



Season 6: International Marketing and Brand Management Episode 6

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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 Elizabeth Drori, a dynamic woman with a decade of experience guiding fashion organizations and driving revenue growth. She's currently Chief Marketing Officer at Sperry, creating the world's first boat shoe, where she is responsible for developing and executing Sperry's global brand strategy, delivering integrated marketing campaigns across all consumer touchpoints, and leading the brand's global communications, digital advertising, creative services, and social media efforts. Prior to Sperry, Elizabeth led teams at Walmart, Converse, and BCG. And we are so lucky to have you here with us today. Welcome, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Drori:

Thank you very much. I'm happy to be here.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. So you have had a stellar career in marketing so far. So tell us, why is it that you chose marketing? What do you like about your job, something that our listeners can consider if they're considering marketing?

Elizabeth Drori:

Oh, lots of things. I think the most broadly, I love thinking about connecting with consumers, what makes someone want to buy something, and then getting them to buy my something. So I really have fallen in love with consumer brands and marketing and thinking about how to grow them, how to make the brand appealing, how to offer new products. And then, on top of that, I really enjoy working in fashion. It's just a really fun category that's very emotional, very brand driven, and has been a lot of fun.

Stacie Berdan:

Great! Do you have some tips for fashion, because a lot of our students are interested in the fashion industry? What are some tips to kind of break into it?



Elizabeth Drori:

I would say, the earlier you can break in the better. And then never hesitate to take on an opportunity, you know, an internship or any opportunity that comes your way. The other thing, and I don't know that this helped me because I had a bit of a circuitous route into fashion, but I worked at The Gap during my winter breaks in college, so, you know, even having hands-on retail experience is really helpful.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, I can see... Of course, of course, you have to actually interact with the consumers, not just kind of brainstorm and do all the smart strategy stuff back in an office, right? You really do need to know the touch points. That's great. What do you think it takes to be successful in an international marketing role today?

Elizabeth Drori:

I think the number one change that's happened over the years is the pivot to digital marketing. And you know, with the rise of E-comm even more so. I would say, when I started out, e-commerce and brand marketing were kept a bit distinct – distinct skill sets, distinct teams. But more and more, the expectation, especially as you become a leader in marketing, is that you understand it, if not have had direct experience with it. And you know, digital marketing is one aspect. Obviously, if you enter on the creative or design side, you know, that might be less important, and you might stay on that route. But if you want to be more of a well-rounded leader, digital marketing is a great thing to get exposure to early on.

Stacie Berdan:

Okay, so digital marketing, that's key. Any other trends that you see on the rise in global marketing, communications, brand management?

Elizabeth Drori:

I mean, AI is a really big trend. Everyone, for example, is trying to understand how to use ChatGPT; I have not really prioritized that. I feel like we have enough going on to worry about. But that's certainly a trend. And then even within fashion, there are brands and retailers that are using digital models, and there's all sorts of things. And then the metaverse, there's layers and layers of what's happening in that ecosystem and how to play into it as a brand. So that's a very big trend, but not one that at least that we've explored deeply. And then, you know, this is not... In more recent years, this has been happening for a while, but in the fashion space for marketing, influencer marketing is so important, as I'm sure everybody knows that. Everybody is on Instagram and Tiktok and seeing what you know, influencers and celebrities are pushing out, and so that that continues to be a very, very important trend.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. So how do you deal with that, with respect to the customer relationships and the consumer brand communication, if you've got these influencers? Do you work with them or how do you actually manage them if you're actually not working with them?

Elizabeth Drori:

We have a couple of different programs for influencers at Sperry. We have a program that we call Sperry Brand Ambassadors, and we handpick about 10 influencers a year, and many of whom we've continued to plus up and repeat work with, again, you know, over the past couple of years since I've been there. And these influencers are meant to embody the fashion aesthetic and look that we're going after, the attributes that our core target consumer has, they love to be by the water, you know, they they're sort of like laid back and relaxed, but also a little bit preppy. So we use these guys for content in particular, knowing that we can rely on them and will always get great



content that feels very on brand. And then we use micro influencers for seasonal campaigns, and they might have smaller followings. But their purpose is also to create, you know, great perception change out there among consumers, but then to drive traffic to the site as well. So, we have a couple of layers that we use.

Stacie Berdan:

Interesting. So you talked about digital marketing? How do you actually, with all of that, how do you really keep the human element at the core of the brand's message?

Elizabeth Drori:

So I'm gonna give you a fun example of a campaign that we...no, it wasn't really a campaign, but something that we created a couple of years ago that we've repeated, and I'm telling the team, they need to do it again, I think it's so effective! We created a Sperry sock debate, because for our consumers, they're very passionate about boat shoes and how they wear boat shoes, and whether they wear boat shoes with socks or without socks. And this came out of a bit of a gap in the calendar in the colder months where we wanted to start pushing boat shoes. But like in New England, you needed to wear socks with them. And so, what we learned was if we tapped into such a passionate debate for fans of the brand and for that product, that we had such high engagement. So instead of us coming to them with, you know, a polished campaign and our own messaging and sort of talking to them, we really encouraged them to weigh in on something that they felt really strongly about. And we took it across all channels. So, it was...it started as a social media idea. And then we ended up really blowing it up and we had the banner on site. Instead of clicking into you know, shop Men's, shop Women's, it was like Team Sock, Team No-Sock. And we sent an email, and we asked people to vote on Twitter, and people ended up calling our customer service, and just giving them the vote, which like didn't make any sense, but just showed that people were really jazzed up about it. And so, I think that, to me, is like the most successful way that we and my team has brought out that human element. And I think it's an important reminder that you want to have a conversation with your consumers and not just, you know, sort of talk at them and send them another message. So the times where we can stir up and have conversation with consumers and talk to them about what they care about, and particularly what makes them passionate about the product, that's where you got the biggest win.

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. How fun and totally, I mean, I live in New England and so, but I grew up in Florida – you'd never wear socks with your Sperrys.

Elizabeth Drori:

Exactly! And there was an emerging Team No-show Sock, you know, we actually saw a lot of no-show socks. So that was funny. Yeah. And then our licensing team was like, you need to push the socks that we sell. So it became a whole thing.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, so cool. That is why so many people are interested in marketing and consumer marketing, especially fashion marketing, because it is cool. It's interesting. It's fun. I love that story, so thanks for sharing that. Was there a point, kind of taking a step back, in your career when you actually felt the global marketing environment shift, or when you were like, whoa, we really have to shift strategy on that, because, you know, the previous idea is not going to work?

Elizabeth Drori:

Yeah, I mean, I would say the past few years, have been... like the COVID pandemic has prompted one change after another, and broad swaths of change, you know. And some of it... I was at Walmart, leading marketing for the



Walmart fashion business when COVID hit. And for us, it was amazing because Walmart sold toilet paper. So like, as a company, we were okay. But we started to shift like, we can't shoot a campaign, so let's find the influencers that have a photographer boyfriend or father or you know, or friend that can shoot them. And that's how we got content. So some of that was just how we got work done. But then I would say the environment in terms of who's shopping in store who's shopping online, what's the right message, and then what are they buying – all of that changed during the pandemic. And for Sperry, 2020 was a very hard year because our category was not one that was prioritized during COVID. You know, people were spending time outside, people were not going into work... And it's interesting because right now we are seeing a pivot back into loafers, and we're trying to ride that wave and sell our own loafers and then also sell boat shoes on the back of that. But it was definitely, you know, a tough year that required a lot of pivots. And then, in between then and now, there were also times when we would be planning a marketing story to a specific moment in the calendar, and then that product was delayed, because there were a lot of logistics and supply chain issues that resulted from COVID. And so we would have to replan, repeat, and be really nimble. So, I don't think we've seen, you know, that much change and constant change and pivots, therefore, in strategy and products and consumer trends and behavior than what we've seen in the past few years.

Stacie Berdan:

Wow, those are great examples. Because, of course, the supply chain, and then all of those pivots at once, because people's habits changed as you point out, and then being able to get that... Wow, that's great, great example. How do you successfully market one brand or a core message across various cultures in different languages? How many markets is Sperry in? And how do you do that?

Elizabeth Drori:

It's a global brand and so we have business around the world. And with Sperry, the way that the business is set up is through licensee partners and distributors, as opposed to owning the business in key markets. And so, it becomes a bit of a game of telephone, where you know, you create a strategy or a campaign or a message and then it's not that it only has to get translated into another language and, you know, in a way that's relevant, but you have to translate it to a partner, to the partners team, and then that team might have language barriers. And you know, and then there might be context, that's different, but you don't necessarily get that information back. So it's definitely tricky. And I'd say the number one learning is, the sharper and more focused you are with what the message is, the better. Because if you're not clear, or something's a little bit fuzzy, it will, you'll see that fuzzy multiply like a snowball, as it actually makes its way into the market.

Stacie Berdan:

Wow, wow, that's really interesting. Was that the same at Walmart, or did you have that different kind of global brand teams and where that dynamic tension can occur?

Elizabeth Drori:

Walmart's business was actually very US centric. Walmart operates very differently around the world. But I worked for Converse for seven years, and in their early days they also had a distributor model. And then over the time I was there, we started to take back the markets and own the business. And so, it definitely makes it a little bit easier when you have and feel like one team. And there's always a balance in marketing of do the regions report dotted line into marketing or solid line into marketing, and then dotted line into the regional commercial center or solid? And where's the balance of power in terms of the budget? Is it held in global or is it held in the markets. And so those were debates that we ended up in Converse. And at Sperry, my team is the global team, but my team is also the US team. So, you know, over time, if we grow and international... our business is very heavy in the US but we have some big markets in Asia too... but if we grow more internationally, whereby it would warrant having a dedicated team, then I think that that balance would flip, and hopefully that will happen one day. But for now, yeah, we live in the telephone game scenario.



Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that's interesting. Your footwear is interesting, I was just in Spain and Amsterdam, it's really interesting to see actually what is out there. But Converse are huge. And that's neat that you're actually taking back the marketing and everything, because I remember Converse from decades ago. They were not the popular shoe to wear, that's for sure. But now yeah, they're so cool. That's awesome. That's awesome. What, um, what's the biggest challenge, maybe an opportunity that you see in the fashion industry, both, you know, as a business and marketing?

Elizabeth Drori:

I mean, I think frankly, the biggest challenge is supply-chain inventory issues still. But I think one change that's interesting where the consumer trend doesn't line up with the business is around gender fluidity. So, we know that gender fluidity has become more and more, you know, important in terms of the way people shop, the way you want to, and people expect you to be inclusive, and yet footwear and fashion historically are very gendered because it's size driven. So, like we make... and Converse didn't have this problem because it was one shoe, and it was the same shoe, it's the same shape. For many other footwear brands, you have the shape of, the silhouette is called the 'last' and it's made to the size and shape of your foot and they are different by gender. So we have men's shoes and women's shoes, and different size runs of the same product. And so we, you know, goal ourselves to be more inclusive and we actually created on our site, a gender inclusive merchandising page. But we can only do that for the products that the team has sized and done the conversion and feels good about in terms of being able to offer it across. And I would say, on top of that, our shoes tend to fit a little bit narrow, so that doesn't help. So I think some brands you see that are startups who sort of do it out of the gate, have an easier time, but we're constrained by, you know, how we make our shoes. And then on top of that, we sell to department stores, and they have a women's buyer and a men's buyer. So even if we change the game, it would still, we'd still have to have those separate conversations when it comes to our retail partners on the wholesale side. So, I think that's a tricky one that we've tried to navigate. And we can only from a marketing perspective, push it so far, because we have these industry constraints.

Stacie Berdan:

It's a different way to look at it. Sometimes, you know, social activists or as part of the whole ESG movement, people like just change, you just need to figure it out. It's actually just not that easy just to change, and you're thinking about it and trying to figure it out. But it's tough. Tell us something about one market or a country or region that you believe marketing professionals today really need to know about, would benefit from hearing. What do you see that's out there?

Elizabeth Drori:

I don't know, aside from like New York City... I don't know that I would say there's one market or country or region because I think it very much depends on the industry, your brand, your product and what you're trying to do. And marketing isn't about understanding necessarily that country, it's about understanding your consumer, and knowing where they live or visit, what they're into. And that's something that you might have to do independently in every market you do business, because it could be very different. Or you could find that it could be very similar. At Sperry, we did some consumer research a year ago around the water, where a brand born on the water, hence the boat shoe, and we were trying to understand people's connection to the water as a way to unlock more emotional benefits. Like if we could unlock the feelings that you have around being by the water, that's a really powerful place to be. And so, we wanted to understand what are those feelings and emotions and what are the common themes. And we did research in the US and UK. And we found that there were three main themes that bubbled up – people go to the water to reconnect with the friends and family, people go to the water to recharge, they like to be active, they like to kayak like to paddleboard etc. And then people go to, to like for rejuvenation, they go to find their inner Zen, they look out onto the horizon, they listen to the sound of the waves, they go to lose themselves. And that was really informative for us, we took that into our creative direction, we took that into, you know, to some degree product direction. And then recently, I went to Japan, because that market is doing really well for us, and wanted to



learn and validate some of these, what, you know, what we know to be true in the US and UK. And we spoke with some consumers. And it was amazing how those themes came up again, and you're like, well, that's, that's quite universal. Now, what's not universal is who has access to the water, like is the water in an equitable and inclusive space? In the US it's not, in other countries that is less of an issue. And so, there's you know, a little bit more on the margin, but those themes feel I mean, we haven't validated them in every country, but they have started to feel really universal, which is which is pretty amazing.

Stacie Berdan:

That is amazing. I love that. Rather than just a country as you said it's more of a theme. And water of course, because that's really, really neat. And everyone doesn't necessarily think about water in the same way either, every single country around the world. It's a different. Wow. Tell me something about, you know, an element of your global life, you've had these great global jobs working on brands internationally, and something that strengthened your professional career that listeners can take away.

Elizabeth Drori:

I love international stuff. I have always been a Francophile. I've loved to travel. I used to ice skate when I was younger and I had international skating competitions. I think I skated just to, like, go abroad. That's how much I liked it. So I think I've gravitated to and sought out international opportunities. But I did put myself in a couple of growth scenarios. I did do a study abroad when I was in college, I went to London. And then, but I would say what was more transformative for me was when I was 25, so a few years out of college, I went to live and work in Paris. And that was an opportunity I created for myself. I was in finance at the time, and I met one of our business unit CFOs at some, I don't even remember, some conference, and he ended up taking a job at a joint venture that we had, my company had in France. And I sent him an email and I was like, do you need anyone? I speak French, even though I realized now like, the French, I mean, really, it was like high school French that I spoke. But I thought I spoke. And he wrote me back and he said, you know, let me get over there, I'm gonna see what's required. And then six months later, I got an email from him and the subject line was "Were you serious?" And like, next thing, you know, I moved to France. And my family thought it was crazy. They were like, wait, you're just gonna live by yourself, like in a foreign country and work there, like, I don't understand! But it was really one of the best things I've done in my life. Like, I will, I will... I'm like... I mean, I can't even say I will never regret it. Like, it was so unbelievable to me to do it also. I mean, I, again, I happen to be a major Francophile, so it was a bit of a dream, but to have to navigate in another country... and I would say when you study abroad, I'm not putting that down because that's also an amazing opportunity, but you're afforded some setups where you don't have to figure things out as much as if you just go and have to navigate, like, having a bank account, and, you know, doing things that put you, you know, in a position to, like, live in and work somewhere. And, you know, and spending more time and being more immersed in another culture, another work environment. And, you know, also getting to know an expat community of people around the world. I think that really was an incredible experience that I, you know, I don't know if directly it's impacted by career... I mean, I would say, when I was a management consultant, they put me on a case in Montreal, because they're like, you speak French. Great. And then I realized that it was a banking case and I didn't know any banking. I didn't know the word for mortgages, and like, mortgages was something that I was like, what are they saying? And then I Googled it. I'm like, oh, yeah, there's still words I don't know. But it's... that was a very foreign experience. And I think it does give me a little bit of credibility when, you know, I'm working with business partners, or, you know, I think I have an appreciation for it. And then just, you know, taking the opportunity, you know, whatever opportunity can come your way or you can create to spend time in different countries, I think is very, very valuable.

Stacie Berdan:

I'd love it. I love it. Great initiative, wonderful, raised your hand said you'd do it, followed through... And as you describe, it wasn't easy, that's for sure, but fun in a dream. You took a risk, calculated risk, and it paid off. That's fantastic. That's fantastic. Is there a piece of advice you'd like to actually go back and give your younger self?



Elizabeth Drori:

I think it's along those lines, like take the opportunity to learn and to gain experience and figure out, you know, if it's a stretch project, or creating an assignment for yourself, but put yourself out there. Because I think my biggest career jumps, you know, including living in Paris, were about that, were about taking risks, creating opportunities, you know, they don't always come to you. Sometimes you have to see the void or see the path or, you know... That happened with me at Walmart, that... You know, I think there were many career jumps that were because I put myself out there. So I would, I would highly encourage that. And I would say, as a leader of an organization with younger people, I am thirsty for that on my team to have people, you know, raise their hand to try to do something new. And I think you have to look at it as your, you know, learning on the job. And if you can get, you know, paid to learn something new and then develop that skill set and have that for the next experience then how great!

Stacie Berdan:

That is great, wonderful advice. That is great. And this has been a terrific conversation Elizabeth, I really, really appreciate it. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to add? Maybe something I didn't ask that you'd want to share?

Elizabeth Drori:

Um, I would say, you know, especially for this audience, they... people say you need to know what you want to do in order to make that happen. Like, what do you want to be when you grow up? And I think I still struggle with that, personally, what do you want to be when you grow up? But I think the more clarity you have around that, the better. Because I spent a lot of time, even though I knew I liked marketing, like I made my younger sister play advertising with me when I was a child, like the signs were there. And yet, you know, my dad said, well you're really smart and you like math, so why don't you do computer science; and I listened to him. But I don't think that was good advice. I think, even when you feel like you don't know, you need to look for those clues that give you an idea. Like I said, I worked at The Gap in college. And then here I went and ended up in finance for a defense contractor, like how did I go there? And, you know, no regrets, because it afforded me the experiences that I've had, but it's definitely... it's possible to change careers but it's easier if you start out with what you want to do. So, I would say, you know, when you're young and out of college, and in an early level, and a younger level, people are much more open to someone, you know, okay, I'm just gonna hire this person who seems really like a go-getter, and who's smart and can figure it out. And so there's much more of that benefit of the doubt to when you're later on in your career and you're like, actually, I think I want to do marketing. And people were like, well, I don't know, like, I like you but I can also hire someone who's been doing it for 10 years. So it becomes definitely harder to change as you move on. So pursue your dreams now, kids.

Stacie Berdan:

Great advice. That is wonderful. Thank you so much, Elizabeth, for taking the time. I know you're a super, super busy person. And so I really appreciate it. This has been a great interview.

Elizabeth Drori:

My pleasure, lovely discussion. Thank you for having me.

[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!