

MARCO CAMISANI
CALZOLARI
**THE DIGITAL
RENAISSANCE MAN**

ABSTRACT

MARCO CAMISANI CALZOLARI IS AN ITALIAN BORN DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT, AUTHOR, TEACHER, ENTREPRENEUR AND PUBLIC PERSONA. A WELL-KNOWN “DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS GURU”, FROM AN EARLY AGE MARCO HAD A CURIOSITY FOR ALL THINGS RELATED TO DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGY.

It's an attribute that would lead him to becoming a *self-taught* expert in the fields of digital technology and communications.

Following his studies and early career, Marco quickly gained an appreciation for the art of communicating complex digital concepts to mainstream audiences. In 2022, Marco was best known for his role on one of Italy's most popular shows called Striscia la Notizia, where he hosted a digital and tech segment. Passionate about learning and sharing his expertise, Marco also authored many books and was a guest lecturer at several universities. A common thread weaving all his experiences together was a desire to help people with their daily *digital and tech* queries. At the beginning of 2022, Marco was thinking about his resolutions and ventures for the coming year, and several questions came to mind that required answers.

This case is for educational purposes and is not intended to illustrate either effective or ineffective management of an organisational situation. The situations and circumstances described may have been dramatised or modified for instructional purposes and may not accurately reflect actual events.

Copyright © 2022 The Authors. All rights reserved. No part of this case study may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without written permission of UCL School of Management.

INTRODUCTION

“Uomo Universale”, also referred to in English as the “Renaissance Man” or “Polymath”, is an idea conceived during Italian Renaissance by Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), that humans are limitless in their capacity for development. The concept led to the notion that people should embrace all knowledge and develop their capacities as fully as possible, as this could lead them to produce masterworks of artistic, scientific, ethical and social value.

This notion can be aptly used to describe, in more modern terms, the life and work of Marco Camisani Calzolari (aka MCC), an Italian born digital expert, author, teacher, entrepreneur and public persona ([see Exhibit 1](#)). In 2022, acknowledged by many Italians as a *guru of all things digital, technology & communications*, Marco was, first and foremost, a continuous learner of the evolving world that is digital communications. Driven by a curiosity to learn about the latest in digital trends and technological innovations, especially those that enable and facilitate the way in which people communicate (via the internet), Marco had spent much of his time researching, experimenting, and playing in this field.

Born and raised in Milan, Italy, in 2022 Marco lived and worked from his home in London, UK. From an early age Marco was always curious about *how things worked*. It is a quality and curiosity that has stayed with him ever since, and it is one that has guided him on the path he is on today - that of a passionate digital guru. In 2022, Marco was best known in Italy for his role as special correspondent on one of Italy’s most popular weekly shows called Striscia la Notizia, where he hosted a segment about, of course, all things related to digital & technology ([see Exhibit 2](#)).

Aside from his expertise in the digital and technology space, which formed the foundation for each of Marco’s professions, what motivated Marco the most was his desire to provide a public service. Whether it be through one of his books, his articles, his broadcast segments or business ventures, through each initiative Marco was motivated to help others. He felt he was on a mission to democratise the digital world and technology and make it more accessible to everyone.

It was on New Year’s Eve, just before ringing in 2022, that Marco found himself reflecting on resolutions and ventures to be pursued within the next 12 months, and several questions came to mind.

THE BEGINNING - THE MAKING OF A DIGITAL GURU

Marco’s rise to the public persona and digital guru he was in 2022 was the result of many years of learning, teaching and working in his field. Marco’s interests in all things digital and tech started from an early age. For as long as he could remember, he was always interested in knowing ‘how things worked’. Growing up, whenever new and exciting technology emerged like a gaming console, unlike most of his friends who were eager to play the games as intended, Marco was more interested in figuring out how the system worked or how it was programmed.

For this attribute he credits his grandfather who was a mechanical engineer, and a disrupter for his time. As a budding digital guru, Marco was always interested in what his grandfather was working on or tinkering with at the time.

Growing up during the 1970s and early 1980s, Marco recalls there were no computers during these years, or at least not commonly found in most people's households like they are today. That did not stop him from experimenting with whatever electronics he could find. On one occasion, he vividly recalls *playing* with acid when trying to create a manual circuit board.

“The base had copper which had to be traced with a marker, and then the acid would erode the copper. It is the type of activity that today would come with a “do not try this at home” warning, but such was the way to experiment and learn back in the day.”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

Marco's interests for teaching and communicating were fostered by his mother. Marco's mother worked as a translator for Olivetti computers. Marco recalls his mother valued learning different languages and was particularly drawn to British culture. In turn, Marco spent every summer growing up in the UK. When Marco was 11 years old, he bought his first commodore computer, originally one of the first consoles made for gaming. More interested in learning how the games were made rather than playing them, Marco set out to understand how to program. And so began his life-long interest in learning about the latest digital gadgets and innovations.

When he was 14 years old, Marco and his family moved to Liguria, a popular summer tourist destination. A self-professed nerd more interested in tinkering with electronics than socialising, Marco had not been exposed to many social settings up until this point in his life. For the first time, Marco was seeing and experiencing how people interacted, socialised and communicated with one another.

“As a kid, I was the perfect nerd stereotype, and I was spending a lot of time by myself. I could have never imagined that life one day would have brought me to be a communication expert, running live digital experiments on TV with millions of viewers!”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

Two years after first arriving in Liguria, when Marco was 16 years old, he had the opportunity to visit a local radio station. Immediately Marco was intrigued by the tech in the studio, by how things were connected – and most impressive of all, by how voice could travel to the homes, cars and radios of hundreds of listeners at the same time. During this visit he was invited to say something on the microphone. For the first time Marco heard his voice being broadcasted for hundreds to hear. Little did he know at the time, it wouldn't be the last time.

With a newfound appreciation for socialising with friends, combined with his passion for digital and technology and now radio communication, Marco came to the realisation that he wanted to live at the intersection of two worlds – one driven by digital/tech, and one that revolved around social/communication. And so began his path that brought these two worlds together.

EDUCATION AND EARLY PROFESSIONAL CAREER

When Marco graduated from high school, the computer programming courses being offered by local Universities were not a suitable fit, as the curriculum being covered was too basic.

“I saw what some older friends were studying, and the types of codes they were learning. I knew most of it. I could have taught myself some of those courses.”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

Keen to pursue a more advanced post-secondary education, Marco set off to attend a Swiss University, which seemed to offer a more contemporary and challenging programme. Not long after arriving at the University, however, Marco discovered the school was lagging in the knowledge and expertise he was looking for in his field. Marco finished his degree, but unsatisfied with the level of education he received, he decided to pave his own way going forward, relying on his own self-teaching methods and abilities. This became a path that guided much of his career ever since – one led by an insatiable curiosity and yearning for continuous *self-learning*.

“During a normal day, I spend at least half of my time reading, researching, studying. Technology is in continuous evolution, and if you want to communicate it and disseminate it in a just way as I try to do, you need to understand in depth what is going on and the views of different experts. Research is time consuming, but I love it”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

Shortly after graduating, at the age of 23, Marco returned to Italy and through a friend landed his first paid job with a high-end fashion company. The company asked Marco to use his programming skills to optimise procurement operations. Marco rose to the challenge and developed a software that fixed the problem within a year.

Following this project, at the age of 24, Marco met one of the best Italian talent recruiters, Claudio Cecchetto. The union marked the beginning of Marco’s entrepreneurial journey. Part talent-recruiter, part entrepreneur, and part investor, Claudio was a visionary bursting with ideas. The duo started working on several projects, including what was possibly the world’s first social media platform.

“This wouldn’t be particularly cool today, but we were working on this in 1995. Claudio had this idea of creating a place where people could meet, chat, but there would also be a currency. The network we built was called Internetwork City, and had a currency called EB (standing for “energy bank”), probably the first or one of the first virtual currencies in the world. The innovative project never really took off. Broadbands were too slow at the time, and perhaps the project was ahead of its time.”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

At that point Claudio owned a big radio station in Italy and invited Marco to be a weekly host, where he talked about the latest trends in digital technology. It was Marco’s first role working in digital communication. He would later go on to work for a few radio stations over the years, including Sky Radio and Radio 105, delivering content segments that focused on digital technology. As he continued to develop his skills as a host and communicator, he specialised in taking complex concepts and ideas and explaining them to his audience in ways that were easy to understand. After 3 years of working together, Claudio and Marco set off on separate paths.

Following his time working with Claudio, Marco began working as a freelance consultant with a number of Italian radio clients (including Radio Capital, Radio Montecarlo, Radio 105 among others), to help build their websites. One of his first projects included creating the first website for MTV in Italy. Marco also became a consultant for MTV, working closely with their digital agency.

In 1998, advocating for more regulation of the World Wide Web, Marco made news for registering the cocacola.net web domain that was surprisingly available.

From there, with a few years of work experience under his belt, Marco unleashed his inner entrepreneur and created his first entrepreneurial venture. Together with his team, he created a website that invited people to tie the knot online. The site was called “QuickWedding”, and while it was not legally binding, it provided a destination for people looking for an easy and affordable way to exchange their vows. Complete with certificates and wedding bands, the website quickly grew in popularity and eventually Marco sold it in 1999 for about one million euros.

The sale armed Marco with capital that he would later invest in other internet-based business ventures between the years 2000-2004, none of which took off - unfortunately. In the early 2000s, when new digital products were emerging, a digital revolution was forming, and the internet was no longer deemed interesting or relevant during these years.

With interest in the internet fading, Marco turned his attention back to where his communications interest began, in radio.

In 2000, Marco created a company called “AudioRete Srl” that produced “Radio3210.com”, Italy’s first on-demand radio station. It was a novel idea for the time, preceding the first podcasts that were developed approximately five years later. The idea was simple - create content that listeners can consume when and where they choose to consume it. With this idea in mind, Marco created software to download new episodes when they were ready. At the same time, he set up a production company and created content for third party companies as well, and another venture that was producing audio contents for websites. None of these ventures became real enterprises.

In 2004, Marco founded another company called “Speakage” (based in Milan and London), which focused on developing web platforms and apps for third parties. The company did well from the get-go, as Marco and his team developed the first catalogue App for IKEA that was used in 15 countries. This business led Marco to set up a programming office in Crimea, too. Around the same time, Marco moved to London with his family, as did his Chief Technology Officer. Another successful venture followed soon: a new digital platform that was geared to providing an online destination for people to protest. The website was called LivePetitions.com and was possibly one of the first petition platforms, preceding change.org, another popular petition sites that emerged and grew over time. The site quickly grew in popularity, and in turn, Marco went on to create the same platform for ten different countries. Each site was customised in a different language and name, specific to each region (e.g., firmiamo.it in Italy and jesigne.fr in France). Free to use, the sites garnered two million active users and revenue was generated through advertisements from clients like the United Nations and Greenpeace, among others.

While the Speakage business was proving successful, always the “experimenter and programmer-first”, Marco focused more of his time on developing the products than he did on growing the business. Additionally, Marco was beginning to feel frustrated by the shift that he was seeing happening in the marketplace. With new technologies emerging, clients were increasingly looking for “fast and efficient” products and services, rather than focusing on quality. For all of these reasons, following what was a successful 13-year run of operating the company in both Milan and London, in 2017 Marco and his partner decided to close the Speakage business.

“I had lost the drive I had at the beginning. We did great things, but I felt it was time to change. I felt the need to reinvent myself – again.”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

In 2012, a research project led by Marco made news¹ worldwide, as the findings suggested that social media followers of 39 major companies were likely bots rather than human. The topic of fake followers gained traction and has been widely discussed since then.

In 2017, Marco joined Italy’s most popular national TV programme, *Striscia la Notizia*, where he hosted and produced weekly segments as the show’s digital communications expert. With a daily average audience of approximately 5 million viewers, both Marco and his segment grew quickly in popularity. Thanks to his work and appearance on the programme, in 2022 Marco has quickly become Italy’s most well-known digital guru.

Marco’s rise to becoming a public figure didn’t alter his entrepreneurial spirit or mindset. In fact, it inspired him to launch a new entrepreneurial venture where he tried to bridge his digital & tech experience with his broadcast (TV and radio) communication experience by founding IETV UK – Italian Expats Television UK. The digital TV was geared to Italian expats living in the UK and quickly gained thousands of followers. The business proved difficult to be sustained economically, and in 2019 Marco decided to terminate the project.

MASTERING POLYMATHY

Building on his extensive production work for *Striscia la Notizia*, combined with his growing presence on social media, Marco decided to focus on creating and producing his own content. Driven by a desire to create the best content and deliver it in the best way possible, Marco taught himself about the technical side of video production, something that set himself apart from his fellow correspondents on *Striscia la Notizia*, as well as from many other presenters in the industry ([see Exhibit 3](#)).

Another distinctive characteristic that set Marco apart from others in his field, and one that stayed with him throughout his entire professional journey, was his innate desire to continuously learn and teach. In 2007, Marco joined the IULM University in Milano as an Adjunct Professor and led the course “Corporate Communications and Digital Languages programme” for many years. In 2018 in London, he guest lectured at London School of Economics and became a member of the Global Online MBA Advisory Board at Imperial College London ([see Exhibit 4](#)). Guest lecturing became part of his personal purpose, a way to share his knowledge by inspiring future leaders of business and society.

¹ See articles on [Reuters](#), the [FT](#) and the [Economist](#).

Leaning on more than 30 years of industry knowledge and experience, by 2022 Marco had authored several books and articles with a focus on digital marketing and communications ([see Exhibit 5](#)). He also advised big organisations including the likes of Atlantia, Danieli, Roche, Mondelez-Kraft and UK Trade & Investment, and was a keynote speaker at several major corporate and industry events.

“Because of my expertise and public persona, I’m invited to speak at very interesting events. One of my favourite memories is speaking at Business Rocks in 2016, where I had the opportunity to meet Apple’s co-founder Steve Wozniak who was speaking there too.”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

RISING TO (DIGITAL GURU) STARDOM HAS ITS CHALLENGES

Becoming a well-known public figure comes with its challenges. As Marco’s popularity as a national digital guru grew, most of his audience didn’t know too much about his career, his academic credentials or his entrepreneurial experience. For the most part, these sides of Marco were known only within his more exclusive circle of digital and technical experts. With his role with Striscia la Notizia, Marco focused on “disseminating and explaining” concepts for the public, as simplifying complex topics is key to mainstream communication.

“I am a tech expert, I have always been. Today I am recognised for my ability to explain digital & tech topics in a way that is accessible to everyone. Thanks to my public appearances, millions of Italians today are more digitally literate and that is for me the metric of success. To explain things to the public, I need to simplify things – and I know this bothers many deep tech & digital experts. Many people labeled me as a social media influencer, which is something I am not, despite the high number of followers. I felt this was becoming a problem for my personal brand. For this reason, I decided to develop new content for newspapers and digital media, with a more of a techy focus.”

Marco Camisani Calzolari

A PUBLIC PERSONA SERVING THE PUBLIC

In his role with Striscia la Notizia, Marco became more than a TV presenter. He was also a public servant. He helped his audience understand how things work, or what products and services are available that may meet their everyday needs. He was able to break down the latest buzz words and concepts, making sense of bitcoins, blockchain and the metaverse, as just a few examples.

His goal every week was to provide a service that would help his viewers. Sometimes this involved experimenting with his audience. Take an episode² that aired on 27 September 2021 for instance, where Striscia la Notizia and Marco decided to run an audience wide experiment aimed at addressing a question that many in his audience were asking themselves: “*are the apps on my phone listening to me?*”

² Video of the episode is available [here](#)

It is a question that one person alone, with one phone, could not have answered with any level of real certainty. With a daily audience of approximately 5 million viewers, Marco thought - why not try to answer this question together? And so, through his show, Marco invited his audience to turn up the volume on the TV and to bring their phones close. Next, Marco made a brief statement about cars. He then asked his audience to pay attention to the advertisements they received on their phones in the coming days, and to then notify Striscia la Notizia if they received car related ads, and on which apps. Thousands of notifications flooded in, showcasing that indeed there was some level of “listening” occurring. The next question that arose was, “*which apps were in fact listening?*”

This led to part-two of the experiment, which at this point had garnered the interest and collaboration of the Italian government unit taking care of privacy. To identify which apps were indeed listening to people’s conversations, Marco asked his audience to disable all the apps, and then turn one on each day to run the same experiment, one by one. Once again notifications from the audience started to pour in. The result of this nation-wide experiment run by Marco became the subject of a national investigation aimed at improving privacy settings. In March 2022, Marco made news again for finding a major bug on the Facebook platform.

NEW YEAR’S EVE RESOLUTION

On New Year’s Eve of 2021, just before ringing in 2022, Marco was reflecting on his journey and achievements.

Driven by a myriad of interests, passions and talents in every area of his life, Marco was aiming to embrace his knowledge and expertise and develop himself as fully as possible - likening him in many ways to a modern-day *digital Renaissance Man!*

Each of Marco’s paths established him as a well-rounded digital communications expert. In each of his roles, businesses, ventures and initiatives there was some common threads – the aim for innovation, the goal of informing, the passion for connecting and helping people.

He wanted 2022 to be a big year. He was reflecting on resolutions to be pursued in the next 12 months, and several ideas and questions were popping into his mind:

- How can I channel all of my experiences, knowledge and expertise – for good?
- Passion and personal purpose have driven me to achieve a lot. How could I leverage this for a new venture, so my personal purpose could be translated into a corporate purpose, to scale the impact of my work and digital public persona?
- If building a purpose-driven corporation is the answer, should it be for-profit, not-for-profit or a social enterprise?
- Is a new venture the right idea, or should I focus on building my presence on social media to expand my reach, and begin producing content in English to reach and engage the public outside Italy?

EXHIBIT 1
MARCO CAMISANI
CALZOLARI (MCC)



EXHIBIT 2
MCC, STRISCIA
LA NOTIZIA'S
DIGITAL & TECH
EXPERT



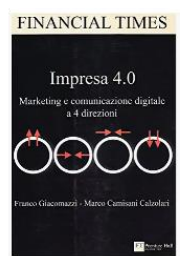
EXHIBIT 3
MCC, THE
PRODUCER



EXHIBIT 4
MCC, THE
TEACHER



EXHIBIT 5 MCC, THE AUTHOR



AUTHOR

PROFESSOR PAOLO TATICCHI

Biography

Paolo teaches Strategy, Consulting and Sustainability at UCL School of Management where he is also a member of the School's senior management team.

Before UCL, Paolo spent six years at Imperial College London where he is still a Visiting Professor. Paolo's research on corporate sustainability is internationally recognised and his books internally appreciated. Outside of the academy, Paolo has significant consultancy experience in the fields of strategy, education, and sustainability. Today, he advises influential organisations in the UK, Italy, US, Canada and India.

His projects, quotes and opinions have been featured over 250 times in media outlets like The Financial Times, Forbes, Sole 24 Ore, Sky News, Mediaset and CNN.

In 2018, Paolo was chosen by influential website Poets & Quants as one of the world's top 40 business school professors under the age of 40. In 2021, Paolo was indicated by Italian's leading business daily Sole 24 Ore as the most influential Italian under the age of 40.

Contact

UCL School of Management
Level 50, One Canada Square,
London E14 5AA

E: p.taticchi@ucl.ac.uk

AUTHOR

MELINA CORVAGLIA-CHARREY

Biography

Melina is a Research Assistant at UCL School of Management, where she works on various projects focused on business strategy and sustainability. Melina also works for Enovation Consulting Ltd. as a Sustainable Content Marketing Strategist. Previously, Melina worked in the Media Sponsorship & Marketing field for 15+ years, collaborating with Fortune 500 companies to develop strategic and results-driven partnership marketing campaigns.