the entire company, not only can we make the things we’re doing better, but we can help those countries just getting into the space become more efficient. MasterCard has a presence in more than 200 countries, and I’d like to see us doing digital marketing in the overwhelming majority of those. Some markets are doing a fantastic job, but many others are just getting into digital, so we’re trying very quickly to get strategies and frameworks in place to make their jobs easier.

Besides North America, what markets are succeeding with digital?

Donnelly: Mexico has quickly picked up global strategies and frameworks and implemented them flawlessly. It’s also got an incredible culture of collaboration. Specifically, our Mexican market has terrific youth projects such as Priceless Music, which has achieved tangible results with local youth. We won a Cannes Silver Lion for a music app called MIYAMO, which is a customized music app.
Australia, Brazil and the UK are all very successful market leaders as well.

In the US, the single biggest consumer-facing and digitally enabled program we have is Priceless Cities. It’s currently live in 26 cities including New York, Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles. It’s providing the opportunity for consumers to purchase priceless experiences. So unlike current programs that might just offer great discounts, ours isn’t necessarily about being the cheapest or having the biggest discount. It’s about uniquely offering consumers the opportunity for a priceless experience.

Is the priceless experience more of a larger lifestyle concept?

Donnelly: Yes, it is. For example, in the US this summer, Beyoncé was a big partner. While many people can sell tickets to big-name events, we were providing a very limited number of tickets for the best seats in the house during her The Mrs. Carter Show World Tour. We also offered an exclusive VIP backstage pass. It's all about our brand being in the business of enabling priceless experiences and then strongly encouraging you to tell your friends.

We will continue to scale more markets with specialized offers and customized opportunities for individuals, merchants and card issuers. While we’ve primarily talked about consumers and what they want out of this, there’s a big opportunity for partnerships with merchants that, at the end of the day, are eager for new customers and increased purchases from existing customers. So this is an opportunity that uniquely allows us to provide value to consumers, merchants and issuers.

In some cases, instead of making it very city-specific, like Priceless New York, we recently launched Priceless Arabia in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Jordan and other countries. We grouped them together, which allows us the creative license to talk a lot more about the mystique of that region of the world rather than individual cities.

What are your three biggest business priorities?

Donnelly: At a very high level, as a global company, we are focused on three priorities: grow, diversify and build. The marketing vision to support those priorities is to seamlessly connect every person to everything that matters. So there are three marketing priorities: No. 1 is about shifting the culture, capabilities, community and communications to focus on people. No. 2 is about building customer relationships—whether they’re consumers, merchants, governments or issuers. And finally, No. 3 is about scaling aggressively—scaling our solutions, strategies, reach, and consumer database sizes.

What are the biggest challenges facing your industry?

Donnelly: Being relatively new to this industry, one of the most unique challenges is to understand the incredible opportunity digital offers to speak directly to consumers and gain insights—to listen and learn. But we have a challenge in the fact that these consumers don’t come directly to us to get a card. We have an opportunity to influence a purchase, but consumers don’t come and purchase it from us, so that’s uniquely different from other sectors like consumer packaged goods or auto.

We’re not necessarily driving people to buy from us. We’re driving people, in some cases, to buy from our partners. In most businesses, you’re pretty much fighting for the No. 1 spot in search, so that’s where it nets out. In our case, we’ve got to sometimes question that. Do we really want the No. 1 spot? Because we really want people to get a card—and if they don’t get cards from us, then I’d probably want to push people to where they can get a card. You really have to become an influencer, an educator and a value-added partner to consumers. Ultimately, it’s a win-win if people actually get and use a card.

“At MasterCard, we use eMarketer for global and regional data to help us validate hypotheses and ultimately develop our strategies.”

What have you and your team used eMarketer for?

Donnelly: I’m a huge fan of eMarketer, and I’ve been a customer for a long time. At MasterCard, we use eMarketer for global and regional data to help us validate hypotheses and ultimately develop our strategies. In many cases, we may directionally think we know given facts about a market, such as mobile penetration, mobile usage or smartphone adoption. But eMarketer is the very first place we turn to validate a hypothesis or discover new facts to build our strategies.
What do you like best about eMarketer?

Donnelly: The product continues to evolve and get more user-friendly. It was always good, but it was always only as good as what was actually in the database. The content continues to increase, ranging from very valuable charts to even more valuable and deeper reports. It’s about balancing the mix. In the past, I would turn to eMarketer for high-level insights in a general area, and now I can get far deeper insights in very specific areas. And your interface and usability have continued to mature—it’s obvious there’s a continued investment in eMarketer.

What would you like to see more of?

Donnelly: I’d like to see deeper financial services data every single quarter, specifically about CRM. I was recently looking for deep data about the use of CRM tactics within financial services and found that challenging. At a high level, it’s my observation that when I’m looking for general tactical data, it’s there. But your model of aggregating and synthesizing lots of research certainly gives you a far better chance of having what I’m looking for than any one individual provider I might be subscribing to.

How is eMarketer different than other digital research sources you use?

Donnelly: Two things come to mind. One is the aggregation of lots of sources. That’s a huge differentiator. And then second, I can quickly find aggregated and comparable data—apples-to-apples research—on whatever I’m looking for.

What is your take on opening access to business intelligence to everyone in the company?

Donnelly: My position is to get as much data to as many people as possible because they’re much more likely to find something great to do with it. Whether it’s website data, mobile app data, mobile site traffic data or social data—the more I can get that out and in concise dashboards for others to apply to the business, the better use I can be to them. I believe in giving access to as many people as possible.

We have our conversation suite, which is our social media command center and social data that’s been deployed to our global and regional communications teams as well as within marketing. It enables real-time monitoring, engagement and publishing across social, digital and traditional media in 43 markets and 26 languages. It’s a next-generation tool that moves monitoring from simple reporting and analysis to predictive intelligence and real-time publishing. Through data visualization displayed on a 40-foot screen, it’s very easy to see all the conversations in real time, whether you’re working on core products like credit, debit or prepaid products, or on emerging products like our MasterPass digital wallet.

What’s the most exciting or inspiring project you’re working on?

Donnelly: One thing that intrigues me the most is content marketing. If you were to go to LoveThisCity.com, you would find a site that’s in four US cities. We hope it will be a model for associating our brand with lots of unbranded, passion-based content. People wake up every day and look for whatever they’re passionate about—whether it’s the Yankees, jazz music or great restaurants in New York. They don’t necessarily always look for our brand. So the more we can associate with those brands, the more we can accomplish all kinds of things. I’m really excited about a deeper content marketing strategy that aligns us with the passions that seamlessly connect people to everything that matters to them.

The #LoveThisCity program is all about what makes you love your city, so it’s very much a local-based way of talking about opportunities that enable pricelessness. If you’re looking for a restaurant in New York, you might go to one of the big restaurant directories. You probably wouldn’t go to MasterCard. However, you’re going to find what everybody else finds. What we’re trying to do is give you very small pieces of content, usually no more than 400 words or so, that offer insider-type local secrets. It’s all about enabling a priceless experience.