

## Maureen Polo Transcript

**Maureen:** Hello, Sunshine is a modern media company, a next-generation media company that was designed for women to put women at the center of every story. The goal of our company is to change the narrative for women, is to tell stories that authentically represent them where they see themselves in the content. And I think for Reese, it started with this idea that to change the stories, you have to change the storytellers.

**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. Today, we're thrilled to be joined by Maureen Polo, the head of direct-to-consumer at Hello Sunshine, the Reese Witherspoon. Founded a media company that aims to produce stories that highlight and celebrate women. We're here at CES in Las Vegas. Maureen, so great to see you.

**Maureen:** So great to be here. Thanks for having me.

**Matt:** Absolutely. So CES, it's interesting because it's really become kind of the hub of content innovation as well. I mean, it's called the Consumer Electronics Show, but might as well be called the Content Show because all the big players are here, the studios, the distributors, et cetera. Tell me about your experience at CES and what you get out of coming here every year.

**Maureen:** Yeah, I skipped CES last year just because we were so busy with the business priorities. And I realized being here this year how important it is to be here for our business priorities. And it's about content creativity. It's about connection. And it's about understanding our consumers. And I feel like there's no better place to understand how quickly our world is moving than being here. So I'm getting so much out of just meeting with partners and hearing, what they're excited about or what their challenges are. I love to see what we're doing behind the scenes in real life. Talking to TikTok as an example. We've done so much. We only just started on TikTok about a year and change ago. I've only been at the company for two years. So seeing what we've been building with them and everything we've done with them has been viral. But seeing sort of like where we're going with them in the retail commerce space in particular.

**Matt:** Yeah, we're getting to that.

**Maureen:** So we're just really excited to see some of that. And then I was just on a panel with a group of executives from Audible and from Lionsgate and from Snap and from Heartbeat. And just sitting with people like that who you have similar perspectives but have a really different way of showing up. I think it's so much fun. So I'm so happy to be here again.

**Matt:** Absolutely. And what are some of the common themes for 2024 that you're hearing about that are on the top of mind for people in your space?

**Maureen:** Yeah. So some of the common themes. This doesn't feel that new, especially because I just spent a decade at Fullscreen, which was a next-generation media company

focused on digital creators. But I think everybody talking still about the human-based creator based ecosystem and continuing to tap into them and really smart, probably data first, but also creativity first ways. So-

**Matt:** For the creator economy overall.

**Maureen:** When I entered the creator space, I think as a 40-year-old woman, and a lot of people around me in the more traditional media realms were like, what is this? Is this going to be a flash in the pan? I said this is not a flash in the pan. And I think now 10, 11 years later, the fact that we're still talking about that as a growing trend is mind-blowing to me because it was so doubted back in the day.

**Matt:** It's not just the career space isn't just one thing, right? It's a culmination of so many different trends. You have millennials and Gen Z who are attached to their phone. So they're the mobile devices all the time. They love short content because they're shifting away from a lot of traditional viewing methods. And people have always been inherently more interesting to follow than scripted characters. We see that through reality TV, which is like the earliest. I guess the creators, right? And all the way through. So I think all those things combined.

**Maureen:** And then coming back, bring it back to tech, right? Is the science behind it? All of the platforms are prioritizing human-based storytelling. And so if we're here as storytellers who are trying to be focused on how to, I don't want to use the word capitalize, but to really. Leverage the tech ecosystem. It's making sure our human-centric stories that are commercial feel authentic. And so I think it just comes full circle. That is an opportunity. And then, I mean, I'm sure everybody is talking about AI.

**Matt:** Is AI something that scares you, excites you, a little of both?

**Maureen:** It's interesting. I have this debate with my 15-year-old or almost 15-year-old all the time. She's anti. AI because of really authentic. Yeah. Which is wild. Right. And she's in a school environment where it's so taboo. Kids are getting kicked out of school environments because of leveraging it. And we talk in my house about if it's human led, if you're leveraging it to get a deeper understanding of the human connection, if you're doing it in a way that is honest and with some, I don't want to use the word policing, but like when you're really, when there's some guidelines and parameters that are put in place. I think that we have to tap into it and we have to sort of immerse ourselves in it.

**Matt:** 100%.

**Maureen:** And I get excited about it and about what it does to be able to give my team more time to be more creative. And so we're looking at tools that help us do just that. When I think about even what we do with Suzy, when we deeply understand what our audience needs, and wants, and how we can serve them better. And then thinking about how we can then give the consumer the opportunity to serve us with what we're learning about how to serve them and how they can be part of creation and fan creation in particular with AI. I love the opportunity to give the family the opportunity to take. A piece of IP from Hello Sunshine and personalize it and then share it. I just think that there's so much opportunity around it. And so-

**Matt:** There's rights issues and a lot that needs to be sorted out.

**Maureen:** And by the way, I work at a massive entertainment company that is built. It's a purpose-driven, mission-driven company. Hello, Sunshine is about changing the narrative for women. We have to be thoughtful and careful about how we help women own their IP and how they represent it and tell their stories and own their stories. And we just had. A crazy entertainment industry changing strike, right? And a lot of the conversation around AI was part of that. And I think you can be careful and smart and protect our talent and protect the IP and protect ownership. And still be playing in the space. And so I think we have the opportunity as a company like Hello Sunshine. Which is so mission-driven, which is so value-driven, which is so people-first and puts people first and still be leaders in innovating.

**Matt:** And at your size, you have the ability to be nimble too, and take advantage of that.

**Maureen:** We can keep testing, learning, and growing. And again, because some of our community really started out of our book community with Reese's Book Club being, when Hello Sunshine was started, Reese built a scripted business.

**Matt:** It tells us, for those who don't know, explain what Hello Sunshine is, the company.

**Maureen:** So Hello Sunshine is a modern media company, a next-generation media company. That was designed for women to put women at the center of every story. The goal of our company is to change the narrative for women, is to tell stories that authentically represent them where they see themselves in the content. And I think for Reese, it started with this idea that to change the stories, you have to change the storytellers. And she was being fed roles and scripts where she just didn't see herself in them, and they didn't really depict how she saw other women and the people around her. And so she built this company, to sort of be...

**Matt:** You had to change who you wanted to see.

**Maureen:** Yeah. And we've expanded so much in the last six-plus years. Beyond, you know, now we have an unscripted division and a kids and family division, but also the side of the business I run, which we call direct to consumer, which means lots of things to lots of people. But at our company, it's. All of our owned and operated channels sit under my purview. It's marketing and strategy and business development. It's our acquisition. So we acquired the The Home Edit two years ago. And Reese's Book Club sits under my purview. And then in Agency Solar, which is really the marketing engine that fuels all the marketing and creative work that we do at Hello Sunshine. But it's also the work we do with brands. Because if you want to change the narrative for women, you have to change the commercial messaging. Again, my daughter at home that I just referenced, who's almost 15, she sees more commercial messaging every day than she sees anything else.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** So for us to truly change the game for women, we have to be partnering with brands to help them change the narrative in terms of the stories they tell. About their brands and about the way they see women. So I think that the company is built truly to be moving at the speed of culture, to be able to leverage technology and storytelling to really shape the way women see themselves and the way the world sees women today and forever.

**Matt:** And you're producing a variety of different content, some which is more well-known. I believe you produce The Morning Show, which is on Apple TV, which is a great show. And many others, right? What else did you produce that we might know about?

**Maureen:** Yeah. So we produced Daisy Jones and the Six on Amazon, right? You love that show.

**Matt:** It was amazing.

**Maureen:** One of the things we love so much about what we did with Daisy Jones, it started with our Reese's Book Club IP, right? Taylor Jenkins Reid, who's an incredible author, who's been part of our community from day one. We, Reese and Sarah Harden, the CEO of Hello Sunshine. Read the book, loved the book, and knew the story. We look for stories where women are the heroes of their own story, but in an unconventional way, and saw this opportunity in Daisy and in this really rich IP. To tell a multi-dimensional story. Beyond that, though, the ability to tell a story that was so broadly appealing to not just women, but to men, to multiple generations.

**Matt:** Music fans, everything.

**Maureen:** Music fans. The convergence, which I think we're going to see more of in the future state of... Entertainment and fashion and music. That was really how we created this trifecta of super fans on Daisy Jones. But then also Amazon was an incredible partner to sit in the rooms with and build this with, right? We had so much opportunity to produce. And I'm speaking on behalf of my partner, Lauren Neustadter. Who leads the scripted side of the world? But she'd tell me stories of what it was like to be in the room building that show for years, producing it. But then on the side of the world that I oversee. Being able to take that IP and take the content that we were producing in partnership with Amazon and then build social content and storytelling and immersive experiences for our super fans.

**Matt:** Engage the audience, pull them in.

**Maureen:** Yeah, and we were doing such a great job of partnership and building and growing our Daisy Jones community. Some of the talent said, hey, Hello Sunshine, can you produce our social content for us around this? And it just became everything we did for Daisy Jones went viral. Across TikTok and Instagram, which is our two primary vehicles, at least for today. And we just kept seeing the audience grow and then the viewership grow and then the community grow and the super fans who were creating their own micro communities around what they loved around the music, right? We created a band. And so that is a cultural phenomenon that started with the book that leaned into, it was from costume to music to the way that we showed the multi-dimensionality of the different types of women that you see inside Daisy Jones. So that's an amazing example of the way that we work the Hello Sunshine flywheel and some of the great work we did. I think another good example that sort of dimensionalizes the way that we think about content development for women, but how it can be broadly appealing is Surf Girls. I was at a dinner last night here at CES, and the men at the table brought up Surf Girls, an unscripted series that we just produced. And they were like, oh, I love the story of these badass girls and what they're doing.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** Some of the more traditional surfers have largely been men. And it's not about this female narrative that, you know, it's earnest and it's compelling, competitive, athletic content. And it's just been so fun to be part of something that is changing the game for women and also building culture at the same time.

**Matt:** So in terms of the business model, someone will read the book and say, okay, this should be turned into a show. And then you will fund the creation of the show before it's bought by Amazon? Or like, how's that work?

**Maureen:** Usually, there are a few different models at play. I think the way that it generally works is we'll find an intellectual property. Sometimes it's not a book intellectual property, but we'll find intellectual property. And we will get the rights to that intellectual property. And then we will start developing what it could look like the scripting that we spend the time doing that. But we will take it to a partner.

**Matt:** Before you go into production.

**Maureen:** Yeah. And generally, that's mostly what the model is today. I think that we're all exploring so many new models.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** Post-strike, but more so post all just the changing landscape that's consumer-led. But I think that largely our model has been to really think about our audience, what's going to serve them most. And also, what do we fall in love with? You know, for us, so much of it is. Where we feel like our audience expects us to be, but in an unexpected way.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** And then we know what partners want from us for the most part. You know, we are so fortunate that we get to work with all the streaming partners. And again, I'm speaking on behalf of Laura Neustadter and Sarah way, who sit in those worlds and I work super closely with them. But they know when we're talking to Netflix and we're talking to Amazon, we're talking to Apple and we're talking to Roku, like, what are their white spaces? What do we need? From us for us to super-serve them.

**Matt:** Their audiences. Yeah.

**Maureen:** And I think one of the reasons I feel super grateful to be at a company like Hello Sunshine in a post-2023 world is we bring an audience to the table for those partners.

**Matt:** So you have a broader Hello Sunshine audience that you've created. So when you create new stuff, the Hello Sunshine audience goes with you.

**Maureen:** Yeah.

**Matt:** Affordable, right?

**Maureen:** And honestly, when our partners are building their marketing plans to bring this content out into the world, and as they're developing their trailers and they lean in with us, we're part of the marketing strategy. And we're talking about what does our community want? How do we make sure that we're leveraging the Hello Sunshine community, the Reese's Book Club community, the Home Edit community, who are also super focused on culture and entertainment and just our entire ecosystem. We start programming around how we're going to super-serve our audience way before the show is ready to be out in the world and viewed or filmed. And then as we, they're out doing their marketing. We're also telling stories that work together, that play off each other, that tease each other. And when we feel like, oh, this is what our audience... We own this on the Hello Sunshine side because this is what our audience is going to tap into. And they're going to go take it and make it viral. They'll lean in on us to do that work. And then oftentimes when we say, oh, this feels very IP first, you should take that out to the social ecosystem. And then we'll hopefully find the magic where we come together. That's our model. And not many companies can say that when they're going and selling a production. Oh, you're also getting 60 million women. That we reach every single week, growing every day.

**Matt:** So is Hello Sunshine a consumer brand that people follow and know? Is that the platform on which this audience lives?

**Maureen:** Yeah, and I think that's what I got so excited about, coming here running direct to consumer. Was helping people understand that Hello Sunshine is not a production company. We are a direct-to-consumer.

**Matt:** Such a unique model.

**Maureen:** It's such a unique model. There isn't one that exists like this. And I think where Reese was so smart to build a company, yeah, she's at the helm. So the quality, the level of what she stands for, and what this company stands for is very clear. But we are evolving way beyond that. And we're bringing this massive media to the table with our high-quality production capabilities and our knack for understanding what's going to work. And I think it's an opportunity because the world's constricting around us. And you have to bet on what is going to be successful. And, you know, dollars and budgets are, you know, content's not going away. Entertainment's not going away.

**Matt:** Of course.

**Maureen:** My kids and the next-generation consumer that you know so well at your company, want more content. They're voracious consumers of creativity and content. But budgets are reducing, right? The world is changing. And so you know what you're getting when you work with Hello Sunshine. It's not a question anymore.

**Matt:** And the built-in audience is key because if I'm a streaming platform, then maybe I can get new subscribers. Oh. Yeah.

**Maureen:** We're in conversation sometimes with Apple or Amazon or Netflix or whomever when we are saying, hey, guess what? We're seeing this within our community. They saw this in the first episode. We're seeing this within our community. And our community is telling us how much they loved what was going on in this character's closet.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** Let's lean into the fashion story, right? Or we are seeing this consumer who we didn't expect to be watching this show. We should be building content or talking to talent.

**Matt:** Right.

**Maureen:** Creators and influencers that tell that story. Because you and I aren't going to tell that authentically, but they are here and they're coming here and they want more of it. Let's go do that. Most companies have to lean into their insights, but no, and we have a fandom. That has been paying attention since the day we announced we bought the rights of the script or we're going to be producing this with our partner. And that's gold and that's why insights are so important to us.

**Matt:** And was it Reese's star power that allowed you to galvanize this audience was that sort of like the spark of the whole thing because you mentioned heartbeat we spoke to them on our podcast in the past Ty Randolph.

**Maureen:** Yeah.

**Matt:** His amazing, exactly.

**Maureen:** So amazing.

**Matt:** Very similar to Kevin Hart's audience, and it's such an interesting model is it very similar where you leverage her star power, her audience to start to get that flywheel going?

**Maureen:** Yeah. I mean, I think what reason I just talked about this and Sarah Harden. We were talking about how they started the company, Reese, of course you see, Reese is involved in this and she's built such an incredible brand.

**Matt:** And a big audience on social media.

**Maureen:** Herself and a massive audience. But what I think is so incredible is when audiences come to us, they are coming to us for Reese, but equally. We have data from our insights engine that we're doing with your company. That they're coming not just for Reese now they're coming for everything else we do.

**Matt:** Yeah. And that's what you want because that's far more scalable.

**Maureen:** Yeah. I've worked for other celebrities and celebrity companies. That takes forever to build. We're six years in and we are seeing that our audience is saying, we love her. We want more of her. We're so glad she's attached to this. But there's so much.

**Matt:** Well, she wasn't in Daisy Jones in six, right? So it's like, there you go. Right.

**Maureen:** And again, like her legacy, this business was built for that exact reason. This isn't just about this one incredible, inspiring woman. It's about all the women who want to see themselves, who want the stories that are told to reflect them, right?

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** And it comes down to women who also don't have time. We know this from all of the research that we do and the insights we have is women have never been more burned out. Women, the paradigm of choice, want to come to us because they know what they're going to get from us too. And they come to us for joy. Some of the insights that we're seeing right now that we're so excited about is how 2024, we keep calling it the year of fun. I think it was 73% of our audience, is what they want this year, what they're seeking more of, is fun. Not self-empowerment.

**Matt:** Right.

**Maureen:** Not more successful professionally.

**Matt:** I think it's a byproduct of the scary world we're living in right now.

**Maureen:** Yeah.

**Matt:** The headlines, the polarization of our country, the geopolitical climate. I think people want escape on entertainment and that's where fun probably lives.

**Maureen:** A hundred percent. If you were to ask me, like, what do you think is the biggest consumer trend for women right now? They want to laugh.

**Matt:** Yeah. Travel is a big thing too.

**Maureen:** Travel is a big thing.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** People come to Hello Sunshine. So it's like 77% come for entertainment, 74% come to laugh.

**Matt:** Right.

**Maureen:** To find that positive moment in the day.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** And that's driving a lot of our expansion and our innovation.

**Matt:** We'll be right back with the speed of culture after a few words from our sponsors. You mentioned TikTok and you've also mentioned commerce and TikTok has in 2023 made huge strides in the social commerce space. Tell me about some of the initiatives you're doing in e-commerce because I would imagine that's another huge commercial opportunity that you have.

**Maureen:** Yeah, I think from an e-commerce perspective, right, we're thoughtful and careful in terms of how we're starting to expand the Hello Sunshine consumer brand IP.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** So we're looking and playing in that world as a Hello Sunshine, right? There'll be a couple of announcements in the new year that you'll see.

**Matt:** We'll look forward to that.

**Maureen:** We're excited about it. When I think about commerce, the brand that we're most focused on exploring, testing, and learning is The Home Edit. Are you familiar with The Home Edit? Okay. So Joanna and Clea were two women who both moved to Nashville around the same time. They got connected by friends. They were both LA transplants who moved to Nashville. They were both entrepreneurial women who were obsessed with organizing. They built this organization business where they were going into people's homes and helping them organize. Clea had come from a background in PR and fashion, so she had a lot of celebrity connections. She wanted to go in and organize a few celebrity homes, and she ended up with the Kardashians, and she's organizing these amazing, incredible houses.

**Matt:** And that's a huge thing on TikTok, too, the organization videos.

**Maureen:** We built the category. Joanna built the category. That was, I think we're talking four years ago, Reese saw them. They had less than 100,000 followers on Instagram.

**Matt:** She just stumbled upon them on Instagram or something.

**Maureen:** I don't know if she ever sleeps.

**Matt:** We all know people like that.

**Maureen:** So many ideas, and so much inspiration. She sees things and she will just say, hey, what do you see in this? And then our team will go and look and I'll go look, my colleagues will. And we say, there's something magical here. She found this. She thought it was magic. The company started a relationship with them where it started more as an advisor with them. Like there's something special here. You need to build out beyond just Instagram. They started to grow and scale. Hello, Sunshine produced a YouTube-first content series. That we had AT&T come in. AT&T is a great partner for Hello Sunshine. Generally, when we were about to do something, they wanted to jump in first and do it with us. We're like, oh, we'll get behind this. So they helped produce this YouTube series. This YouTube series became what we pitched to Netflix or what Joanna and Cleo, The Home Edit, really pitched to Netflix. We weren't even that involved in the beginning because it was just us mentoring them.

**Matt:** Right.

**Maureen:** They get the show called Get Organized produced. And now all of a sudden these organizers who are sort of going into celebrity homes but also going into everyday people's homes, they become TV stars. They also now start talking about launching product lines. And people want to know, I love those shoes while you were organizing. You can wear those all day. What are those? So now they're doing this e-commerce affiliate linking. They don't even know what it's called. They just start doing it. Anyway, long story short, fast forward six years. There

are almost 9 million followers that they're reaching every week. They have a massive product line at Walmart, at The Container Store.

**Matt:** I was thinking container store. Organizational materials.

**Maureen:** The container store was one of the first partners, but organizational materials. They built a category. It's a category that didn't exist. Now there are massive communities of organizers that are demanding us to build new products for them, with them.

**Matt:** And the thing about it is it's like feng shui. It's like it changes how you feel. I mean, we all know if you have a desk that's organized, you feel like you can work better. So it's not just how it looks. It's how you feel.

**Maureen:** I have neurodivergent children. And it's to get my kids to really lean into their brains and really take the advantages they have and power them is getting a clutterless space. Women are burnt out. They don't even know where to get started sometimes. Just having space.

**Matt:** And consumerism is everywhere.

**Maureen:** And consumerism is everywhere.

**Matt:** Yeah. People are buying everything every day. Amazon, one-click shopping. There's just so much stuff. Yeah.

**Maureen:** So this business has quickly turned into an entertainment business, a product business. A content business.

**Matt:** Awesome.

**Maureen:** And they're also inspiring all these other entrepreneurs. We're launching next year in the kid's space. We've launched luggage with Walmart this year. We're launching categories inside Walmart that I can't speak to yet that are going to redefine 100-year-old categories. From two creators.

**Matt:** Are those licensing arrangements?

**Maureen:** These are licensing arrangements.

**Matt:** Right. Where you do the marketing and then somebody else does the manufacturing. Right.

**Maureen:** Yeah. The reality is as we've broadened this organization category, consumers just want it all the time and right now they don't want to leave their house for it. So we're looking at what are some of the other ways that we're broadening those commerce experiences. How do we own that relationship with the customer? It doesn't mean that I have to own the distribution, but it means how do I get them to buy by creating content for them that gives them the opportunity to feel like, oh, I need that now. How do you make clear plastic bins something you need right now? How do you make it the lipstick in a marketplace where, oh, it's

just a quick pick-me-up that makes me feel really good about what I did? Well, you give them an opportunity to see what the outcome is and what it feels like. And that's the opportunity to sort of take creativity and build commerce off of that. And we're seeing a lot of success with what we're testing and learning. And we're going to start to use some AI testing this year to see how we-

**Matt:** Very cool.

**Maureen:** How do we scale that more quickly? And how do we take some of those learnings and start to build? And then product development wise. There's going to be so much opportunity for our fans and our organizers that we reach. To sort of co-create with us and give us guidance about what else they want to see. So that's a really good example. And it's across. All the different retail spaces. It's in-store, it's physical, it's digital, it's on social. It's virtual. We are looking at expanding into virtual experiences where you don't have to be in someone's home, but we can be organizing with you and then you're shopping and buying right in those moments.

**Matt:** And when you talk about partnering with brands like AT&T, do you just have a network of brands that have bought into your audience, and then you're coming to them with different opportunities like The Home Edit YouTube series? Or are they coming to you and saying, this is what we're looking for, and then will you produce around that?

**Maureen:** It's a little bit of both, I would say. I think, Ally Bank and Side Hustlers, yeah, they're awesome. And they've been really forward-thinking when it comes to brand funded content. And I think that's another growth area that-

**Matt:** Yeah, because you talk about the economic challenges of the streaming companies, et cetera. The money has to come from somewhere. At the same time, big brands are struggling to engage and reach consumers. So it kind of makes sense that it's always a balancing act of is this a commercial? Is this something consumers want to watch? And that's-

**Maureen:** That's sort of what happened, right? Ally's sort of came to us. And said, well, you're Hello Sunshine. You're in the business of helping entrepreneurs and female-led businesses grow, scale, and have a platform. We're a bank that's focusing on empowering females. And so how do we build something that is really meaningful in the entertainment space? That serves the needs of our consumers, but also really serves the needs of Hello Sunshine's mission to change an area.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** And so we developed, and we, my partner in the unscripted side, Sarah Ray, and her amazing team developed this show where it's almost like the, I'm a super Shark Tank fan.

**Matt:** Yeah, me too.

**Maureen:** It's like the Shark Tank for women, for a better way to explain it, right? And we're finding these incredible female entrepreneurs who have incredible products. And then retail partners, and talk about commerce and distribution, they're like, oh, we're going to help you get this distribution platform, right?

**Matt:** You can do that through marketing, audience awareness, commerce.

**Maureen:** And then all of a sudden, this business that was essentially scaled and amplified by Ally Bank and Hello Sunshine is seeing how Ally Bank is getting behind females, right? That's an incredible model. That's one way to work with us. Another way from a brand perspective is AT&T is a great example of a partner that. Came in with us early days. They were one of the original investors in Hello Sunshine. They saw the opportunity pretty early and they saw the white space. So they invested in us before we were essentially sold to... Blackstone in the last year and change, two years. They tend to see when we innovate, they want to be part of it. So when we launched The Home Edit we said, this is something big here, this is a human-based D2C brand and it's an entertainment brand. I see it and I see the need for women. I see the opportunity. Let's get behind that, right? We recently launched Shine Away, which is our first cross-company, cross-IP, immersive experiential event that we hosted in October in LA. We were going to go out and look for a few partners who really were going to help amplify the stories we were going to tell on these stages and in these rooms and experiential centers. AT&T said, don't take it to anyone else. We want to be in this with you in a meaningful way. We want to show up in the same way we have with you guys. And I credit Helen Smith and her incredible team at AT&T to say, this is how we're going to lean in authentically with Hello Sunshine to do it. So they have this long-term relationship where we just kind of, they come to us with what their latest brand agendas are. And we come to them with, well, here's what our agendas are. And here's how we can make one plus one equal five. And then there are some examples where we're just doing campaign-based work. Being at CES in the last two days has been amazing because we're sitting in rooms with others, I'm sitting with CMOs and CEOs talking about what their needs are and how they need to show up differently for some of their customers. And then we're talking about, oh, well, this is how we're doing this with our customer. And then, you know, we're walking away with, here's our next steps, and here's what we should be building together. And those might be more campaign-centric because it's serving a very immediate need because everyone's here talking about the future state, but also immediate needs.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** Probably reflective of the market that you referenced just five seconds ago. So anyway, I think that we have a few different ways that we partner with brands and we sort of lean into like, what do we know their customer? Now that we know more about their customer, what do we think that customer needs from us together?

**Matt:** Yeah, what are the needs that you're uniquely set to deliver on?

**Maureen:** And we've never been more focused, I think, in our industry on performance, and, once we nail the creative, how do we make sure we are going to drive the results?

**Matt:** Whatever the metrics are.

**Maureen:** Whatever the metrics are.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** Yeah. I also really get excited about how we can build with partners in the way that partners need us to build.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** And that's rare. I came from a massive media company most recently where it's an incredible company. But at such scale that you bring what you have as an organization to the table. And for us, we build together.

**Matt:** I was thinking as I hear you talk and kind of go through all the things that you're working on, a lot of people who we have on the Speed of Culture Podcast are people who oversee a company that sells toothpaste and, there's just pretty linear focus. How do I sell more toothpaste? Brand extensions, what we're doing. But you are doing so many different things. In the course of this conversation, you span the gamut of what almost anybody in the marketing, advertising, and media space is doing, you're doing it all. How do you manage your time? How do you know where to focus? How do you prioritize? Because there's only so many hours in a day. And this seems like an organization that can go in so many different directions that it's probably as much about what you say no to as what you say yes to.

**Maureen:** One thousand percent. I don't think I've ever said no more. As an executive who has had to build and scale.

**Matt:** I'm glad you said yes to the podcast.

**Maureen:** Again, I'm happy to be here. But we don't want to work with everyone under the sun.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** You know, we want to build authentically and meaningfully. And we know that when we do that, our partners come back and we do more in more meaningful ways. So it happens, our growth and our scale and our. Revenue metrics all grow in the right way. We say we do. We do a lot, but we do the few things that we do well in that we need to be where the women are. So we have to expand across all the different platforms and ecosystems, but we're not just going to be there to be there, right? I'm a super fan of what's happening in the gaming and the digital innovation space. I have two little boys. Who spend every second begging me for time on what they call tech, right? Which is they want to spend more time on Minecraft for my older son who's 10. Is still begging me for more time on Fortnite, right? I am like, you have to earn that. You have to do all the things for you, right?

**Matt:** Yeah, the ultimate.

**Maureen:** But we're not there yet because our audience that we're super serving, we have so much more to do in some of the places we already are. So we're not there. Do I think we'll be there in the future state? Absolutely. But right now, our focus and our growth, there's so much opportunity in the places we're going, right? Audio is a good example. We've had so many companies pitch us.

**Matt:** It's great you're in the podcast.

**Maureen:** From a Hello Sunshine brand perspective. Like so many and so many incredible, impressive partners. And we've just been really thoughtful and strategic about what we're going to do from a Hello Sunshine brand perspective. You know, The Home Edit, we launched a

podcast last year with Sony called Best Friend Energy that was very specific for that brand, right? But when it comes to the Hello Sunshine IP, we do represent a lot and we do a lot. So what are we going to do in audio? And how are we going to show up in a way that is really smart, really innovative and gives women what they need and doesn't put more on our audience's plate?

**Matt:** Yeah, you're very calculated about that.

**Maureen:** Calculate, right?

**Matt:** Right, yeah.

**Maureen:** So we will have some exciting news to share soon in the audio space. I've been here two years and changed. For two years, I've been working on that piece because we got to do it really right. And we have to do it in a way that our audiences show up. They want to be part of it. They need to expect it. They are going to expect something from us, but it's going to be unconventional. They're going to see something a little different. And also that wasn't the right priority for us two years ago.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** It's right now. So that's why we sort of prioritize with where's the white space that only Hello Sunshine can bring the consumer on the journey.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Maureen:** You know? Where's the deepest penetration with our customers? That's where we lean in because that's how we see the results, you know? And for us, we're shaping culture without having to just capitalize on some of the trends and we're setting and shaping them. And so we don't feel like we have to jump on the bandwagon. We feel like we can be intentional. And that's how we ask ourselves the question, do our audiences need this from us? Do we feel like we're going to win? And most importantly, is this a story we're in love with? Is this content we want to produce? Is this a distribution vehicle that we feel like we're going to engage our audiences in a way that makes them feel like they're part of the experience?

**Matt:** Sure. So shifting gears, we wrap up here in terms of your career. I mean, you've had an awesome career and you've worked at a lot of big companies like Condé Nast and Meredith and Hearst and Fullscreen, which became Warner Brothers. So now you're in a much more entrepreneurial role, it sounds like, than working at those big organizations. How have you been able to remain relevant and kind of evolve with the pace and ever-changing industry?

**Maureen:** Yeah.

**Matt:** To allow you to be in this position you're in now that maybe can be wisdom that we can impart to some of our younger listeners?

**Maureen:** I mean, I'll say, you know, it's funny like I've been at so many of these really big traditional media companies. But I was always the first person to raise my hand for something new that didn't exist before. And I'll age myself here, and this is embarrassing. And my daughter is always like, Mom, don't talk about print as innovation. But when I started my career, no media

divisions had print businesses, right? And so much of the rich storytelling was print at the time, right? Digital didn't exist. I'm that old.

Matt - 00:33:20:

Me too.

**Maureen:** Makes me feel better. And so I raised my hand and said, I want to go start this print division. I want to tell stories that can be deeper than 30 Second Spot. And I raised my hand to do it. And so here I was at a traditional creative agency. I was at Young & Rubicam. And it doesn't even exist anymore. He's exchanged his name four or five times in the course of my career.

**Matt:** It's like the never-ending acronym right now.

**Maureen:** Exactly. But I raised my hand for that, right? And then I moved over to Time Inc. And I worked for the guys at This Old House. This Old House still exists today. I can't even fix a window getting stuck in my home. Like, I am not the person that can be a fixer-upper at all. But I was so excited by these men who had a show on PBS, who are authentically going into people's homes and transforming them. Digital just happened. And I said, oh my goodness, this is a brand that is, you know, these men are endearing. They're doing things that make lives better. They are reaching people in a magazine, on PBS. We should be in the moving space. So I was sitting there as a young person saying, we should be building new movers content. Like, we should reach new movers. So it was just in a role at a company that was very print-centric doing innovation. And again, I'm aging myself. That was probably 25, 20-something years ago.

**Matt:** But it's about initiative, isn't it?

**Maureen:** It's about initiative, right? And it's about opportunity. I'm curious. I love to understand people. I love to understand how communities are built what drives passion points and how our world evolves. And so I've just always raised my hand at big companies for something that felt a little bit daunting. I think one of the things that most women I see, is they're nervous to take risks. And I don't know if that's just women or just people in general, right? But I know for me, a lot of my friends who were growing up in the industry with me, were sort of looking for that straight shot up to the top. Like, oh, well, if I do this and I do this, I'm going to get that job, right? And maybe that's anyone, right?

**Matt:** Sure.

**Maureen:** I felt like. Oh, I don't see a clear path to the top. I see a clear path to understanding human behavior and entertainment evolution. And I see a world where it's changing so dramatically. So if I can just keep taking roles, we're sure. I love leading people. I love to lead. I love to work with people. I show up for my team. But I can keep leading people if I keep learning. And I'm not afraid to learn and make a mistake. I call them great mistakes. If I say to my team all the time, I say to my kids, please make great mistakes. Meaning make the mistake, understand the mistake, learn from the mistake, and, you know, take those learnings into the next thing you do. So my advice for my younger version of myself or what I say to my daughter every day is just raise your hand if you're curious. If you're interested in something, don't be

afraid that it's going to hold you back. Just keep learning. And I have taken all these jobs where I can just keep learning and growing. And I think as I get closer to half a century. I think I keep growing and learning and I have entrepreneurial jobs because. I'm curious and I understand human behavior and I love the changing media landscape.

**Matt:** Yeah. And there's no better place to explore that than here, see us in Vegas.

**Maureen:** Yeah.

**Matt:** So, thank you so much for joining us. This is awesome today.

**Maureen:** Thanks for having me.

**Matt:** Yeah, we covered so much. And to be honest with you, most of that I didn't even know about.

**Maureen:** Oh, I love that.

**Matt:** Yeah. And I think our audience is going to enjoy learning about Hello Sunshine and all the great work you're doing there. So it's been great.

**Maureen:** Awesome. Well, thanks for having me. I've been a super fan of yours for a long time and I'm just excited to be here and partnering with you and your team.

**Matt:** Likewise. Thanks for saying that. And thanks for joining again. On behalf of Suzy and Adweek team, thanks again to Maureen Polo, the Head of Direct to Consumer at Hello Sunshine for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate, and review the Speed of Culture Podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Hear from Vegas at CES and we'll see you real soon. Take care, everyone. Bye-bye. 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 of Adweek's podcasts by visiting [adweek.com/podcasts](https://adweek.com/podcasts). To find out more about Suzy, head to [suzy.com](https://suzy.com). And make sure to search for the Speed of Culture on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts, 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.