



Season 6: International Marketing and Brand Management Episode 8

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Stacie Berdan:

Welcome to the global careers podcast sponsored by GW-CIBER – THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world. Whether or not you’ve considered moving abroad or taking on an international role, globalization will impact your career. So join us for a lively discussion as we explore what an international career really means. My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and I'll be your host!

In Season 6, we focus on the challenges and opportunities in global careers in marketing, communications and brand management. What are the rising trends and skills employers in the field are seeking in new hires? Join us as we hear from award-winning international marketing professionals as they share their stories working on some of the most iconic brands around the world. Today's guest is Megan Yarmuth, an award-winning communications professional with more than 18 years of experience working for some of the biggest global PR agencies. Currently she is head of PR, Ogilvy Doha, where she leads the public relations team on accounts including Qatar Foundation and Qatar tourism. She recently moved to Doha from Washington DC, with her husband and two school aged sons. While in DC, she was working for Weber Shandwick on public health and awareness campaigns for the CDC. Megan is also an entrepreneur who co-founded and managed a video production and digital media company, Rock House, and she is a GW alumna. She earned her MBA with a focus on Marketing in 2009. Welcome, Megan, it is so great to have you with us today.

Megan Yarmuth:

Thank you. It's great to be here.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. So, one of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there – more than just titles or linear, kind of, resume descriptions. What is it that you do?

Megan Yarmuth:

Sure. So, I am currently leading the PR team and our portfolio of PR clients and work in Ogilvy's Doha, Qatar office. For those who might not know, Ogilvy is a very large global integrated agency, meaning that we have practices like PR, advertising, health experience, all over the globe. I believe we're at about 130 offices and over 90 countries. And for those who might not exactly know where Qatar is, I get that question back home a lot, it's a very small geographically, but mighty country located in the Middle East, bordering Saudi Arabia, and most recently was the host of the World Cup. They also don't mind if you call it Qátar, Qatár or both, I get that question a lot, too... But yes, so, my day-to-day, I'm back to your question, what that looks like, for me, is a structure where I have a great team of account leads that manage the overall day-to-day on accounts with clients, I then step in to provide that overarching support, strategy and counsel for our clients and teams. I also spend a lot of my time working on ensuring our account growth in the market, and that our PR expertise remains best in class here in Doha. I think that answers it...



Stacie Berdan:

Great. Yeah, so, dive a little deeper, what is public relations? Because a lot of our... this episode or the season, I'm sorry, the Season 6 is all about marketing and communications, which is pretty broad. And PR is one area of that. Tell us what PR is?

Megan Yarmuth:

Sure, absolutely. And I do think what I've found, you know, because I was GW alum, and I spent a lot of time in the Ogilvy DC office, is that PR is different in each market, a lot having to do with how, you know, digital has changed, and media has changed. But for the Doha office, what that means is we still work really heavily with media, we maintain media lists, we look for opportunities, we write a lot of editorial op-eds, manage our clients overall, you know, image reputation, but also their voice in the marketplace. We also do a lot of campaign work. So, making sure that, you know, I work very closely with social. In fact, I have some social folks on my team, so they handle not only... if there's an op-ed that goes out in the paper, they make sure that it's also represented on each client's like, you know, their social channels, what does that look like? There's a lot of writing, a lot of writing, we're very word focused, which makes me very happy. And, you know, we also just make sure that if an opportunity comes up, the client is trained for crises, for media opportunities, all kinds of things like that.

Stacie Berdan:

That's great, great description and very clear. So thanks for that. And you mentioned a couple of things that I want to kind of dive into. Yes, writing, so important. So glad to hear that it still is important. But you also mentioned digital marketing, social media... What are the effects that they've had on the business?

Megan Yarmuth:

Oh, that's such a great question. Well, digital marketing and social, they are great tools, when used effectively. It really has made the connection to a brand or an organization feel very personal, right. So if you're watching a TikTok or Instagram from a brand, it feels very one-on-one. And the clients that have embraced that, we've found, have had the most success. Over time, it's allowed us to, like, really narrow our targets and our audiences and understand them better as well, you know, which is great. On the flip side, it does mean that there's a greater demand to provide more and more content, which can feel really overwhelming to an organization and where a lot of my team steps in to help.

Stacie Berdan:

So that's really, it's really interesting. What kind of... I mean... So, it's amped up the amount of time you have spent, because, literally how... like how many times a day or a week or do you post for something? Does it matter? I mean, is it just so quick and so, I don't know, less long lasting, right?

Megan Yarmuth:

Yes, that's a great question. So, you know, it's not a one-size-fits-all. So, what that means on our end is, if the client, you know, we really tailor the plan for the client, so if it's, you know, the electric company, right, or a government entity, we might not need to hear from them every single day, or every thought that's on their mind, right. But we still need them to have a presence. And versus, you know, a more traditional brand, like a Coca-Cola, where they are needing to fight in the marketplace for brand recognition, and, you know, airspace and cut through, so they would be tweeting and instagramming a lot more often. So, really tailoring it to meet the client, you know, objectives, needs, is important.



Stacie Berdan:

So, it sounds like more like PR is much more 24/7 versus a traditional marketing has much more time, data research, that kind of...

Megan Yarmuth:

Yes, we are always on, and we try to be proactive, but have very reactive plans in place.

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. All right. So, and you've had such a great successful career in the industry... What changes have you witnessed? You know, particularly in the last five years, besides the social and the digital media?

Megan Yarmuth:

Sure, sure. I think everybody has seen a lot in the past five years, especially the past three years, it's really upended the way we all communicate, you know. Virtual work took over, across all industries. It's a season of extreme change. I've seen it, you know, I saw it in the US, and I see it here as well, there has been just a lot of turnover in the media industry in general. All folks in journalism are being asked to cover and do more with less, which means, you know, as on the other side, on the PR side, we have to have a lot of empathy with our media contacts, and make sure that we understand what they're going through, and maintaining those relationships, so that they're really effective and kind of understanding the burden that they're going through. So that's been a big change. I mean, it was happening already, but COVID, certainly, you know, increased that problem. So, yes, making sure we can help provide, you know, content and information in a way that can be quickly used by journalists is important.

Stacie Berdan:

What do you see coming up in the next three to four years? What other changes do you see?

Megan Yarmuth:

I am so excited about the next few years. There are a few trends, specifically, that get me really, really amped up. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention AI, right, everybody is talking about it and the capabilities are growing so fast. Continually looking to AI as a way to drive solutions for clients and work more efficiently is an area I'm spending a lot of time thinking and working on right now. Climate change – I am sure a lot of our listeners have noticed too that; I would say, even in the past six months, we're starting to see this shift. It's being referred to in media as the climate crisis. Media outlets are spending a lot more time and resources to covering its impact and, you know, basically devoting entire teams, whereas before it was kind of a byline, now it's really front and center. The positive part of that is they're also covering potential solutions continually and more holistically. So, I think it's a really great change to see in the marketplace. And finally, a trend that really is as exciting is podcasts and digital audio content like this one continues to be on the rise. Video, as well. It's just continuing to grow and cut through and really resonate with audiences, which is exciting.

Stacie Berdan:

It is exciting. Great. Great to hear. So, thanks for those... AI, climate change or crises, and podcasts. Terrific. So, I want to turn a little bit to where you live now. So, you recently moved to Doha. Tell us how you landed such a great role. I'm sure it's on the minds and on the top objectives of so many of our listeners to do what you've done.

Megan Yarmuth:

Yeah, absolutely. It was definitely a journey, like everyone. I did just recently hit the one-year mark here, which was exciting and starting to feel a little more settled in. But moving internationally was always on the bucket list for my husband and me. We traveled a lot and really wanted the experience. But then like many, time passed, we had



children, we started our own company at one point and kind of just thought, Okay, this isn't going to happen and pushed it, you know, aside. In 2019, we came here to film with our company Rock House at the time, to film for Northwestern. Northwestern has a campus here focused on journalism and communications. So, we were able to get a sense of the country. But when we were here, we were here for work, we did not have the lens of hey, we're gonna move to this small country in the Middle East at all on our minds. It's just never somewhere we thought we would land. But in 2021, there was an open position at Northwestern to take on some of the production work. So, after some thought we decided it was the right time for a move. And my husband landed the role, which was great. And then once I was in country, I was able to really reignite my relationship with Ogilvy. I knew coming here, I had already made some contacts with several agencies, but Ogilvy was near and dear to my heart. So, I'm excited to be back. And it certainly made it easier that I was already here and had history with the company, because, as you know, getting sponsored, making the move is a big investment for a company.

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. That's great. That's a great story. So, it shows, illustrates to our listeners that sometimes, you know, you have your partnership, the two of you, it's really important that you both wanted this kind of global experience. One of you lands it, then, as you pointed out, you're in country, and it's so much easier to get a job that way. That is so cool. Great. And yes, Ogilvy. Yes. But I was obviously part of the whole WPP family. So, Ogilvy is a distant cousin, yes. What's it like to live there? You know, what's new, exciting? What do you miss? You know, tell us a little bit about that.

Megan Yarmuth:

Yeah, living here is really interesting. And like I said, it's never somewhere that was on my radar. But it's been such a learning process. It's so eye opening for us as a family. You know, one of the best things, and really a big motivator for us, was that it was all about the travel opportunities. So, Doha has one of the world's best airports, I'm not just saying that because they're also a client, but they truly do. The Doha airport, HIA, is one of the best in class around the world in terms of airports. So that means like, we have a lot of nonstop destinations that would be a lot more difficult to reach from the US, you know. A lot of Asia, Eastern Europe... For instance, we just got back from spring break, where we explored the country of Georgia, and it was only a three-hour flight. So that was certainly a big motivator and a big part of why we moved here. Another thing is that the expat community here is really strong. So when some people move internationally, they might be, you know, having a harder time fitting in or finding people to connect with. Here it's very transient and there's a large expat community. So, we've been able to make friendships with like-minded people from all over the world and that's just been fabulous. It's been really, really great. And then, you asked me what I miss. I do miss a lot of things, especially fall and just a general sense of seasons. It's the desert, it's very... it's hot for about... when I say hot, I mean very hot, for about six months a year. And then the other six months are pleasant, almost like a Florida winter. So, I miss drinking that pumpkin spice latte and wearing a sweater. I also would have to say the metric system is very strong here, so cooking takes a lot of mental math on my part. You know, go back to AI, I'm very happy for Alexa to do the conversions for me.

Stacie Berdan:

That's funny. That's great. Little things like that. How cool. How cool, is it? Yeah, that's great. And love, love the airport. The airport is a fantastic airport. I agree with you. I agree. Yes, yeah. Tell us, Megan, what skills do you think are necessary to compete on a global scale? And maybe, particularly either in PR and/or, you know, the Middle East?

Megan Yarmuth:

That is a great question. So, on a global scale, no matter what, no matter... you have to have the technical skills, and often the education for whatever job / role you're looking, you know, to pursue. To be successful globally, I think you need to have a genuine curiosity for other cultures. You know, it's not easy in communications, you have



to really understand, you know, a word can have a totally different meaning in a different culture, a different language. So, I'm constantly asking questions, you know, that are culture related about why something is the way it is, you know, even some of the little things that we think are, you know, not a big deal, are a really big deal. Um, you know, for instance, I have several Muhammads on my team, who all go by their last name, kind of casually. But in an email, I've discovered you don't put that, you know. So, you know, those little cultural differences are important to get just right. And it takes a curiosity and, you know, non-judgment and a lot of ways to make sure that you're getting those just right. I've also, you know, talked about eye opening, you know, each country and culture has their own perspective on their past, which is shaping the way their clients and consumers think and behave. So, you like really need to dig in and understand that perspective, so that you can be effective. I had no idea. You know, in the US, the history that we learn is great, but it's not comprehensive at all. And it's not from the perspective of that country. So that's been really important.

Stacie Berdan:

Mm hmm. That's a great point. A really good point. And that is true everywhere you go. And it is a different, slightly different lens. Yeah. Yeah. Fascinating. And when you mentioned your non-judgement and curiosity and ask questions, it made me think of patience too. You just described being very patient without using those words. Really, to get through... yeah.

Megan Yarmuth:

Not always the most patient! But I am learning that there's a process for a lot of things that's just... it's not wrong, it's not weird – it's different. And it still gets done, right?

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Is there a lesson or two that you have learned? Particularly in working in the Middle East or in Qatar?

Megan Yarmuth:

Yes, there have been many lessons... Some, I'm sure, you know, will continue to keep coming to light. I would say, for the Middle East, in particular, things happen at a different pace than they do in the US. So, what I'm finding, my experience is that it often starts slower, the pace starts slower, and then it gets faster as the project or the deadline nears. Even in meetings, you know, you don't go in and expect to talk business right away. In the US, especially in the Washington, DC area, we kind of get down to business pretty quickly. Here, even in an office, first you accept the tea and the coffee, you get to know each other a bit first, and then you start to talk business. So, business is personal here. And, you know, that took a little adjustment on my mindset of, you know, how much time to block for a meeting or you know, just understanding that I need to say yes to the coffee. I'm very caffeinated by the end of the day. Also, the Middle East is made up of several countries, obviously, which means a meeting of many nuanced cultures and even different Arabic dialects, especially here in Doha where the expat community is a big part of the workforce. It's not just European expats, right, I have people on my team from all over the world. But a lot of them are from Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria. Great, they all speak Arabic... well, actually, they have different dialects, and they have different nuances to their culture that really does make them different. And so, you know, finding a few people in my office who I can ask these really, you know, just blunt questions and get the straight answer without a lot of judgment in either way has been really important for me. Another lesson I've learned, which is kind of funny, and this came up yesterday actually, is that we in the US use so many baseball terms in business. And so, I'm constantly having to explain. You know, I gave someone an accolade yesterday of, you know, thanks for pinch heading, and they had no idea what I meant. So, those are kind of fun ones.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. So, what do you do? You explain it and you continue to use it, or you explain it and they're like – What?



Megan Yarmuth:

A little of both actually. Some... there's a few of my team think that a few of my expressions are kind of funny. So, I've heard them start to use them. I'm a big baseball fan, especially the Washington Nationals, so anytime I can spread that knowledge is great.

Stacie Berdan:

That's great. That's great. Tell me, Megan, so you mentioned a little bit about climate change and crises, you actually live in the oil industry area there. There's a lot going on with ESG, DEI... And in the past, you know, PR used to kind of like hold the mantle with CSR and things, that it was really not always action, it was just kind of like words or a little bit of money. But that has dramatically changed. So, what do you think, the role... how is it looking today for a PR professional for these kinds of things? ESG or CSR, in particular? And, you know, what are you doing about it? How are you helping your clients? What's different?

Megan Yarmuth:

Yeah, I think that's a great question. Here, obviously, there's a big US and other European countries have a big presence here in the oil industry. They really are quite honest about it here. I will say, each... We don't right now... I don't have any clients that are those companies in particular. I have worked with them in the past. And each one has their own perspective, right. And so, working with them to understand that perspective, and look for ways where you can communicate what that is to their audiences, whether their clients, the direct consumers, countries... I know here in Qatar, it's very top of mind. In fact, they just had what's called the Earthna Summit, which was focused on understanding climate change in desert and dry environments, right. We hear a lot about the polar ice caps and, you know, ice melt, but we don't hear a lot about how it's affecting really dry areas. What's that doing to crops to, to people who need to migrate to areas where, where they can find food. It's really interesting. So, working with each client to tell their story and to, you know... Of course, we all love to work with clients who have a positive impact, but looking for ways where you can help them find what that is in a way that's really authentic is pretty important.

Stacie Berdan:

That's wonderful. Yeah, that's great. That is great. And good to hear. Good to hear. How about being a woman, anywhere throughout your career – working in DC or for global clients or where you are now? Has it helped you, are there obstacles? Just talk about being a woman working internationally?

Megan Yarmuth:

Yes, there is a lot of women and PR, right. Of course, I picked the two cities. Washington DC is kind of a tough town as well, but there's a lot of women and PR. But what you start to notice is it does change when you look at leadership, right. Like, that's where you start to see the shift of less women in general. So, certainly the field of PR is very demanding and often means difficult hours, deadlines... Like we talked about always-on reporters and proposals who just won't wait. And I find the real issue is when women are also providing care to small children, right. So, I've experienced that myself and my two are young in the US, and I was racing down the hallway to day-care, you know, because they start charging you five minutes too late... five minutes, the clock is ticking. And you could hear the heels running down the hallway. So, certainly, that's a time I think, where PR suffers with women and finding companies who can provide support... I was very lucky that the Ogilvy leadership at the time was really supportive of my family needs. So, I was able to work a kind of a hybrid before hybrid was a thing, which is great. I've also had some great female mentors that lifted my work up trying to do the same for others. Certainly, supporting women on my team who have small kids to kind of help to navigate that situation and look for ways they can still meet their deadlines and work but also have balance and make it to the Halloween party at school. I think it's really important.



Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that's wonderful. I'm really glad to hear that, because that is definitely an evolution. One of the reasons I left the agency life was I had twins who are small, and it was just too difficult to travel all over the world all the time. So, you're right, and the PR, the 24/7 is just the burning the candle at both ends can be tricky. So, I'm really glad as a woman who's been there, you're actually seeing that helping and advising your team. That's really, really wonderful, Megan, thanks for that. Yeah. So, what would you tell the young professionals starting out in the industry today?

Megan Yarmuth:

Young professionals, it's a really fun group, I have several. You know, looking back, I think what was most important for me was networking effectively. Networking effectively as early as possible, learning how to do that. And of course, that's changed a lot for folks who are working from home mostly, right. So, making the most of every opportunity that you can, where, you know, someone senior is in the room that you can learn from, I think that's really important. Not being afraid to ask for a coffee meeting. And I do think this becomes even more important as people are remote. When there's an opportunity to meet with someone in leadership for coffee or, you know, a 15 minute check-in, it's really important. But to come to that meeting prepared with questions and a genuine interest in learning and what they have to say. And the reason why that's so important is, you know, for instance, when my phone rings, and it does often with cool opportunities, I'm more likely to tap the person who seems like hungry to grow or has expressed, this is an area I'm really interested in. And I'm interested in, you know, AI or climate change, I'm able to match that opportunity a lot easier than I am with someone who seems a little checked out or disinterested.

Stacie Berdan:

Great, that is wonderful, good advice. And this has been a fantastic conversation. And before we wrap up, I want to ask, is there anything else you want to add? Maybe something that I didn't ask you that you want to leave our listeners with today?

Megan Yarmuth:

Um, you know, the only thing I would add is that if a global career is truly something that someone has an aim for, to me, I think what really helped was looking for opportunities to work at companies that also have an international presence. It can still be very expensive or cumbersome for them to get you over there, but, you know, for instance, you know, I was at Ogilvy when I was younger as well, and a good friend of mine really wanted an international experience. And so, she was able to pitch six weeks in the Belgium office as an opportunity in which, you know, she went to management with what she would get out of it, which she would bring back and make countless contacts while she was there. So, you know, looking for countries, also where your education and skill set are in demand is a great, great way to get in as well. So, I know, you know, the Middle East and parts of Asia really are in demand for Western educated folks, right? There's just not as big of a labor force as the demand versus European countries where they have a harder time justifying that US hire. So, those would be my little nuggets.

Stacie Berdan:

Great advice. Great little nuggets, priceless little nuggets. Thank you so much, Megan, for your time today. I know you're busy and I really appreciate the time that you've taken. Great conversation and I look forward to sharing it with our listeners.

Megan Yarmuth:

Thank you. It's been wonderful.



[Music]

Stacie Berdan:

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!