



Season 6: International Marketing and Brand Management Episode 7

Stacie Berdan

*International Careers Expert
(Podcast Host)*

Tracy Haffner

*Chief Operating Officer
Woosh Beauty*

[Music]

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 guests is Tracy Haffner, Chief Operating Officer for Whoosh Beauty, a small DTC or direct-to-consumer beauty brand in New York City, where she's laying the groundwork to take Woosh Beauty international. Tracy has more than 30 years of marketing and general management experience in the consumer packaged goods industry and has worked at some of the world's most prestigious brands, including Saks Fifth Avenue, Reckitt, Kraft Foods, and Avon. We are so excited to have her here today with us to talk about global marketing for the beauty and fashion industry. Welcome, Tracy.

Tracy Haffner:

Thank you, Stacie, it's wonderful to be here. And thank you so much for having me on your show.

Stacie Berdan:

Yes, this is great. So, you have had an absolutely stellar career in marketing so far. Tell us why you like your job, you know, something that students can relate to or consider if they want a similar career.

Tracy Haffner:

You know, what I've always loved about brand management is every day is different. And, you know, despite having a day full of meetings, all the meetings are on different topics, and you kind of go from one subject to another subject. So, if you like fast paced, multi-tasking type of jobs, you know, brand management certainly is. And having gotten my MBA and took the different disciplines and supply chain and accounting, I just love that marketing isn't always black and white, you know, correct answer like accounting is. I like things that are a little more ambiguous, and you have to be creative in your thinking and problem solving. Like everything is a problem to be solved or an opportunity for the business. So, it's really fun.

Stacie Berdan:

That's wonderful. What do you think it takes? Is there anything different about being successful in international marketing and the role today? Anything, like the skills, certificates, degrees, approaches, experience?



Tracy Haffner:

Well, it's interesting, I was talking to some of the students from our panel last month, and you know, as they've been calling, and we've had these informal conversations, a lot of it comes down to self-awareness and maturity, and relationship skills. Which... it's hard to learn relationship skills, you know, people can certainly take some courses on it, but as I was talking to people, it just came apparent that being a good listener and understanding that country's needs, and how you and global marketing can solve their problems. And there's often a language barrier, there are cultural differences. So, understanding body language, and just really being in tune with the other person is really critical. And even things like speaking slowly. There's so many things I learned and that I was very American. And when I got feedback, I learned, okay, I need to change some things about my style, so that I'm a better communicator.

Stacie Berdan:

That's correct. Of course, yes. Speaking slowly and clearly is super important. I mean, I always feel that when I'm actually in another country, they're speaking another language, I'm like, Oh my gosh, I could never understand that even if I spoke Spanish or something, the way... the speed at which they were moving. So that's a great point. And you mentioned... so GW students, so that's great... since the panel, you've been actually in contact with some – we really appreciate actually that you've done that. That's terrific. And I imagine that some of the topics coming up, maybe the trends that are on the rise and global marketing, communications, brand management, can you talk about some of that?

Tracy Haffner:

Yes. As I was talking to some of the students and they were looking at where to start their careers, to me, I think, the bigger the company, the better, because there will be resources to send you overseas and to experience, you know, the different countries. So that was just more from a kind of job perspective. But then, with trends, you know, it's really social listening, which wasn't around 15 years ago. Social listening as, you know, looking at the social media trends, what people are saying, it's kind of a wonderful form of market research. And prior to that, we would spend millions on market research to understand how the UK thinks versus Brazil versus China... And now we have a lot more information readily available with social media. And, you know, all brands, whether they're global or local, are trying to balance authenticity, which is very important, and being emotional, so that there's an emotional connection with the consumer. And that varies by country. So, you really want to understand the consumers in each country, and then look for any common denominators and still be authentic. It's a real challenge. And that's why sometimes global campaigns have to change language or images, so that they really can adapt to the local market.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, well, let's dive into that a little bit. That's really interesting. I mean, the whole social listening piece, and then I want to talk about global campaigns. And actually, let's start there – global campaigns – have you seen any, been part of any that actually there were big, kind of, like snafus or something that you learned from that you're like, wow, this does take a different approach when you're trying to do something on an international basis?

Tracy Haffner:

Well, you know, hopefully, this is an okay example. But when I was running fragrance for Avon, we would launch up to 30 fragrances a year, and each country might take 10 to 15 fragrances; sometimes Brazil or the US took more. And you know, the images we would shoot, you know, would be global. And, you know, the language would be translated, the concepts – we always socialized with each country and said “what do you think of the concept of eternal magic?” You know, the thought that when, you know, the woman leaves the room, you're still thinking about her fragrance and her smell and that she's, you know, such an interesting person, and she has an interesting fragrance, you know, that sort of thing. But then, when you get down to the image, one time we had a beautiful



woman who was kind of almost like squatting and looking very sensual. And our folks in Asia Pacific were like, “Absolutely not.” You know, a lot of times in the tier 2 and 3 countries and China, bathrooms are just a hole in the floor. And I went to visit a tier 2 country and we were at the restaurant, I went to use the bathroom. And sure enough, there were no stalls, there were no commodes, it was a hole in the floor. And it's just kind of having that experience that that's totally what happens, it's totally acceptable, and just don't show kind of a model squatting because if you're in China, you might get a bathroom image from it. So, it rather sounds silly, but there's things that until you've experienced the country and had, you know, people that are knowledgeable that you're working with, to, you know, that could have been a huge snafu.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. And you're right, things matter. I mean, the things are so different. I mean, the Okay sign, or the peace sign or things, small things that we take for granted as being normal in one's culture can mean something very different. So you're right. That's a really interesting example. And something that shows you really do need to have a global team actually taking a look. What about that, that kind of like smart or dynamic tension that exists between, say, the headquarters putting out a campaign like that and then all the local teams? I mean, how do you balance that? What kind of tension is it? Got any tips for actually working through it?

Tracy Haffner:

Yeah, I was always very transparent with my team, and there would be representatives who were representing their markets and we would have, you know, meetings every couple of weeks. And, you know, I was very clear that, you know, we weren't choosing favorites here in global marketing, we were looking at the numbers and the numbers said that Brazil was the number one country for us for fragrance, so they would get a little bit of a bigger vote. And, actually China was our weakest market for fragrance. So, you know, everybody was on the same page on like, guys, we're all about Global Avon making our numbers, and for Global Avon to make our numbers we need Brazil, we needed the US, we need Mexico. And then we would brainstorm concepts, you know, whether it was soccer – soccer was a wonderful thing for men's fragrance that all three countries could get excited about. And you know, just various ways and we would still make sure Asia Pacific had a voice and they could brainstorm. And it may not work for their country but you're on the team brainstorm with us, because our shared goal is global, and you are the voice of your country. But the bigger picture is the shareholders for Avon that are depending on our revenue stream here for Global. So, I was just very transparent in that way. Nobody felt like there were favorites, because I did spend more time in Brazil and I did spend more time with Latin American countries and the people there to make sure our, you know, product was successful.

Stacie Berdan:

That's really interesting. Yeah. Because it's wherever the money goes, right, wherever the biggest markets are, and the decision making occurs, you have to kind of follow, as you said, where the market share is, because you always do have to remember there is that shareholder perspective and desires and objectives back there. Yeah, that's neat. Let's go back to digital marketing and social media. What do you think the effects it has had, you know, this, I mean, and more, like AI and other forms of, kind of like advanced technologies had on customer relationships, consumer brand communication...? You know, how do you actually gather all that, as you said, you know, it's replaced a lot of the market data research you had to do before, but also make sure that there's still the human element?

Tracy Haffner:

That's something at Woosh Beauty we're very concerned with. And as we scale, we're gonna have to figure that out a little bit. But we personally answer every email, every live chat, and every social post. We have programs that allow us to do what's called a ‘macro’. So, if somebody has a return, you know, it would just automatically spit out a response. And we don't use those very often because it sounds like a bot. And if you type a response in a casual



tone, and type it as a person, it just definitely comes across as not a bot. And it's part of our kind of competitive edge that we have such great customer service. And people will comment on our site all the time “The customer service was fabulous”, because they know we're humans. And we don't talk to them on the phone, we don't have that capability. So our writing style has to be in the minute, very genuine, and how you know, somebody my age speaks, somebody who's in their 30s speaks, you know, will say colloquialisms like awesome, great, we're so happy about your order. You know, it just definitely comes across as a human. And we refuse to do any kind of bots. And as we grow, that might be a challenge for us, but it's really important to us that we're on the receiving end of the customer. And we can talk to them, you know, via live chat and email, but be a real person with real feedback.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, sounds like it's the very essence of your brand, or one of the key components of your brand. But how do you think you're going to do that as you grow?

Tracy Haffner:

Well, you know, there have been some people that have reached out with services where a human being might work on your brand and somebody else's, and we would have to make sure that they know our brand voice and our brand language. So that would be an option. We just haven't had to do that so far. And people are pretty accepting that live chat is in a window. And our customers will email us a lot. They like the email channel. And it's funny, I like the email channel, too. I don't want to pick up the phone anymore. I just want to email a company about where my order is, what the problem is, and not be on the phone the whole time. So I think the trends are helpful for us that way. So I'm hopeful we can scale this.

Stacie Berdan:

I'm with you. I prefer email. I actually don't like to live chat, because I have to sit there and wait for the response. Otherwise, I get signed off. Whereas email (not yours, I haven't tried with Woosh), but when you email, you actually don't expect an instant response, right. I think that's actually a little bit more helpful, even though you have to wait a little bit. Yeah...

Tracy Haffner:

Yeah. And our live chat feature isn't used quite as much. So, to your point, I think it's really just for people who are like impatient, and they want to know, right away...so...

Stacie Berdan:

Interesting. That's very interesting. Was there a point in your career when you felt that the global marketing environment shifted, or a moment when you had to actually shift your strategy within your career?

Tracy Haffner:

Yes. So, again, with Woosh Beauty, most of our production is in the United States. However, brushes there just really aren't brush manufacturers in the United States. There're some, but it's just a wonderful skill set over in China. During COVID, we had a lot of customer emails being like, where's your warehouse, where are your products from? And you know, our, you know, we'd always said made in the USA for cosmetics, and you know, we're... you always have to disclose your country of origin where things come from. But we have been looking at, it would be cheaper for us certainly, if we could make our products in China, the cosmetics, and there's just no way that we can do that, as global tensions are mounting, the “Made in the USA” has been around pre-COVID, post-COVID. And just in our current political environment, it's getting really dicey. So, a company like ours, while we might want to scale up and distribute to other countries, we're going to keep our manufacturing in the United States, we're going to try to figure out the brush issue, but people are more accepting about brushes because it's, you know,



synthetic bristles, because, of course, animal hair is a no-no, even though many beauty companies still use animal hair, which is bad. So, people aren't quite as concerned at the country of origin toward the brushes, but we have higher cost of goods, keeping all of our cosmetics in the USA, because what you put on your face is a big deal. And as we know, customers want paraben-free, clean beauty, vegan beauty... People are looking at the ingredient list like they've never looked at before. And so, you know, on top of that, if you're not made in the US, even if you were clean, even if you were vegan, that could just undermine your wonderful ingredient list if you weren't made in the USA. So that's been a big shift and just keeps... it's still there, and so we're just going to maintain our, you know, higher cost of goods. But we also like that we can visit our factories. Of course, you can visit China; it's just a bigger trip, it's more expensive, different time zone, whereas visiting our factories here is much easier. And it's easier to communicate because we're all speaking the same language. And so, it really kind of balances out.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that's so interesting, because, I mean, the supply chain issues really taught us during COVID that, you know, globalization and global companies really have a challenge when it comes to certain things. We all saw that with the chips. So there's a lot of nearshoring I noticed that is going on, not so much offshoring, you know, halfway around the world. So that's interesting, and it will continue to be interesting, because politics always does play a role in business. Well, we try not to talk too much about politics on this show, but you can't help but get... you can't get away from it actually, when it comes to doing business, when you talk about things that are... or recognize things that are going on in the world, in different parts of the world, that are affecting global supply chain, that are affecting supplies, that are affecting ingredients as you mentioned... So, what an interesting challenge you have.

Tracy Haffner:

And one other thing I'll just mention, because of making products overseas, we had to invest a lot of money protecting our trademarks and our patents. And when we were starting the business, you know, we were saying let's just patent in the US, Canada, you know, UK. But as we talked to our suppliers, they were saying, look, if you're producing something in a factory in China, what's to prevent them giving it to your competitor. Whereas if you're trademarked and you have your, you know, design patent in that country, you're protected, and you can put that on your shipper, which is you know, the case that contains all the product and as it comes through customs, customs can kind of see if there's any funny business going on. So, again, an expense for a small company, but keeping trade secrets and intellectual property was critical to us because some of our eye brushes are design and utility patented, and they're amazing. So that money is an investment. So that when we... if we do distribute in Asia, we're completely protected. And, of course, in the other markets where we plan to expand.

Stacie Berdan:

So many things to consider when you have a global brand, and global marketing, and manufacturing, and supply chain... What do you think, Tracy, the biggest challenge, or opportunity, that you see in the beauty industry, both as a business and in marketing communications?

Tracy Haffner:

I'll start kind of broad and then get into that. From a broad perspective, the beauty industry has really changed, particularly for women 40+. So, back in the day, the women who are now 40+ would go into a department store and sit at the beauty counter and get makeup advice and feel connected - where do I put my contour, how do I use highlighter... There were also print publications and people used to love to pour over, you know, print media. Now fast forward, 20 and 30 year-olds have grown up with digital and very comfortable watching Tik-Toks and YouTubes, and how-tos with makeup. But the 40+ crowd - some of the 40s, you know, grew up with some of the digital - but what we're seeing from all the feedback we get is that a lot of people feel left out. Because if you're not a beauty junkie that you want to participate in the beauty industry, if you walk into an Ulta - you're overwhelmed, if you walk into a Sephora - you're overwhelmed, and the department stores aren't really there anymore. So, you



can talk to your daughter, you know, and her friends and maybe get some advice, you can try to read online and go to Pinterest. But if you don't have time, like our customers don't, we call our customers affectionately “makeup underachievers”, because they love makeup. They're they're not makeup zero wearers, like they wear makeup, and they love it, they just don't have time – they are working, they are moms... so they don't have time to do the YouTube video. So, you know, it's an opportunity for us. And that's where our business, you know, excels. You know, we teach women how to put on makeup and our palette is paint by numbers, it starts with number one, and then there's a brush for number one, and goes to number two for concealer, there's a brush for that. And then there's you know, instructions that are really easy. And so, we've helped women feel included. Now, to the challenge – shade matching and digital have still not really worked together. So, our number 1 question from our customers is “What shade am I?”, and we've made our palette six shades, because there's two complexion shades per palette and you can mix them, you can customize them. And because they're mineral based, they will work for a wide range of women on the fairest spectrum to the deepest spectrum. But that's still tricky to communicate. And then, if you are on the other side of the beauty industry, you have 60 shades. So, you go online, and you're like, I don't know, if I'm shade 15, 16 or 17, they kind of all look close together. So, we're all struggling with that. And again, you could go into a brick-and-mortar and get shade matched, but people don't want to do that, they want to shop on Amazon, they want to shop direct to consumer. So, I don't think we've completely figured that out. We have met with AI companies, everyone has a way of showing us how, you know, our site could do a shade match and when we try it out, it's not really working. You know, Sephora seems to have a new product out there. But again, you have to go into their store, which is great for them. They want people to come into their store, because then we'll spend money. But women struggle with that. And what we do is just a lot of customer service – send us a picture, take our shade quiz... We have to attack that problem five different ways. Because not everyone wants to take a quiz, not everybody wants to send their shade or a picture of themselves. But we love it when they do, it's a great opportunity for us to interact with them.

Stacie Berdan:

Wow, that is, that... I would never have thought of that challenge. But I'm thinking about myself. Absolutely, the shade thing is the one thing that I can never get right. And those, yeah, 15, 20... Geez!

Tracy Haffner:

I know, and I think you're a number 2 or number 2-5... I'm gonna get your address after this because I meant to send you a product after our... Everybody got a lip gloss after the panel, but you've got to try our palate. And, and you'll see what I mean....

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. Yeah, I'm excited. Yes, that's great. Cool, yeah, that'd be really neat to do. I was actually going to ask you actually so, but I'll, we'll do it a little bit offline. But thanks for sending me that I'm definitely going to try the products because it just sounds so cool. I love the direct to consumer. And I think it's just so many interesting challenges that you have in the beauty, in marketing, and running a business, right? There's so much to think about, that I think so many students... you don't really learn about all these things in classes, so... This is a great conversation. I want to ask you, before we start wrapping up, it's just been a great conversation so far, is an element of your global life, you know, that strengthened or enhanced your global career. So many times students like oh, I didn't study abroad, or I didn't learn a language? What is it in your past or that you've done as part of your career that's really actually strengthened your global mindset?

Tracy Haffner:

Well, I did not study abroad. So, for me, it was visiting the countries that it was the best thing I could have done. Those five days abroad in the one market, whether it was Turkey, Russia, etc., gave me an opportunity to meet with not only the Avon representatives who are our sales force, but customers. We did ethnographies, I was in



somebody's apartment in Beijing and somebody was translating, you know what they were saying the whole time and really understanding (at that time I was on skincare) how important you know, the skincare regime is to Asia Pacific. And it was just eye opening. And as I told one of the students a week ago, my favorite part was the people. I do like people, I like interfacing with people, and to interface with people in a different country who are just like you and me, but they speak different languages and they might have, kind of, not different values, but, you know, certain things are more important or less important to them. And you have to be open-minded and really listen to what they say. And I think that made me maybe a more open-minded person, and certainly more self-aware, because as much as I thought I was self-aware, I wasn't aware of myself as an American. You know, I grew up in the South, I'm from Tennessee. Certainly, I know, people perceive me a certain way for being from the south, I get that, but I didn't really get that, you know, outside of the US, I'm an American, and I come across that way. And I need to, like, keep certain things in mind, whether it's again, talking slowly, or not being too assertive, and making sure everyone gets a chance to speak at the table.

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely, “style flexing” – one of my favorite terms for when we're working abroad, you really do have to style flex, gotta get to know the culture and work around and through it in order to actually succeed in it.

Tracy Haffner:

Great term!

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, thanks. Um, Tracy, what would you tell a young professional entering the field today?

Tracy Haffner:

I would tell them to, you know, take their time to find the right opportunity. And luckily, nowadays, you can work somewhere for just two years, and it doesn't look bad. There are plenty of other opportunities, and you will grow the best in an environment where you feel safe.

Stacie Berdan:

Good advice. Good advice. You're so thoughtful, and you've shared so much. Is there one piece of advice you'd like to go back and give your younger self?

Tracy Haffner:

Oh, that's a great question. I would have left my company Kraft, as much as I loved it, much, much sooner. I just got really comfortable. And I kind of thought I'd stay there forever, which is weird. But back then I just thought I would. And by the time I finally left, after 12 years, to go to Avon, I was on cloud nine, that was the best decision I ever made. And what if I'd made that six years earlier? You know, I just got too comfortable at Kraft. And I think I could have learned something else, done something differently. And I'll also add, I wish I had lived abroad prior to having kids. Because I did have a good span before having children where had I not been at Kraft and let's say I'd moved to Avon sooner or a different company, I could have lived abroad.

Stacie Berdan:

Great, good. That's great advice. Always thinking about the global experience. And thinking about family and partners because it is a big deal. This has been a wonderful conversation, Tracy, thank you so much for your time. Is there anything you... one last tip or something... you'd like to add for our listeners before we wrap up?



Tracy Haffner:

Just that, I don't know if people need to worry too much about getting more degrees. I think they should, you know, maybe learn more languages, and then just get more experience. So that's the only other thing I'll say.

Stacie Berdan:

Awesome. That is great, languages are so important. And it takes a long time to learn one but pursuing one is great. That's a great, great tip. Thank you, Tracy for this. I've really appreciated this conversation and it's been wonderful talking with you.

Tracy Haffner:

Thank you, Stacie.

[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!