



**50 giving stories shared as part of
The Marketors' Trust's 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2026**

No 34: The lockdown dissertation that proved creativity still matters



Harrison reads the declaration on the evening he received his award and was admitted as a Freeman of the Company

In the summer of 2020, while the first lockdown kept the country at home, Harrison Smith was scrambling to finish his master's dissertation. He had chosen a question that had been nagging at him: in a world of ever more targeted, data driven advertising, does creativity still matter?

Harrison had already been working in marketing for around six years, in the business to business and business to government world. "I wanted to put myself outside of my comfort zone," he says. "You can get really ring fenced as a marketer into the industry you're in." So he went consumer, straight into what he calls the wild west of digital targeting. This was the era when you could mention tanning shops with your phone on the table and find your feeds full of tanning shop adverts by the evening.

What struck him was how lazy those adverts were. "There was little to no creativity in any of them. It was all just: you've spoken about this, you've bought this, so here's loads more of that." His research asked whether advertisers, and audiences, had given up on creativity, or whether it still made

campaigns more successful. The answer was a resounding yes. Targeted advertising works to a point, but creativity is still valued, still grabs attention, and still deserves a place in even the most data driven campaign.

What Harrison didn't know was that his tutor, Dr. Jafar, at the University of Westminster had quietly entered the dissertation for the Marketors' Trust award. "He didn't actually tell me he'd applied," Harrison remembers. A few weeks later came the email. It was the first he had ever heard of the Worshipful Company of Marketors, and the research it prompted convinced him he had found his community. On the night he collected his award in London, he was also admitted as a Freeman of the Company.

Six years on, Harrison heads up marketing at Marshall Aerospace in Cambridge, a global business supporting C-130 aircraft for fleet operators around the world, with a travel schedule taking in the US, the Middle East and Europe. The dissertation still shapes how his small team works. "No matter how dull or mundane a campaign might seem on the surface, applying a little outside the box thinking can always help bring it to life."

He was admitted to the Livery in January 2026, has served on the Outreach Committee for several years, and has recently joined the Trust Committee. Ask what the Marketors have given him and the answer comes quickly. "Marketing can be a lonely place. A lot of marketers are the only marketer in their business. Being part of a wider group of people who just get the challenges you're facing every day is a really refreshing feeling. Within the Marketors, we're all fighting the good fight."



Harrison with his certificate after being admitted to the Livery of the Company, 21 January 2026

His advice to any student or young marketer eyeing a Trust award: "Definitely go for it. But also look to get involved in the Marketors, go along to an open evening, experience it, and see if it's the right thing for you." As for whether AI changes any of this: "It's an extremely powerful tool, but I don't think it will ever replace human creativity. That's why the Trust supporting education, and helping drive people into the industry, is vitally important."

For fifty years the Trust's university awards have recognised outstanding student work. Harrison's story shows they do something more: they open a door. One unexpected email in a locked down summer gave the Company a Freeman, then a Liveryman, and now a member of the very committee that will choose the next generation of winners. Fifty years of giving, coming full circle.

How to give

Every gift, at whatever level, helps secure the Trust's grants, awards and care for the next fifty years. To give, go to: <https://www.marketors.org/the-marketors-trust/support-ways-to-give>

The Marketors' Trust, Registered charity no. 272339