

Elon Musk sparred with new CEO Linda Yaccarino in on-stage interview: 3 takeaways from the exchange

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Twitter CEO Elon Musk, center, speaks with Linda Yaccarino, chairman of global advertising and partnerships for NBC, at the POSSIBLE marketing conference, Tuesday, April 18, 2023, in Miami Beach, Fla. Musk announced Friday, May 12, 2023, that he's hiring Yaccarino to be the new CEO of San Francisco-based Twitter, which is now called X Corp. Credit: AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell, File

On Friday, Elon Musk announced that NBC Universal's Linda Yaccarino [will serve as the new CEO of Twitter](#). Yaccarino is [a longtime advertising executive](#) credited with integrating and digitizing ad sales at NBCU. Her challenge now will be to woo back advertisers that have fled Twitter since Musk acquired it last year for \$44 billion.

Since taking ownership, Musk has fired thousands of Twitter employees, largely scrapped the trust-and-safety team responsible for keeping the site free of hate speech, harassment and misinformation, and blamed others—particularly mainstream media organizations, which he views as untrustworthy "competitors" to Twitter for ad dollars—for exaggerating Twitter's problems.

In April, the two met for an [on-stage conversation at a marketing convention](#) in Miami Beach, Florida. Here are some highlights of their conversation:

MUSK AND YACCARINO SPAR OVER CONTENT MODERATION

The Miami discussion was cordial, although both participants drew some distinct lines in the sand. On a few occasions, Yaccarino steered the conversation toward issues of content moderation and the apparent proliferation of hate speech and extremism since Musk took over the platform. She couched her questions in the context of whether Musk could help advertisers feel more welcome on the platform.

At one point, she asked if Musk was willing to let advertisers "influence" his vision for Twitter, explaining that it would help them get more excited about investing more money—" [product development](#), ad safety, content moderation—that's what the influence is."

Musk shut her down. "It's totally cool to say that you want to have your advertising appear in certain places in Twitter and not in other places, but it is not cool to to try to say what Twitter will do," he said. "And if that means losing advertising dollars, we lose it. But [freedom of speech](#) is paramount."

MUSK REPEATS: NO SPECIAL INFLUENCE FOR ADVERTISERS

Yaccarino returned to the issue a few moments later when she asked Musk if he planned to reinstate the company's "influence council," a once-regular meeting with marketing executives from several of Twitter's major advertisers. Musk again demurred.

"I would be worried about creating a backlash among the public," he said. "Because if the public thinks that their views are being determined by, you know, a small number of (marketing executives) in America, they will be, I think, upset about that."

Musk went on to acknowledge that feedback is important, and suggested Twitter should aim for a "sensible middle ground" that ensures the public "has a voice" while advertisers focus on the ordinary work of improving sales and the perception of their brands.

PRESSING ELON ON HIS OWN TWEETS

Musk didn't pass up the opportunity to sell the assembled marketers a new plan to solve Twitter's problems with objectionable tweets, which the company had [announced the day before](#). Musk called the policy "freedom of speech but not freedom of reach," describing it as a way to limit the visibility of [hate speech](#) and similar problems without actually removing rule-breaking tweets.

Yaccarino took a swing. "Does it apply to your tweets?" Musk has a history of posting misinformation and occasionally offensive tweets, often in the early morning hours.

Musk acknowledged that it does, adding that his tweets can also be tagged with "community notes" that provide additional context to tweets. He added that his tweets receive no special boosts from Twitter.

"Will you agree to be more specific and not [tweet](#) after 3 a.m.?" Yaccarino asked.

"I will aspire to tweet less after 3 a.m.," Musk replied.

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