

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

A market intelligence brief for
marketing leaders in Travel & Leisure

August 2026

**BLACKLINE
CONSULTING**

A HIGHER STANDARD

THE BLACKLINE RADAR SERIES

The Radar series is a set of role-based briefings for executives in Travel & Leisure, designed to be read in minutes and discussed for longer. Each Radar takes a single seat at the executive table and asks one question: *what should this leader have on their screen for the year ahead?*

Every Radar is structured around five lenses:

- > **THE BRIEF:** The mandate for the role this year, stated plainly. What the organisation is asking of this executive, and how that ask differs across sub-sectors
- > **HEADWINDS:** The forces working against the role. Market conditions, cost pressures, regulatory constraints and structural shifts that make the mandate harder to deliver.
- > **TAILWINDS:** The forces working in the role's favour. Capabilities, market dynamics and tools that, used well, give the executive room to move.
- > **BLIND SPOTS:** The areas where visibility of risk is limited. Not the known problems, but the places where the data, the reporting or the operating model may be quietly masking an issue.
- > **EXECUTIVE TENSIONS:** Where interests may align or diverge. The points of natural tension and natural partnership across the executive team, and where the CMO's agenda intersects with that of the CEO, CFO, COO and CIO/CDO. Knowing where interests align is often the difference between a mandate that gets delivered and one that stalls.

This edition focuses on the Chief Marketing Officer: *converting the shift toward experiential, identity-driven spending into durable trust and loyalty across cultural, pricing, and data channels, while defending that same trust against the regulatory, pricing, and personalisation risks the strategy inevitably creates.*



RICHARD OLIVER
Senior Director, UK



DAVID CLARKE
Managing Partner, UK

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

Trust and cultural brand relevance are this year's two core CMO assets, built together, not traded off. Travel now reads as identity, and discovery starts on social before a booking site opens; brands leaning into cultural moments turn that into loyalty. But the same audience is more price-literate after dynamic-pricing backlash and faces EU border friction and the brand didn't cause it but will be blamed for, so the task is converting identity-driven demand into loyalty without letting pricing or friction break that trust. This is hardest for outbound and Online Travel Agent dependent brands, less so for staycation operators shielded from the EU Entry/Exit System (EES).

BLACKLINE CONSULTING

HEADWINDS

Ticket pricing backlash

→ Pricing backlash has made UK consumers alert to and suspicious of variable/ algorithmic pricing across travel, hotels and events, raising the transparency bar even for un-investigated brands.

EU EES friction lands on brand, not border agency

→ Hours-long EU border queues are a traveller's first trip experience, and the frustration attaches to the operator regardless of cause.

Price-conscious despite resilient spend

→ Consumers are protecting holiday budgets while cutting back elsewhere, making for a more value-scrutinising, deal-comparing audience than in prior years.

BLIND SPOTS

Pricing transparency genuine or cosmetic

→ Disclosing that dynamic pricing is used may not rebuild trust if consumers still don't understand why a price changed.

Personalisation helping or unsettling customers

→ AI-driven personalisation can boost engagement, but felt as intrusive, the same tech quietly erodes the trust it's meant to build.

TAILWINDS

Durable shift to experiential, identity-driven spending

→ UK consumers frame travel as part of who they are, and identity-led positioning is outperforming attraction-led messaging.

Cultural relevance and creator-led distribution as a loyalty lever

→ Social is now the top channel for reaching new audiences, and well-handled cultural moments build durable brand equity, not just one-off virality.

AI-driven personalisation lifting engagement and loyalty

→ Conversational AI, tailored recommendations, and proactive communication are measurably boosting satisfaction and direct, repeat engagement, where deployed well.

Social reach being mistaken for loyalty

→ Strong for acquisition but weak for engaging already-loyal customers, so chasing virality can starve the CRM and direct-channel work that retains them.

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

The CMO's tensions split into two patterns: shared ownership of trust, and divergence from short-term value-chasing that undercuts that trust. The CEO, CIO/ CDO, and COO are natural allies, sponsoring trust commercially, supplying the data behind personalisation, and managing the guest experience that tests it in practice. By contrast, the CFO's push for yield through dynamic pricing, an active regulatory enforcement environment, and sales leadership's conversion tactics all create pressure to extract near-term commercial value in ways that directly undercut the trust the CMO is building.

WHERE INTERESTS MAY ALIGN

The alignment here is natural - invest, & build on it...

On Brand Trust

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

→ Needs direct sponsorship to make brand trust and pricing transparency a genuine commercial priority, not a marketing-only concern, especially as regulatory and reputational risk converge.

On Customer Data

CHIEF INFORMATION / DIGITAL OFFICER

→ Personalisation, pricing, and first-party data strategies all rest on shared systems and a common data strategy, increasingly critical as ad platforms continue to give marketers less visibility into who their audience is.

On Customer Experience

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

→ The closest operational ally in managing the real-world guest experience around border friction, staffing constraints and service recovery.

WHERE INTERESTS MAY DIVERGE

These tensions are structural - navigate them openly...

On Pricing Strategy

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

→ Commercial pressure to maximise yield through dynamic and algorithmic pricing can directly conflict with the trust and transparency the CMO is trying to build; the two must resolve this actively.

On Communications

CONSUMER REGULATORS

→ Marketing and pricing communications are now squarely inside an active enforcement environment; the CMO must treat transparency as a compliance requirement as much as a brand value.

On Conversion

SALES LEADERSHIP

→ Pressure to drive urgency and conversion through tactics like limited-time pricing can undercut the longer-term trust-building the CMO is accountable for.



BLACKLINE CONSULTING

A H I G H E R S T A N D A R D

Founded in 2013, Blackline Consulting is a multidisciplinary boutique advisory and execution firm operating across the UK and North America. We help organisations define strategy, enhance operations, drive transformation, and manage change

A higher standard, delivered quietly by people who care

CONTACT US:

david.clarke@blacklineconsulting.co.uk

richard.oliver@blacklineconsulting.co.uk