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Getting Flying Taxis Off the Ground

How Wisk is Building an Ecosystem
for Autonomous Aviation

A Conversation Between

Becky Tanner, CMO at Wisk, &
Ian Dull, partner at ReD Associates

Introduction

Becky Tanner joined Wisk in 2019 and is responsible for bringing the world's first self-flying, all-electric, four-seat air taxi to market. She leads Wisk's Marketing function, runs the People team, and leads Wisk's Go-To-Market team. In addition, she oversees the Product Design team who is responsible for designing Wisk aircraft to be accessible, comfortable, and safe for all. Here, she talks to ReD about navigating the complex world of bringing revolutionary transportation to the market.

ABOUT

Wisk is a leading Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) company developing autonomous, all-electric, vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) air taxis. A wholly owned subsidiary of Boeing, Wisk focuses on creating safe, sustainable, and accessible urban air travel for everyone.

Ian Dull: Wisk faces a pretty interesting challenge – trying to bring in a fundamentally new and groundbreaking type of transportation and needing to figure out how to build the market for that many years in advance. How do you think about strategy at Wisk?

Becky Tanner: First and foremost, when designing an aircraft, there are really obvious components to the path forward. But the key thing is understanding the full scope of work with a focus on how we ensure we're building a safe aircraft, how we ensure regulatory audiences will work with us, and then how we build the systems to make this successfully operate. When I say systems, I'm referring not only to systems supporting aircraft operation, but also to the bigger ecosystem. There's a tonne of work to do internally, but we also have to keep our eye on external factors, because if we deliver a certified aircraft but don't have other things ready, it's all for naught. We might have routes, but they may not be solving the pain point of the future customer. So it's about prioritising all of that work. A successful launch for us is a baby step, to be really honest. It is maybe one market where you start and you demonstrate to the public your safety track record. For us, it's not only predefining this roadmap, but it's also defining what success looks like.

Ian: How are you approaching the orchestration of all of these different audiences that you need to be in conversation with?

Becky: For us, because we're going at this with an autonomous path forward, naturally, our path has more potholes and speed bumps in the road. One of the big pieces for us is looking for that door opening. There are states and cities that are more advanced in their thinking and they're more open to these types of solutions to solve some of their problems. For us, it's really important that we strategically look across the nation and also across international markets to see where that door is opening so that we can start to build that partnership and that framework and explore what that could mean, and then unlock other things like investments. There's also this interesting push-pull dynamic. When more cities get interested in this, it helps provide confirmation and feedback

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to the FAA that they need to prioritise this. Regulatory audiences historically move slow.

Ian: Many companies making moonshot bets would be so focused on product that they would forget about brand until they enter the market. Yet Wisk has made a powerful, strategic choice to really differentiate on brand, even five to 10 years before commercialisation. Could you tell us more about that?

Becky: From day one, we wanted to establish a brand that was going to be relatable, something that people connect to and that we were proud of. When you think about the complexity of what we're doing and all of the different audiences, I think there has been a real commitment to the reality that your brand – and the reputation associated with it – matters. And quite frankly, while we are a wholly owned subsidiary of Boeing, we have a really unique situation. We are integrated, but we continue to operate on our own. We are so different from other air taxi players in the space. Of course, we're yellow. Others are blue, black, red – the standard

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corporate colour. So it even comes down to our brand colour that communicates the difference in the warmth, in the personality and the brightness that we want to bring. So all of that is by design, standing out in the noisy crowd of the big aviation giants. Our consistency in brand execution and how we want to show up has worked really well for us. We consistently get feedback that we feel different, we look different, we sound different. Engaging with Wisk is a feeling. That brightness, warmth, friendliness, thoughtfulness we put into things – even down to our seat choice and seat-belt choice – we're really trying to establish a brand that feels, even though it's an unfamiliar transportation mode, familiar and safe and comfortable. It's fascinating to me as a marketing person in a deeply engineering company how much they value what we do.

Ian: One of the things I find really interesting about Wisk's approach is the emphasis on collaboration with the competition. How have you thought about working with the eVTOL ecosystem to really build the market?

Becky: Well there is no market unless we work together. That's really the blunt message. One company can't do this on its own – creating this type of change within the FAA, creating this type of change with NASA, having communities build the infrastructure, getting the public interested enough. One company cannot do that. It's truly the power of the group that's going to require this market to launch. Wisk is wearing the most challenging hat in the room. We're asking people to design for an autonomous path forward when our peer group is pushing for a piloted path forward. We're asking for a global, holistic view. That's the role we play – designing for the future, and the future includes autonomous aircraft flying in our airspace. Our competition also knows that's their future path too. So supporting Wisk paving that way is only setting them up for success in their future as well. There is no market unless we're doing this together.

Ian: In terms of building demand with consumers, what are some of the challenges and barriers to adoption you are trying to solve?

Becky: The adoption is definitely going to take years in this market, so for us it's about strategically finding the areas in the market

that are leaning in to this type of technology and then being visible. One of the things that's really different about Wisk is that we've already engaged the future customer multiple times through research. When people have the ability to hop inside the mock-up, that's one of the things that has made us very different than the rest because I think people feel the thoughtfulness in our approach and also how practical things are. But the fact of the matter is, nobody's going to hop on board unless they trust that it's safe and we solve a pain point. If customers don't understand how this will make their lives better, they're not going to want these flying over their neighborhood. ReD has been a critical partner for us in that research. We've been really sensitive to having a wide and diverse audience come in to share their perspectives with us. We want to understand their pain points, we want to understand their current mode of transportation, what's working, what's not working. And then of course, we want to introduce the concept of the solution we're hoping to provide and get their feedback. And that's also changing how we make choices within the aircraft itself. We won't have a successful business if customers don't want to hop on board, so there is no path forward unless we engage the customer now and frequently and get that feedback.

Ian: As you look ahead, what do you see as some of the bigger strategic challenges that you sit with as CMO?

Becky: It's about how we get people to hop on board. What is the right level of education? What is the right level of exposure? Do we have the right network of partners that build the credibility to reach the customer? If we can unlock this for people, that unlocks everything else. Because there is no mass marketing, we have to approach this in baby steps. I think it's a massive leap to say, "I'm going to fly you from San Francisco to New York, and there's no pilot on board." That's a bigger jump than trips around 20 miles that get you there safely. We need to get a market talking about Wisk, and get happy customers sharing their testimonials, saying: "I felt safe. I actually forgot that there was no pilot on board. I felt like I knew what the aircraft was doing. It felt predictable." And the holy grail is: "I was bored, so I was looking at my phone."