

Brian Irving Transcript

[00:00:01] Brian: It really created this human connection between the rider and the driver. And it wasn't just about getting from point A to point B, but how you got there mattered. We've matured past a lot of the early things, but what we have remained true to is the belief that there's a better journey, and our purpose is rooted in that. It's rooted in getting real humans, enabling real drivers to make real money, and to connect with the passengers, and passengers to connect to what's most important to them. And that might be, like, something really mundane like getting to a doctor's appointment, but it might be something really sublime like going to meet your college friends that you haven't seen in five years or something. So we really believe that it comes down to who's on the journey and how we can help them get there better.

[00:00:53] Matt: To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm **Matt Britton**, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now, and how you can keep up. Welcome to *The Speed of Culture*. Up today on *The Speed of Culture* podcast, we are thrilled to be joined by **Brian Irving**, the Chief Marketing Officer at Lyft. Brian's been at the forefront of Lyft's transformation, guiding the brand through an exciting evolution focused on human connection, innovation, and community. From launching **Lyft Silver** to leading the charge towards autonomous vehicles, Brian's vision is shaping the future of mobility. Brian, so great to see you, and thanks for joining today.

[00:01:35] Brian: Likewise. My pleasure.

[00:01:37] Matt: So let's talk about the Lyft brand. There are some people out there who travel in ride-sharing, other ride-sharing products, but have never used Lyft. What is different about Lyft that you'd like the audience to know in terms of the product and the brand?

[00:01:50] Brian: Yeah. I mean, I think that it goes back to the genesis of it. And, really, the founders thought that there was a better way, like, a friendlier way to get around. And to do that, some of the most iconic and probably most memorable parts of the origin story of the Lyft brand had to do with the **pink mustache**, and that they really encouraged passengers to get in the front seat and kind of like fist bump with the driver. It really created this **human connection** between the rider and the driver. And it wasn't just about getting from point A to point B, but how you got there mattered. And the core of that, while we've matured past the pink mustache that wasn't relevant, for if you're waking up at 6 AM to go to the airport for this meeting, you know, like—

[00:02:18] Matt: It's more of like leaving the club at 3 AM.

[00:02:20] **Brian:** Exactly. So we've matured past a lot of the early things, but what we have remained true to is the belief that there's a **better journey**. And our purpose is rooted in that. It's rooted in getting real humans, enabling real drivers to make real money, and to connect with the passengers and passengers to connect to what's most important to them. And that might be, like, something really mundane, like getting to a doctor's appointment, but it might be something really sublime, like going to meet your college friends that you haven't seen in five years or something. So we really believe that it comes down to who's on the journey and how we can help them get there better.

[00:03:21] **Matt:** And, of course, you run a **two-sided marketplace**. So an imagined part of your journey isn't just about getting more riders, but also getting more drivers to join and serve your customers.

[00:03:32] **Brian:** Yeah. What's interesting is that I think getting more drivers was part of the journey, a part of the challenge for quite some time. And now, while we still onboard new drivers at a regular pace, it's really about **serving them**. Like, again, our purpose is to serve and connect. And so when we think about serving drivers, how do we help them maximize the time that they are spending driving? And whether that's because they're doing it as a full-time driver and this is their primary source of income, or like a lot of folks who are doing it as a way of supplemental income for their family. And whether that's, like, mom who has maybe dropped kids off at school and is feeling like a three-hour time block where she can bring in some additional income for the family or whatever. It's like, how do we help them serve not only their own needs, but serve the needs of our riders? And, frankly, like, our **driver preference**, by the way, is, like, **29 points higher** than other rideshare providers out there. Drivers prefer, by far, to drive with Lyft because we have a point of view to serve them, and how can we help them get the most out of their time on the road?

[00:04:41] **Matt:** So let's talk about the consumer for a second because, obviously, the consumer trends that impact the way that people get from one place to the other obviously have a big impact on your business. And when you look at **Gen Z**, who is now this year for the first time ever, of average age of a first-time mother in the US is Gen Z. So Gen Z grew up with the iPhone in the household, so they are mobile first if you will, and they're also less likely to own cars than previous generations, which I would have, and also living in an increasingly **urbanized culture** where people are living in cities longer. There's much more two-income households, people getting married later in life. I would imagine all those things provide tailwinds for a Lyft business versus people who move out to the suburbs, two-car garage, white picket fence, when maybe they're going to be using your service a lot less.

[00:05:29] **Brian:** Yeah. I mean, for sure. I think that you're hitting on something which is sort of like the macro trends of the expansion of the audience of, like, who actually is taking rideshare. I'll also point out that in major cities like New York and San Francisco, we actually run the **bike-share business** as well. And so we own and run City Bike. We own and run Bay Wheels here in San Francisco, which is also an increasing part of how people get around in the city.

And when they are connected to the bike service, they are also much more likely to be connected to us as their preferred rideshare option as well. So it really is, like, how do we help people get around in a way that is both natural to them but relevant for how they live?

[00:06:16] Matt: And in terms of changing how they're getting around, obviously, **autonomous vehicles** is a massive topic, I'm sure, for you and the automotive industry in general. Putting Lyft aside, where are we? What inning are we in, if you will, of the evolution of autonomous vehicles? Being that the ninth inning would be everyone, including your mother, is in an autonomous vehicle, like, where are we today, and how far are we away from the ninth inning?

[00:06:40] Brian: I think we're all just starting to buy tickets to go inside of a stadium. We're—it's so early and, yeah, super exciting. It's like to play out your analogy there. Like, the anticipation, the enthusiasm is there as you're, like, ready to go into the stadium. Like, you know something really great is about to happen, and you might be a spectator or you might be a participant. But it is really exciting. It's very early. And I think for us, it's really thinking about from a rideshare, from an AV partner, like, where can we uniquely enable them? And we've had already a lot of really great announcements of things that we're into around, like, **fleet management**, some that people hadn't initially thought about of what it takes to have AVs on the road, as well as then onboarding all different types of vehicles, and that might be sort of personal vehicles through to sort of, like, shared ride type vehicles. And the big thing for us is, like, we have differentiated ourselves and our brands by supporting our drivers, by supporting, like, this **human-first approach**, and we are going to continue to do that. So we're also investing in how do we help bring drivers along the journey, not just by talking at them, but also bringing them into the discussion and helping to shape how we're thinking about our role in AV going forward.

[00:08:02] Matt: Right. Because I would imagine there's no world in which you're never going to want drivers. And maybe it when you're sending your kid somewhere or maybe if it's for a longer journey versus a short-haul journey in a city. And I think there's going to be a role for humans, obviously, in transportation, but there's also going to be an increasing, and the same analogy exists for business. You know? Like, I run a software company, and we have people that are worried about their jobs. We have customers that are worried about their jobs. And the question is, like, what does upskilling actually mean as technology, as **AI** takes a bigger role? And I'm sure AI is a big driver of autonomous vehicles, and I'm also sure it's a big driver for your seat as a CMO in terms of how you're thinking about your business. So how has AI impacted your life on a day-to-day basis, and where do you see that same question being in five years?

[00:08:51] Brian: I think we're all kind of, like, going through this journey of probably looking at—there was a lot of overhype early, maybe, like, a year and a half, maybe two years ago, like, a lot of hype, now a lot of substance. And then to your point, like, a lot of, well, I absolutely do not believe that this should be a strategy that I will ever lead around marketing, which is, like, **fear, uncertainty, and doubt**. But it is absolutely has to be recognized to your point of team members who are wondering, like, is AI coming to replace their job? And I think where we really

are, and I just came out of a meeting with my whole team talking about this, where we're going is, like, we really should think about what AI can do to **unlock the multitudes of our own individual potential**.

[00:09:37] Matt: Be a force multiplier on our skill set.

[00:09:39] Brian: 100%. And if you think about it as, like, all of a sudden, whether it's a hundred, whether it's 200, maybe it's 50, you have, like, a hundred new employees working for you who work twenty-four hours a day and have a vast array of skill sets that are at your fingertips, and you are prompting them to do their best work. And we have to think about that way. Like, we have to think about, like, an employee from day one doesn't come in and do everything exactly like their best. You have to condition them, train them, talk to them to unlock that. And so I think we're now on that journey of what the possibility is. I don't even know if I can talk about five years now, because I think even in six months and a year from now, all the things that we say, "Uh, there are limitations here, not quite there yet," I think they're going to be solved. And so, like, I think even, like, long-term planning is really, like, six months and a year when we're thinking about AI.

[00:10:34] Matt: What are some of the challenges that you are finding, just, you know, it is early days in AI, with getting your team to embrace change, to accept the fact that what got us here won't get us there, and how you're dealing with that as a leader?

[00:10:47] Brian: So I think my job is to help provide a **safe space**. I think first and foremost, that, again, like, this is not about someone coming to take a job. But I think that if you want to continue to have a job in marketing in the future, you should want to be **AI native**. Because whether it's here at Lyft or anywhere else, I think any CMO is going to be looking for people who already have experience, like, hands-on. So I think really starting to create the safe space for this to be a learning journey. The second one is thinking about conditioning. So we've done things like **AI challenges** for folks to just, like, go out and explore and experiment and see what happens and comes back. And then we're building out more of the road map of, like, what are the tools that we should start with where we think we can unlock the greatest potential from our team members? And then how do we do the training, change management, and development with those tools to rethink how we think about processes, incentives, job descriptions, and all of that stuff? So I'd say we're in the messy middle of it right now, but it's really about **psychological safety** and thinking like, "This is okay, and jump in". And, also, like, I think the other thing we discovered is that people kind of felt like they were **cheating** by using AI early on. Like, they were almost, like, hiding the fact that they were using it, and they're like, "No. No. No. But, like, bring this to the forefront. Share your learning. Share your insights. It's not cheating". It's, again, it's enabling.

[00:12:14] Matt: It's interesting because students were cheating by using AI. My son actually got caught using AI very early days of the AI revolution writing a term paper, and part of me was, like, upset because he didn't disclose it, but the other part of me is like, yeah. He's doing

what we're telling with the workforce to do on his own, so maybe he should be applauded for that.

[00:12:30] Brian: Yeah. I mean, honestly, I do think that there is responsibility for us as leaders. And I have a six-year-old son, so I'm both. I am really terrified, but also really excited for his potential in the world. But I do think it brings us back to, hopefully, spending a lot less time sort of, like, aggregating, pulling things together, organizing to **critical thinking**. So, like, okay. So your AI agent might help you develop a go-to-market strategy in thirty minutes, but you still have to do the critical thinking of, "Is this right for us? Is this right for us right now? Is this the right approach? Is it 80% right? Is it 70% right?" So I hope it really brings us back to a place of, like, helping us do critical thinking as well.

[00:13:13] Matt: Yeah. Absolutely. Which is—I always talk about that being a huge skill set that needs to be developed. Sometimes, things like critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, they're areas that are really hard to upskill in if somebody is just sort of like an order-taker, so to speak. So do you find that for certain roles, you need to look outside of Lyft to find people? And if so, like, have you found those people easy to find?

[00:13:39] Brian: Yeah. I mean, we've been evolving sort of the team here over the last year and a half since I joined already. And so we do have a lot of folks who have stayed and has embraced this new journey, and they're either bringing their core skills and, like, "Hey. This is stuff that we can't throw out. Like, we have to keep these as core skill sets and bringing new people in". But I think that we have a great employer brand. Like, Lyft is an amazing place to work. It always has been. I think part of it is because it's always been a **caring culture**, not just about our riders and drivers, but for the people as well that work here. And so no. But I do think we're starting to look at, as we interview folks, is asking, "**What experience do you have already using AI to do your job?**". And even saying, like, "**What do you wish you could do?**". And, really, again, like, to that point, helping to unlock the critical thinking part of this of, "Well, I've used Gemini or ChatGPT or Claude or whatever to get this far. I wish I could be able to do this". To me, that helps give a signal on that desire for the thinking and being a future, you know, building the future of what a modern marketer is versus being stayed in what I used to do.

[00:14:50] Matt: We'll be right back with *The Speed of Culture* after a few words from our sponsors.

So, talking about being a **modern marketer**, and, obviously, one big role you have as a marketer is getting new customers into the fold and driving more usage from existing customers. And that comes down to capturing their attention and getting them to take action. In that regard, like, what has worked for Lyft from a marketing perspective, full funnel here in **2025**?

[00:15:14] Brian: Yeah. I think that it's sort of like both ends of the spectrum. Right? Like, we have to get the foundation right? Like, we have to make sure that we are managing efficiently the customer through the funnel and just helping them make sure that we are obsessed about

every single point of the journey, and that we are converting at a super optimal rate. And what we've gone through over the last year and a half is sort of redefining what the future of the Lyft brand is. So pulling from the core of our identity, that's always been true, but also looking at, like, where we want to go, whether it's AV, whether it's our expansion internationally, whether it's our upleveling to help serve business travelers. It's really thinking, like, we have to, like, think about how the brand matures as well.

Within that, we are always the **challenger brand**, or we have been. And so this is the fun part for me, I think, as a marketer. Like, there are people that come and say, like, "Oh, we don't have the same budgets," whatever. No. You get to think differently. Like, you really get to—and for us, that means being, like, a **purposeful rebel**. We are always inspired by our purpose, but we get to challenge the status quo of how to do things. And that comes to life in things like **Lyft Silver**, which is a new product that is purely targeted towards my mom and my mom's generation, who's like a little tech insecure, who's sort of at the towards the end of her ability to drive all the time. She's after dark, she's just not comfortable at all. In Michigan, that's at four o'clock in the winter. So, like, what, she's not going to leave her house after four anymore? No. And so we're really serving by providing a truly unique service and custom service for that audience.

[00:16:52] Matt: That transcends marketing. Right? That's like **consumer insight** gets baked into the product that delivers value to the customer.

[00:16:59] Brian: That's right. And then the marketing is something that we then get to unlock. And so, like, one of the things I love, like, we launched a partnership with **Billie Jean King** yesterday, like, super timely. I mean, she is, like, the mother, the godmother of not only tennis, but probably sport as a whole. She's already a Lyft customer. So for her, she was like, when we approached her, she was like, "This is a no-brainer for me because this is why I already use Lyft". And, of course, like, the cultural timeliness of it being the **US Open** as well right now is one of those things where I think driven by data, driven by insight, and then creativity is just like, how do we unleash it? And so I love that.

[00:17:35] Matt: Has Lyft done a lot of work in the **creator economy** world, given just the new age of Gen Z and how they grow up with the phone? I would imagine getting in that news feed consistently is an important way to maintain top-of-line consideration.

[00:17:49] Brian: 100%. I mean, I do think, like, we have one of the strongest social marketing teams out there, including how we work with creators and influencers. We tend not to go for the sort of, like, creator, the **mega influencer**, because it doesn't really align to our brand generally. And so we really think of those who are on the cusp and, like, as their story arc is starting to rise, really try to work with them and help them break through as much as how them helping us break through.

[00:18:16] Matt: Yeah. For sure. So I want to switch gears a little bit and talk about you and your career journey. You've worked at some of the world's greatest companies, and I would put

Lyft in that right now. But prior, you've worked at places like **Google** and **Meta** and **Airbnb**. Along your Silicon Valley journey, which it seems like you've had, what are some of the takeaways that you've been able to gather from these companies that's made you a stronger leader and a stronger marketer to put you in the CMO seat that you're in today?

[00:18:42] Brian: I think one, **serendipity** has got me here. I talked about my mom being in Michigan. I grew up in Flint, Michigan. So, like, there's no chance that I should be sitting here talking to you about me being the CMO of Lyft today. You know? And so, like, there's so much and so many people that have helped me get here, including, you know, just being lucky, I'll say.

I think I've had these different chapters, and I wish I could say that they were really intentional and they weren't. But the first chapter was really rooted in **data and performance**. Like, I started as in finance at GE, going through the financial management training program, and then moved into more marketing analytics and CRM, and data. That chapter got me to then an opportunity at Apple where they needed those skill sets. But when I got to Apple then, what that unlocked for me was a whole new skill set and learning opportunity around **brand**, and, like, that brand and product are cannot be divorced from each other, and that it is **craft and attention to detail** more than anything else that matters when thinking about the brand. And then sort of post that, it's been different versions of bringing those two things together and informing my sort of perspective on marketing, and that being really brand-driven, but **outcomes are what matter**, and that we have to actually impact the brand on what we do and not just do things for the sake of creativity.

[00:20:08] Matt: And when you're at a company like Apple or Google, I mean, these are the world's most powerful, innovative companies, and you decide to take a leap and do something different. What gives you the conviction to do that when you are already working at a place that has so much potential?

[00:20:24] Brian: Largely, again, like, it has been my opportunities have come because someone who I have worked with before has gone somewhere else or introduced me to somewhere else where it became like a natural sort of opportunity for me to say, like, I could stay associated with this brand. I've had an amazing run and amazing experience here. And what's the opportunity for me to **grow and learn more** in the next role versus this one? And so it's really been about that.

And the analogy I use is that you might be in a room with a door ahead of you, and you think that that's the only door that's available to you. So you go through it, and you think it's going to be this huge room that you're going to stay in for a very long time. And you find out it's a very small room, but it has three other doors that you would never have had access to had you not gone through it, and that one of those doors is the one that gets you to the next one. And so I'm a firm believer in being thoughtful, but **saying yes to things** that you think that are going to matter to you and matter to achieving, like, where you want to go in life.

[00:21:27] Matt: Yeah. And, obviously, you've worked at so many great companies. I'm sure you've come in touch with so many incredible people, talented people that have gone on and do great things. When you think about the most talented people you've interacted with in business and the ones who made the biggest impact, what are some of the attributes that you think are common across them?

[00:21:46] Brian: They absolutely **care about individuals**. They know that their success comes from helping **unlock the success of those around them**, first and foremost. And I think that they know that, like, teams and employees are human beings and not, you know, employees and teams at the core of it. And I've also had a number of, like, not great leaders. Those experiences have been equally helpful for me because they've helped me understand what I hope to never represent in leadership of my teams. And then there have been some just incredible people who maybe were not people that I reported to or were peers. Maybe they're two or three levels below me, like, reporting in, and they helped me unlock a whole new level of possibility, whether it was through a marketing capability that was emerging or whatever. So really trying to be inspired and learn from all of those around.

[00:22:43] Matt: Yeah. And how are you keeping in touch with all the changes that are happening right now? Obviously, you have to care about people. You need to be inspiring. You need to be able to be inspired. But where do you get your information in terms of this is where I need to lean in? This is where that Silver product—I'm sure it came from an insight. Where are those insights coming from?

[00:23:02] Brian: I will say we're very fortunate that we have a CEO who is passionate about **customer obsession**, drives profitable growth.

[00:23:09] Matt: Core to your brand.

[00:23:10] Brian: It's core to our brand. And so that is both a mantra, a strategy, and someone who enables that and inspires that throughout the entire org is a gift. That is absolutely true. I also think, like, we're super fortunate in the Bay Area. There is an incredibly strong **CMO network** here across various industries, and we get together a lot. Sometimes it's because other people bring us together. Sometimes it's because we bring ourselves together. But we spend a lot of time talking, learning, open. It's not about posturing and whatever. Like, it's just real authentic. Like, what's going on?

[00:23:44] Matt: Great to have that.

[00:23:45] Brian: It is incredibly—

[00:23:46] Matt: No matter what your role is, to have a group of peers that you can bounce things off of, I think, is critically important to identify your blind spots and making sure that you're continuing to level your game up.

[00:23:54] **Brian:** Without a doubt.

[00:23:55] **Matt:** So, Brian, we always end our podcast by asking our guests if there's a saying or mantra that has kind of encapsulated their professional journey to date. Just wondering what comes to mind for you and why.

[00:24:06] **Brian:** I think, like, I'll come back to something I said earlier, which is, like, **be driven by curiosity and say yes**. Say yes to learning something new. Say yes to the lateral move. Say yes to working with someone who is incredible and inspiring. But I think that it's really easy in a world where there is so much pressure, so much chaos, so much going on to just stay and try to be stable. But I think in hindsight, I always regret those moments when I do that. So I would just continue to encourage myself and would encourage others to **say yes**.

[00:24:42] **Matt:** Yeah. And to your analogy earlier, like, sometimes you will open up a door and you'll find the room is smaller than you thought. Maybe there are other doors. But sometimes you open up a room near a door that you thought was small, and it's huge. And I think a lot of people—I was just telling my son, who's just starting in college, the same thing, which is don't assume that the thing that you're going to go to is going to play out exactly how you think. Because the reality is you think that this event or this thing you're going to go to is going to be something. And it's going to be something completely different, and you're going to have an experience that you never imagined you're going to have. And I think that goes along to your mantra of just saying yes and putting yourself in those positions.

[00:25:17] **Brian:** 100%. You actually took mine and made it better.

[00:25:20] **Matt:** Well, you definitely have made me a better marketer and leader by just hearing about your journey at Lyft and all the great experience you have in your career. So thanks so much for joining today. I'm really excited for our audience to hear it themselves.

[00:25:31] **Brian:** Thanks, Matt. I'm super appreciative.

[00:25:33] **Matt:** Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and Adweek team, thanks again to **Brian Irving**, the Chief Marketing Officer at Lyft, for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate, and review *The Speed of Culture* podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Till next time. See you soon, everyone. Take care. *The Speed of Culture* is brought to you by Suzy as part of the Adweek podcast network and Acast creator network. You can listen and subscribe to all Adweek's podcasts by visiting adweek.com/podcast. To find out more about Suzy, head to suzy.com. And make sure to search for *The Speed of Culture* in Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or anywhere else podcasts are found. Click follow so you don't miss out on any future episodes. On behalf of the team here at Suzy, thanks for listening.