

An Inclusive Brand

An Interview with Cathy M. Coughlin,
Senior Executive Vice President and Global Marketing Officer, AT&T Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Cathy Coughlin was appointed to her current role in June 2007. Coughlin began her communications career in 1979 when she joined Southwestern Bell Telephone Company in her hometown of St. Louis. During her 34-year career, she has held senior management roles in sales, marketing, operations, and advertising. Prior to her current role, Coughlin was President and Chief Executive Officer of AT&T Midwest. She currently serves on the boards of directors for Northwestern University and the Girl Scouts of the USA. In 2013, *Fierce Wireless* named Coughlin to its "Most Influential Women in Wireless" list and she ranked as one of the world's most influential CMOs, according to *Appinions*. Coughlin holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from Northwestern University and a Master of Science in Finance degree from St. Louis University.



Cathy M. Coughlin

COMPANY BRIEF AT&T Inc. (www.att.com) is a premier communications holding company and one of the most honored companies in the world. Its subsidiaries and affiliates – AT&T operating companies – are the providers of AT&T services in the United States and internationally. With a powerful array of network resources that includes the nation's fastest and most reliable 4G LTE network, AT&T is a leading provider of wireless, WiFi, high-speed Internet, voice, and cloud-based services. A leader in mobile Internet, AT&T also offers the best wireless coverage worldwide of any U.S. carrier, offering the most wireless phones that work in the most countries. It also offers advanced TV service with the AT&T U-verse® brand. The company's suite of IP-based business communications services is one of the most advanced in the world.

AT&T has a long history of supporting women and diversity. How critical is that to the culture of the company?

Our commitment starts from the top. Our Chairman's vision is rooted in the belief that diversity at all levels drives the best business results.

AT&T is a very inclusive brand. We have 100 million customers; we serve all of the Fortune 1000 companies; we serve individuals, small businesses, schools, hospitals, and

enterprises. They're diverse, so we serve them best when our workforce is diverse.

In fact, our employees tell us having a diverse and inclusive workforce is what makes them most proud about working at AT&T.

Is inclusion the next step in diversity? How are they related?

While diversity is inevitable, inclusion is critical. Only inclusive organizations and cultures win in the long run. People ask, "What's the difference?" Diversity is being asked *to* the dance; inclusion is being *asked* to dance.

Would you talk about the efforts to draw more women into STEM careers?

Nationwide, women are not pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) degrees or careers at the same level that men are.

In fact, studies show that women fill about half of all jobs in the U.S. economy, yet they hold less than 25 percent of STEM jobs – and women with STEM jobs earn 33 percent more than comparable women in non-STEM jobs. This is an issue for employers and, indeed, for our country.

At AT&T, we have more than 90,000 female employees, and nearly half of them are in STEM-related jobs, leading our labs, network organization, and operations. They're innovators. In fact, AT&T women are named on 4,000 patents.

A great example is Marian Croak. She has more than 130 patents, including the one that gives us the ability to donate to charities via text message. Another is Kris Rinne, who recently became only the second woman inducted into the Wireless Hall of Fame.

While we have a great roster of talented women in STEM, we need more. The good news is, we have tremendous opportunities in our labs, foundry innovation centers, business sales teams, and network operations organization. We're working hard to attract more of the best and brightest by collaborating with women's career sites to post our jobs, conducting college outreach programs, investing in scholarship programs, and ensuring that our existing women STEM leaders are visible.

Our hackathons and Fast Pitch contests are an especially good way for us to promote our career opportunities and showcase AT&T as an

employer of choice for technical women. Next year, through the AT&T Developer Program, we'll host six tech hackathons with developer teams led by women.

We also have an eye on the horizon and are building a pipeline of women with technical capabilities.

Research shows that girls start to lose interest in STEM in 7th grade, so we know we must reach them early. That's why AT&T is investing in a science curriculum for the Girl Scouts and in programs like Girls Who Code. This summer, we exposed high school girls in New York to an eight-week coding boot camp – and also gave them access every week to one or two senior-level professional women at AT&T.

I personally am very passionate and proud of this work because we're doing it on so many levels.

What are you doing to help women get into, or remain in the leadership pipeline?

At AT&T, we've been working aggressively to help prepare more women for leadership opportunities. We've done a lot of our own research, put in place plans based on what the data tells us, and measured our progress so we hold ourselves accountable.

Our work is informed by a newly created Women's Leadership Council, which serves as a "think tank" for the company, evaluating practices used by best-in-class companies, sponsoring additional research, and making recommendations to senior management. We also partner with an employee group – the Women of AT&T – to help with recruitment and advancement initiatives.

One outcome of this work is that we're now focusing more attention on high-potential, entry-level or middle management women early. We're encouraging them to have conversations with their loved ones and bosses about future opportunities. They're also able to get involved in mentoring circles with executives, who can help them navigate their careers. All this helps ensure that when opportunities come along, they are prepared for them.

How important has it been in attracting talent to get the message out about how the company has evolved?

It's very important. With "Rethink Possible," we have rebranded ourselves to catch our brand up to the company we are.

We have always been an innovation company that has stood for human progress – a

Rethink Possible company – and our rebranding efforts have helped us get the word out.

Years ago, recent college graduates would tell me they wanted to work for start-up companies because they wanted to change the world. Now they say, I want to come to work for AT&T because I truly can change the world there.

Is it tough to avoid losing that innovative edge at AT&T's size and scale?

It can be a challenge. We're a \$125-billion company. For a company that size, it can be tempting to hold onto legacy revenue streams. But that's not how we operate. We're future-focused, constantly innovating and building new revenue streams.

Customer appetite for fast, secure broadband wireless and video connections is insatiable. That's why last year we announced our intent to transition to an all-IP, wireless, and cloud company by 2020. We're investing billions of dollars to build out the best-in-class, super-fast wireless and wired networks, with our U-verse, Mobility, and IP solutions meeting that need. Today, those services are driving topline revenue growth.

We have a tremendous strategic asset in our 245,000 employees. We tap into their collective imagination through the Innovation Pipeline, or TIP. TIP gives any AT&T employee the ability to submit an idea and have it crowd-sourced. The best ideas get funded and commercialized.

One of those ideas ended up being AT&T Toggle, which was created by a young father trying to better manage his work/home life. He came up with a way to have separate profiles – one for work and one for everything else – on the same device. It's now commercially available to help make our employees' and customers' lives easier.

Finally, we've also opened up our network for developers. We have foundries throughout the world – in Israel, Atlanta, Dallas, and Palo Alto – where we invite start-ups to pitch their ideas. We take the best of them and work with the start-ups to bring them to market.

Throughout our history, we've continually worked to spur innovation and that's not changing.

Has the Rethink Possible campaign accomplished what you anticipated it would?

It's exceeded our expectations. The campaign has been well-received by consumers, but it also has resonated strongly with business owners. They told us, "That's me: I rethink possible every day, and your technology is helping me do that."

The measurement for me is, is your message relevant to people? Do they find it credible?

Does it make them think differently about AT&T? The answers to those questions are yes.

What should women be doing to build their careers early on to grow within this industry?

First, take advantage of opportunities. I have never turned down an opportunity in my career. I'm fortunate because at AT&T, the opportunities to lead big teams, learn new technologies, and solve problems on a grand scale are unmatched.

Second, surround yourself with the best people – people who are smart in ways you are not.



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Third, take ideas, turn them into plans, and do what others say can't be done.

How critical is corporate responsibility to the company?

When we reach out to our communities, we do it in a way that makes sense not just for the community, but to our business because it's more authentic and sustainable, and makes more sense to the community.

"It Can Wait" is a program we are passionate about. We cannot stand by and have people use our products and services in a way that is dangerous, namely texting while driving.

We've created a movement based on this belief. We have 1,500 organizations that have joined with us, including other wireless companies. We just crossed the 3.5 million pledge mark and that number keeps growing. We've made "It Can Wait" a way of life at AT&T.

We're now focused on working with the ecosystem to develop a technology solution. We think we're seeing an impact as a result of increased awareness, but we want to evolve to a technology solution that makes it effortless for our customers to avoid texting while driving.

Could you have imagined that you would spend your career here? What has kept you with the company?

Honestly, it doesn't feel like I've spent my whole career at the same place. That is because we keep reinventing ourselves. The past six years have been about transforming our industry. We've built super-fast networks, worked with device makers to introduce intuitive devices that now are enjoyed by millions of customers, and built out cloud infrastructure to seamlessly connect almost anywhere via those devices.

The next six years will be about transforming every other industry.

It will be about changing health care with innovations like monitoring patients remotely and managing medical images in the cloud.

It will be about changing the security and automation industry. We're already making your mobile device the remote control for your life with products like Digital Life.

It will be about changing the automotive industry. Earlier this year, we announced a deal with General Motors to incorporate 4G LTE wireless technology into their cars, starting in 2014. You can imagine the potential in terms of safety and information in the front seat, and entertainment in the back seat.

It will be about changing and democratizing education through technology. We recently collaborated with Georgia Tech and Udacity to offer a master's degree in computer science from Georgia Tech completely online for \$6,600 – compared to tens of thousands of dollars for a conventional approach – and to make the dream of a master's degree a real possibility for many more people.

I get excited about this constant state of innovation and transformation for our customers.

We have gone from a utility brand to a lifestyle brand – where people were fearful of technology to being fearful without it. Our technology helps people connect with and watch over their families, and run and grow their businesses. How can you not be excited to be part of all this? ●