

Customer Experience

An Interview with Melissa Arnoldi, Executive Vice President and Chief Customer Officer, AT&T Consumer

EDITORS' NOTE Melissa Arnoldi is the Chief Customer Officer for AT&T Consumer. Most recently, she served as the Chief Executive Officer of Vrio Corp., a multi-billion-dollar AT&T digital entertainment services company in Latin America with more than 9,000 employees across 11 countries and more than 10 million subscribers during her tenure. Prior to that, Arnoldi served as the President of Technology and Network Operations, directing a team of nearly 200,000 employees.



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She was responsible for global information, technology development, network deployment and operations, as well as AT&T's Intellectual Property group, Labs and Foundries. Since joining AT&T in 2008, Arnoldi held roles of increasing responsibility focused on IT merger integration, system consolidation and new product launches. She also supported systems and operations across multiple business segments, including AT&T's Mobility and Business Solutions. Arnoldi came to AT&T from Accenture, where she was a partner in the Communications and High-Tech Consulting group. She serves on the board of directors of NASDAQ Inc. and also sits on the council for Extraordinary Women on Boards. She has been honored as one of the National Diversity Council's "Top 50 Most Powerful Women in Technology" and received a Silver Stevie Award for Women in Business for "Maverick of the Year" in 2015. In 2016, Arnoldi was showcased by FierceWireless as a woman leader to watch for her key contributions in the engineering and technology fields in the telecom industry. She holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Memphis and an MBA from Georgia State University.

COMPANY BRIEF AT&T (att.com) is a diversified, global leader in telecommunications, media and entertainment, and technology. It executes in the market under four operating units. WarnerMedia is a leading media and entertainment company that creates and distributes premium and popular content to global audiences through its consumer brands, including: HBO, HBO Max, Warner Bros., TNT, TBS, truTV, CNN, DC Entertainment, New Line, Cartoon Network, Adult Swim and Turner Classic Movies. AT&T Communications provides more than 100 million U.S. consumers with

entertainment and communications experiences across TV, mobile and broadband. Additionally, it serves high-speed, highly secure connectivity and smart solutions to nearly 3 million business customers. AT&T Latin America provides pay-TV services across 10 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean and wireless services to consumers and businesses in Mexico, where it is the fastest growing wireless provider. Xandr provides marketers with innovative and relevant advertising solutions for consumers around premium video content and digital advertising through its platform.

What aspects of your role at Vrio will you bring into your position as Chief Customer Officer?

When I became CEO of Vrio, I had a vision to become the leading digital entertainment provider in the region, while also becoming the best place to work. The Vrio team delivered, building a best-in-class digital entertainment experience and connecting customers whenever and wherever they want. In 2021, we ranked third in the multinational category for Latin America's Best Workplaces list by Great

Place to Work®. We accomplished our goals in terms of technology and culture transformation.

I want to help foster and shape the same kind of evolution as the Chief Customer Officer of AT&T Consumer. In this role, I'm honored to lead field technician and customer service teams that support roughly 180 million annual customer interactions. They work every day to deliver the best customer experience, and we want to support them and this mission. Ultimately, we know that happy employees, equipped with the best processes and technology, lead to happy customers.

How do you describe the AT&T culture and how critical is culture to its success with customers?

We have four culture pillars at AT&T: Serve Customers First, Move Faster, Act Boldly, and Win as One. Notice that our first pillar is about the customer, because we know how integral our customers are to our success. If we don't do our best to serve them when and how they want to be served, we can't achieve our aspirations as a company. Now more than ever, customers have choices, and we want to be the first connectivity provider that comes to mind – not just because of our ability to provide unrivaled products, services, and network connections, but because of our dedication to understanding, valuing, and appreciating our customers.

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We're making it easier for our dedicated teams to serve customers first by providing them with the updated training, technology, and tools needed to succeed. We're also creating an environment of empowerment and collaboration to deliver on our remaining culture pillars, which drives our teams to develop the best experiences for our stores, in customers' homes, over the phone, and online.

How has AT&T adapted the way it works during the global pandemic to best serve customers?

COVID-19 has affected everyone in our AT&T family, from our customers to our employees. Understanding this, we knew early on that the only way we were going to be able to serve our customers effectively was to ensure our teams were taken care of, personally and professionally. In addition to our pre-existing sick-leave and paid-time-off benefits, we gave employees extra time off should they need to care for sick family and friends. When possible, we also allowed our teams to work from home. However, due to the nature of work for some of our customer-facing teams, that's not always possible. When our teams work in-person, we take precautions designed to meet or exceed guidelines set by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as those determined by local authorities and key members of the community.

Early in the pandemic, our teams adapted to serve customers on their terms by embracing change and introducing new contactless, omnichannel experiences – such as new abilities for customers to buy online and pick up in store, receive a distanced curbside pickup, or interact remotely with virtual sales experts. We also updated and continue to enhance the tools we use to communicate with customers before dispatching our technicians to provide self-help and appointment rescheduling where appropriate for safety. When in-person appointments are necessary, we strive to keep both our customers and teams safe by asking appropriate COVID-19 related questions before arrival. Technicians will dispatch only if the screening results are negative, and if they have a way to

keep their hands and equipment clean. While at the home, our technicians practice social distancing while delivering on our commitment to best-in-class service.

Where do you see opportunities for the telecommunications industry to improve the customer experience?

We believe the entire telecommunications industry has room to improve the customer experience, and that starts with listening to our customers' needs. That's why my team exists – we are dedicated to listening to customers and finding ways to make their experience better. We harness the power of data, analytics, and technology to better serve our customers, quickly and effectively. We're also focused on using that technology to help predict and resolve customer needs before they even arise.

We know our customers care about speed, convenience, personalization, and flexibility so our goal is to create a seamless experience that feels special and unique to them, no matter where or how they choose to engage with our brand.

It will take time for the industry to make up ground in customer experience, but I can say that for AT&T, we're making customer-focused changes unlike any we've made before. We want to become a leader in this space – not for ourselves, but because our customers deserve a connectivity provider that truly puts them first.

What responsibility does AT&T and its teams have to the communities they serve?

At a high level, AT&T meaningfully impacts the communities we serve in two ways: delivering connectivity and creating a positive customer experience. Since the pandemic started, we've seen the critical nature of AT&T's core products and services. When parents and children transitioned to working and learning at home, our broadband allowed them to connect seamlessly. When grandchildren could only safely keep in touch with their grandparents over the phone, our wireless network helped make it happen. We're proud of this impact, but we also recognize that a digital divide exists and not everyone has the same access to connectivity. That's why we've committed \$2 billion over the next three years to help bridge the gap. As a part of this investment, we're offering low-cost broadband to eligible

customers and investing in projects that improve digital education in underserved areas.

However, the products and services that we sell are only part of the equation. We have tens of thousands of customer-facing employees that can make a significant difference for our customers and we're encouraging our teams to act when they see an opportunity to give back. One example of this comes out of El Paso, where our field technicians visited a customer's home and saw that a young boy had created an improvised basketball hoop. The technicians took the initiative to go back and pour concrete for a new court, and they bought a hoop and basketball to go with it. It was a small gesture, but it meant a lot to our customer. This is the kind of impact we can have when we think broadly about our role.

How do you define effective leadership?

Effective leadership is about demonstrating courage and creating a culture that moves us forward, one where people are inspired, excited and empowered to bring their best selves to work. Inspired people do more – without it feeling like more. At AT&T, we still have a long way to go to solidify the kind of winning culture we dream of, but we are getting there together.

Leaders also need to use technology and the power of data to make the best decisions for the business. In our case, it means to constantly assess the needs of our customers and find new and improved ways to deliver the best experience.

What are your key priorities for AT&T's customer experience efforts as you look to the future?

I've started to think of it in terms of achieving simplicity. What does that mean? First, it means that we're easy to do business with. We show an appreciation for our customers' time, knowing that we operate in a fast-paced world with many choices. Second, we build trust through consistency. Our customers need to be able to count on us to deliver the same quality every time they interact with us or buy our products. Third, we anticipate their needs. We know their preferences and how they use our services which makes it easier to care for them. Finally, we treat them well when things go wrong. We build trust and loyalty by taking ownership to make things right.

When we get this right, we build lasting customer relationships. ●