

From Stage Lights to Corporate Heights: The Remarkable Journey of Valerie Vargas

In the AT&T headquarters looming over the Dallas skyline, Valerie Vargas navigates the corporate landscape with the same precision and passion that once guided her in the dance studio. As Senior Vice President of Content Creation and Advertising, she orchestrates campaigns that reach millions, yet her path to this executive suite began on a humble Maryland farm and wound through various creative opportunities.

"My parents were small business owners who showed me what it takes to make it in the world," Vargas reflects, her voice carrying the confidence of someone who has repeatedly proven herself in challenging environments.

Throughout her career, the resilience and adaptability she learned early in life has proven invaluable as she navigates the rapidly changing telecommunications industry.

Vargas's journey began with a passion for performance. Accepted into Syracuse University's prestigious musical theater program—ranked second in the country at the time—she dreamed of a life on stage. But the realization of missing out on the classic college experience led to an unexpected pivot to marketing.

"I saw marketing as selling yourself, which is really what acting is," she explained, describing the thought that would become the first step on her path to corporate leadership.

After completing her undergraduate degree, Vargas pursued law at the University of Miami, later working for a Georgia Supreme Court justice. She compares the legal profession to a "thespian society," but she could not abandon her creative instincts. Her desire to turn back towards creative expression led her to Atlanta, where she conducted informational interviews with anyone willing to meet.

"I didn't want to leave the creative side of my career behind," she says.

Her persistence paid off when she landed a position conducting market research at BellSouth Cellular. This role would become the foundation of a career characterized by industry-transforming mergers and acquisitions.

Vargas's career timeline reads like a history of telecommunications consolidation. She was a member of the launch team for Cingular Wireless and later played a role in the merger of Bell South companies and the formation of the new AT&T.

Her career has involved a series of relocations that mirror the evolving telecommunications landscape. After establishing herself in Atlanta, Vargas moved to San Antonio as a part of corporate restructuring. She then spent five months in Dallas helping establish the new AT&T

headquarters before returning to Atlanta when the advertising division was relocated there. Years later, her journey came full circle when she returned to Dallas to lead Content Creation and Advertising from the corporate headquarters.

"Mergers and acquisitions are the storyline of my career," she explains with a hint of pride.

Through each professional transition, Vargas identifies the human element as both challenging and fulfilling. She acknowledges the difficulties of managing different personalities and team dynamics, particularly during corporate restructuring. Despite these challenges, she maintains that the relationships built throughout her career have provided the greatest satisfaction.

In her current role, Vargas oversees creative development for all paid advertisements, communications planning, organic advertising, and retail marketing. Her daily responsibilities include setting a vision, removing obstacles, making quick decisions, and approving expenditures.

When asked about her proudest achievement, Vargas points to AT&T's post-COVID strategy. Following a DirecTV spinoff, she helped reestablish the company's focus on becoming the best connectivity provider, developing the AT&T Guarantee, the first of its kind in the industry.

"We were the first telecom company to guarantee a provided service and offer credit when service is down," she explains. The initiative also ensured existing customers received the same deals as new ones, a departure from industry norms of showing bias to new customers.

For Vargas, effective marketing is linked to storytelling, a principle that has guided her approach throughout her career.

Vargas thoughtfully distinguishes between conventional storytelling and what she terms "story-doing," a more powerful approach where companies demonstrate through concrete actions what they claim in their narratives. It's about authenticity, she explains, pointing to the 5G football helmet as a prime example. This initiative showed how AT&T is willing to use their vast resources to help those who are disadvantaged.

Her background in theater has significantly influenced her marketing approach. The theatrical principle of showing rather than telling translates directly to effective advertising in her view. Instead of simply claiming reliability, her team showcases authentic stories of how AT&T's connectivity empowers people's lives.

This narrative-centered approach is carefully balanced with rigorous data analysis. AT&T conducts extensive "copy tests" on all advertising to measure important metrics like brand recall and message recall. They track performance across digital and traditional platforms. While emotional connection drives initial engagement, Vargas emphasizes that data verification ensures their resonating with their audience in the right way.

Beyond her professional achievements, Vargas has raised three children while navigating her demanding career.

When asked what advice she would give her younger self, Vargas doesn't hesitate: "Whatever role you take on, do it at 110%." She advocates for seizing opportunities when they arise and emphasizes that growth often comes from embracing new challenges.

Her family has influenced her leadership approach, providing a broader perspective on her work. She even uses her children as an impromptu focus group to gauge whether advertisements will appeal to younger generations.

As telecommunications continues its rapid evolution, Vargas remains at the intersection of technology, creativity, and human connection. A fitting position for someone whose career began with a passion for performance and storytelling.

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