

Linda Yaccarino: does Twitter's CEO have the most difficult job in tech?

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Author: Kari Paul

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The rebrand of Twitter to X.com this week has been widely considered as among the most consequential steps in Elon Musk's endeavor to reshape the social media company. It is also being seen as a deciding moment for the company's recently appointed chief executive officer, Linda Yaccarino. Yaccarino, a longtime advertising executive, took the helm of Twitter in May. Her appointment came after months of controversial decisions from Musk, who bought Twitter for \$44bn in October 2022 and proceeded quickly to lay off the majority of its staff and alienate advertisers with new policies. Faced with growing criticism over his erratic decision-making, Musk promised to bring in a new CEO – a position he himself described as a “painful” job that anyone would be “foolish” to take on. With a storied career in media and advertising, Yaccarino's appointment offered a flicker of hope to those invested in Twitter's future. Yaccarino, 59, began her media career as an intern at NBC Universal, and spent two decades at Turner Broadcasting, before returning to NBC Universal in 2011. As chair of advertising for the broadcaster, she ran its \$13bn annual ad sales business and was known for her silky but tough negotiating style. When Yaccarino was appointed as the company's first female CEO, there was much talk about her standing on a “glass cliff” – a concept that has emerged through research positing that women are more likely to be promoted to higher positions when companies are in crisis and failure is more likely. But many industry analysts say that while it is widely acknowledged that Yaccarino may have taken on one of the most difficult jobs in tech, few people would be better equipped to do so. “Her history has given her massive credibility within the advertising world and in digital media, and she is not one to back down from a challenge,” said Dan Ives, an analyst at investment firm Wedbush Securities. “She recognizes that this is an uphill battle, but she also recognizes the opportunity for turnaround.” Much of her success, analysts said, however, would depend on how much Musk was willing to share control. The chaotic nature of the X announcement for some has dashed the hope that Yaccarino can clean up Musk's mess. “There was quite a bit of cautious optimism when it was announced that Yaccarino was going to take over – that optimism has now faded,” said Jasmine Enberg, top social media analyst at the market research firm Insider Intelligence. “It was clear from the start that Musk wasn't going to step away, and now it's clear that he isn't going to step to the side either.” Others argue they see signs of Yaccarino taking up a bigger role. While Musk is still very much the face of the company, Yaccarino has been more actively involved in Twitter announcements and strategy of late, said Joe Panzarella, director of the digital marketing and media program at Yeshiva University. She made a series of pointed statements about the rise of Threads, Meta's new Twitter competitor, alongside Musk. “This was the first time they were out there equally,” Panzarella said. “Over the last couple of weeks, we have almost seen her say, ‘Hey, you want me to run this thing? Then I have to be the voice of it.’” Yaccarino was also more prominent in the announcement of X than she

has been in past Twitter developments, sharing about the rebrand extensively on Twitter and in a company-wide email to employees. She was the one to announce specific product features and a vision for the future of X and said in the rallying cry to employees that “we enjoy moving at the speed of light, and when we do, that’s X”. Still, X is very much in line with Musk’s longstanding goals to create an “everything app”. That the X rebrand is very clearly an effort from Musk and not Yaccarino has underscored the new CEO’s lack of control over the company, said Enberg of Insider Intelligence. “The launch was a clear indication that even though she may have the title of CEO, Musk is very much still in charge,” Enberg said. “The rebranding is a visual manifestation [of] that.” Twitter evolving into X is a big gamble, experts have said, and time will tell whether that bet will pay off and save the struggling company. Twitter has been in a downward spiral since Musk took over, grappling with a \$13bn debt burden and a massive exodus of advertisers – historically the company’s main source of income. Twitter is looking for new revenue streams, and the “everything app” could be a path to doing so. As for Yaccarino, the executive is not yet down for the count, said Ives. “This is clearly going to be very challenging – there are many twists and turns in the Twitter saga and each day is a new chapter. But there is also a huge opportunity here,” he said. “If she’s successful, she goes down in the history books. And if not, she becomes a footnote.”