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Consumers and Brands in the Digital Age [Entire Talk]

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Tina Wells, founder and CEO of Buzz Marketing Group, answers questions on trend-spotting, ethics in marketing and new approaches to audience engagement. Wells also tells the story of her journey from school-age entrepreneur to leading a firm that helps companies create ways for consumers to express their true experiences with brands.



Transcript

Well, thank you everyone for welcoming me. I feel a bit jet-lagged, so I said no PowerPoint today. I wanted to have a conversation and we've spent some time talking about this class and about what you're learning and about the center and so I'm really excited to be here. I'm really excited to talk about how I started my company. It's been 18 years now. So that's like a very long time and I think it's also because it's been a really long time. So I want to talk about how I started. I started my company back in 1996 and so it feels very ancient. The world was really different. The tools I had available to me to do that and to start are very different than what I think young entrepreneurs have today.

And so I want to talk a bit about how I started and focus on the work we do at the agency and then what we do now. And I hope to save kind of some significant time to have Q&A and to engage with you and answer your questions. So let me start off with how I started Buzz. So I never ever thought I would be an entrepreneur. In 1996 that was not a word that was really kind of known to me. I always thought I would be a beauty editor. So I was very focused on fashion and beauty and I wanted to be an editor at primarily a teen girl magazine kind of like 17. And so, at 16, I applied for a job with the newspaper for Girls out of New York City called The New Girl Times and at the Times I primarily wrote product reviews focused on - my first column ever was for a company called High Intensity that made very cool jewelry. And I found during that process of reviews that when I would submit the column back to whoever gave me a product, they would always say if I keep sending you a product will you tell me what you think? And at 16, I thought that was the coolest thing ever. I thought there that there were tens of companies who would send me products if I just told them what I thought and so I thought that was the gig.

I didn't think it was a way to make money. It was something I became really passionate about and even at 34, I still - I'm so passionate about trends, about new things, about whether it's reading about a new destination in Conde Nast Traveller, it's something that still fuels me today; the idea that there are so many new products to try, so little time. So back in '96, I remember a lot of PR-type people who were my 'clients' and I started getting phone calls like "I have a friend, she works on this brand. You'd be really cool to talk to." And I didn't really understand what the conversation would be. I was literally a suburban teenage girl and I should - I guess - go back and say I am the oldest of six children and so the eight of us where I was kind of the odd kid doing this interesting thing and since all of my siblings have really interesting careers and do really interesting things, but at the time it was something very different and very new and so my parents were like why is UPS - why are UPS and Fedex here everyday? So no one really got what was going on. I didn't really get what was going on. But it was happening really quickly and so by the time I was 17, I had about 40 clients and, again, I use that word very loosely because I hadn't yet had that moment where I realized I could make money doing what I was doing. And so I started to recruit my friends and say if I gave you guys some of these products, can we all review them and I will tally our scores and I will send this little report back to our client and so that works for a while and then my friends would say well, I have a cousin in Texas and she would love to be one of the your trend spotters and again think about the time we're talking about. I said, well, how would I communicate with

her? I had just gotten an AOL email address at 16. So the idea of technology and connectivity wasn't something that was yet really relevant, I think, at that time.

And the way to communicate, the way our network communicates today, didn't really make sense at that time. So continued pretty small until I got to college and as a freshman in college I had two real important things that happened at the same time. First, I took my intro to business course at Hood College; I went to a womens' school, Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. And I took an intro to business with the Head of the Department and at the same time I was working on one of these reports for a fashion company and my client at the time called and she said I'm going to tell you something really important. I just received your report, I reviewed it with my team and yours is 10 times better than a report we paid \$25,000 for. You have a business, it's called market research and that's all I'm going to tell you, go figure it out. And so during office hours I went into Dr. Jose's office, I said here is what I've been doing for the last 2.5 years. What do you think? And she took some time and kind of just stared at me for a while and then she said I want you to take an independent study with me next semester and let's see if we can't make this a real business. And so I was really fortunate at that time to - like I always tell Dr.

Jose, I got beat up for 13 weeks in a row into creating a business and marketing plan, but I still use those plans today. And I was really fortunate, because when I was in college at that time, so I think '97 to probably spring of '98, it was right around that like .com boom and so when Dr. Jose and I talked, she said I don't want you to get caught up in what at that point seemed to be a kind of trend. She was like I want you to build a business that's a solid business and if there is a digital component that's great, but you've got to build a solid business and there were - I mean I try - to help you understand what was happening at this time in the Internet, there were websites like quepasa.com that were raising \$50 million and then went bust a couple months later. So it was very different than I think kind of the builder moment, that's happening now and in a little bit I will get into some of the trends we're studying. And so I understood okay, I need to build this solid business and I was really fortunate that when I needed to understand statistics I could go and talk to a professor and if I needed to understand how psychology and sociology played into my business, there were people that were available for me to talk to. So of course I am a big advocate of building businesses while you are in school. I think that I always say my education definitely worked for me. And it was really important for me to actively be a student and also build this business, and so I can - I worked with Dr. Jose and realized okay, I have services, now I can make money and started working really hard at recruiting clients and by the end of my college career I was working with Verizon Wireless.

I remember spring of my senior year doing a research project for them and flying to California and back to school for class and I spent my junior year instead of staying abroad, I studied away. Lived and worked in Chicago, which I really found to be kind of the Mecca for marketing and so at 22 I'd had a lot of experience. At this point, six years of running this business and I still thought maybe this was just a really interesting hobby. I didn't actually think this was going to be my career for as long this has been my career. And so I still remember the conversation with my advisor when I said oh, I had just watched legally blonde - I was just talking about this last week in another conference and thought I should go to law school. I don't know people who like fashion and beauty go to law school, I don't know. I remember her just saying yes, you could go to law school because you're a very good student. And not knowing that this is what I wanted to do, and I had been getting some media and I thought that the media was focused on my story of being this interesting girl doing this interesting thing. And even at that age, at 21, I didn't think that was the way to build a business; so focused on one person, one story. And I also didn't think it was the right story.

I didn't think it was the right message because at some point you have to grow up and you have to be respected as a research company or whatever is that we were becoming not there is this girl that does this cool stuff with the product; I felt like there was a timeline on that. And so I said to my advisor, we really talked, spent quite a bit of time in different sessions talking about should I go to law school, should I do vastly different things, should I go into the field and just apply for a job. And I remember my girl friends senior year reading like this book on quarter life crisis and it was really funny. They were like oh, you of course don't need to read this book. I'm like: I probably have the biggest crisis here of everybody. But I decided, I said to my advisor at the time, I said here is what I'm going to do. I think that - when I graduated, it was spring 2002, and illegal downloading had become a major issue or it was becoming kind of thing. You know, it was the Shawn Fanning movement and that sort of thing. And during the spring of my senior year, I spoke at a music industry conference. It was a very interesting conference because there were three other presenters from really, really big research institutions and they were saying things to the audience who you can imagine, were people who were quite concerned about illegal downloading and they were saying things like: it's not going to be an issue, only 17% of people illegally download music.

And then I get up, this senior in college who has a research panel at that time, I should back up and say our network grew to 9,000 people solely because CosmoGirl Magazine wrote two sentences about what I was doing and I got 15,000 applications from people all over the world who wanted to be buzzSpotters and so we really created this great network. And we had done research and found of the 500 people that we surveyed, that 99% of them had illegally downloaded music within the last 30 days. And so obviously we were presenting two very, very different sets of data and so I kind of was disheartened, I was cut out of an article and billboard and I thought okay, well that is what it is And so back to that conversation with Dr. Weinberg, I

said, you know what I want to do, I want to - I have always wanted to be a liaison between consumers and people who target them. And at the time it was teens and then as I grew older it was the young adults and now I'm 34, so we just say consumers and people who market to them. And I said well, I want to talk about things that other people don't want to talk about. And I don't have any skin in the game to necessarily need to go one direction or prove one thing. I'm really curious as to why consumers do what they do and what their interests are and so presenting that research was to say, you might be right, maybe only 17% of people illegally download music, I just have a belief that the 99% that are in this demographic I'm dealing with have a really huge impact. And, obviously we know now that that did have an incredible impact on that business. I think still today it is impacting the music business and how that business is shaped now.

And so, yes, that's always my example of the power of Millennials and the power of consumers when they decide that something is or is not working for them. And so, I decided I was going to try that out for a year. I opened an office in New York City and I work there. I lived in South Jersey and I still live in South Jersey today, and so did that for three or four years. And I guess that most interesting thing that happened during that time was I was featured in a cover story for O Magazine. And so at 25, having that Oprah stamp of approval on my career was huge. I didn't think it would be. Not that I didn't think the Oprah brand was huge; I just didn't think anybody cared about a kid who was doing research in New Jersey. I just didn't think that was a story that would resonate with people and obviously if you're lucky enough to be touched by the Oprah brand, it does turn to gold if you're doing something good. And so, it was great for us and I still remember clients coming into the office like with my actual page from the Magazine kind of like we saw this and so, that was great for our agency and I think we kind of - again other profiles and 30 under 30 and all kinds of awards which for me and I think you'd understand if you're an entrepreneur, you have to be fascinated by your work and passionate about it and the other stuff is just stuff that happens.

It's not something you pause - and I think my mom, I realized recently has a clip book of all of my different media, but for me it was just this is another day and it's another day that I get to do something that I love. And so, we continued to grow the network, continued with our research and then the economy took a turn, which was interesting because what happened is our business really diversified. So we got into influence of marketing, again, by accident. I had a client call and say the girls I talk to about beauty were having some issues launching a product at Sephora, do you think we could engage them in influencer? And this was probably about 2007, so I don't think - it was right around the time BuzzAgent was coming along and I thought I don't know that we're that. I've always really wanted that line of consumers being able to openly and honestly express their opinions to brands and that was a really-and still is-a very core value of our company and very important to me. So that means if I have to say something that's not great, that that has to be okay. And that also is a big reason why I don't have a team of 50, 60, 70 people because sometimes I do have to make decisions that I think are a little more ethically driven for our business. And so at that time I wasn't sure it would work and we tried influencer and it worked really, really well. And so we incorporated that into our services and so when the economy took a turn, it was a lot of traditional things that were getting cut and people were reinvesting into the type of work we do and so we have over the last 18 years, worked with 135 companies and I guess some highlights for me would be companies like American Eagle Outfitters, Sony Music, Dell, Microsoft, and so we've gotten to touch some really big brands and I've learned so much from our clients. And I'd say personally for me, one of the more fun accomplishments - a lot of people talk about my business book, but not so much about my children series.

So I write a series for 7 to 12 year old girls. It's published by HarperCollins Children's Books, it's called Mackenzie Blue. And it's really focused on a girl I think is kind of like a modern Ramona and I've written five books in the series. We have sold over 200,000 copies. So it's a really fun - I feel like it's my fun passion project. I'm working on another series right now. It's all about a girl who can't tell a lie and what happens in middle school and so writing and creating McKenzie and creating a character that is really beloved by girls has been an interesting experience for me, especially as a researcher, because through McKenzie, through her life, I get to see girls react to her and really get to understand kind of what's going on in the life of a 12-year-old girl and that was something really interesting. And then I guess as a final comment before I open it up to your questions. Two years ago, I was elected to the United Nations Foundations Global Entrepreneurs Council. And so we are charged with bringing innovative ideas to the UN.

And if I weren't working for myself, I'd absolutely love to work for the UN and so it's been a really incredible experience. That's why I'm actually in San Francisco now. I have a board meeting, it's our last, and so it's just been an unbelievable experience for me for the last two years, and earlier this year I got to spend some time in Uganda. I got to visit a refugee settlement and meet entrepreneurs. And when I think about what entrepreneurship means to me now at 34, a bit more established and kind of what your opportunity is. When I started out, there were not a lot of tools and there weren't a lot of people that could help other people rationalize what I was doing. You guys live in a world where everybody knows who Mark Zuckerberg is, everybody knows what it means to be an entrepreneur and everybody understands the upside. When I was doing it, I was that girl doing that weird thing and people were saying to my parents your daughter is so smart, why isn't she a lawyer or a doctor? They just didn't get it and so I'm now members of many different associations that didn't exist when I started and so I think that the entrepreneurial spirit and especially what I got to see in Uganda has really made me an even bigger champion of entrepreneurship. Seeing innovation that can drive and create business opportunities in Uganda and meeting female entrepreneurs who are creating an amazing life for their children that are able to send their children to private

schools just because they're entrepreneurs and they've simple businesses, selling soap, having farms, is something that was really interesting to see. And so, I guess at this point, I'd love to open-up for questions.

We can talk about my work, we can talk about trends that I'm seeing; whatever is interesting to you. I know for a second you touched on like almost like an ethical quandary in your business from time to time. I was wondering if you could just elaborate on that. Can you repeat the question? Sure. He was talking about really the ethics involved in what I do everyday. And I think that marketing is an interesting area when you talk about that, right. It's the images that we create, the messages that we send. I think that there was a time where I talked to my clients about kind of a one way funnel where we push things out to consumers and imagine when I was a teenager, I will use myself as an example, I feel like Gap dictated my whole life. It's like when their fall campaign came out, that's who I was, that is what I was going to be. And if I wanted a really specific shoe, there was no online shopping.

I went to a mall that dictated what I had access to and that was that. If I was this suburban Jersey girl, this is what I could have access to. And I'm sure we remember those times where our friends would travel to the West coast and would get something there that we couldn't get at home. And so I think it created this funnel where marketers could project onto consumers what was cool. And there had been documentaries; I think there was a particular one I saw call the Merchants of Cool where Sprite actually said, we project onto you the image of who we want you to be. And that for me was definitely a bit of an ethical dilemma and I think I was coming about in a time where technology has created this interesting democracy where consumers can, I feel, have the power and can dictate things to brands. Gap changed its logo, consumers didn't like it, they changed it back to the old one. That would never happen in my opinion 20 years ago. I think your ability to shop online and to make those types of decisions totally changes the playing field. It's not a dictatorship anymore.

It's if I don't like this, I won't do it. If I don't want to buy a car, I can use Uber now. If I want to be a conscious consumer, there are ways I can do that. And so I think that for me, I have always erred on the side of just working with brands that I really like and brands whose products I'm passionate about. And it's hard, because there are some - for me, can I say, I always feel passionate about Dell, I may not have - the products I got to work on were amazing products for people who need PCs. But what I was really passionate about was Michael Dell's entrepreneurial spirit and that he is really a true entrepreneur who is fascinated by new things and creating new things and so that for me was someone I could get behind. And I think that in general, I would tell you 90% of the people I've worked with have really wanted to connect with this consumer and the people who wanted to dictate to them weren't people that would work with my system anyway because the consumer and that research and data, we have a process we call connect-brand-impact-understand and the first step in that process is bringing in the voice of the consumer. So you can imagine if you're a marketer that you already have your plans and you just want me to verify what you're saying, we probably wouldn't be the best match. So I think that earlier in my career it was something that probably came up a lot more where now I feel like it's the reverse for brands who are understanding that you dictate what's going to happen and they're just trying to figure out where they fit. What methods do you use or like where do you look to spot trends and what trends are going on today? Where do I look to - where do I spot trends? I was at Starbucks today and I was sitting next to very interesting Millennial having a conversation about her job at Salesforce and her co-workers and I wish I could have taped that conversation.

I was fascinated by how quick it was happening and what she was talking about. And so I travel quite a bit, I travel outside the U.S quite a bit, but I don't believe that great trends are started in New York and LA. I think that, especially today, trends come from all over the place. And I'm really fascinated by people, and I think that to think that you can go to one place and one source and get everything you need is very antiquated. There was a time when people would produce a trend report and send it out and say to everybody these are the colors of the season. And I think going back to the technology piece, consumers are - it's so fascinating to me. Think about when fashion blogging became a thing, right. So think about a magazine like Lucky that when you open Lucky today I feel like fashion bloggers drive that book where years ago it was editors dictating to us what was cool and what was edgy and now we look at really cool people and those are who - I think Olivia Palermo probably tells more people what's cool than a fashion editor. And so it's interesting to see that power play where now it's like we all have to work together. And so for me commuting is a great time.

If I'm in an airport, I can always tell when a trend is massed based on my time in the airport. I'll give you an example of two: Uggs and Toms. When you get on a plane and everybody walking past you no matter what age is engaged with a certain type of brand, that's when you can start to see mass influence and there are times where I remember seeing two people at an airport with Toms and then I remember every other person having a pair of Toms and so I'm always looking at that moment, that breaker moment when something is really becoming mass. We had a trend a couple of years ago, we called massclusivity, which is the idea that everybody wants mass products that are customized for them, kind of driven by iPod. So I don't think that trends come from just one place or just one person, because at the end of the day my clients want volume and so we're right now creating something called the Millennial brand index where we're ranking brands in many different categories. And I'm talking to someone who is going to be part of a judging panel for this project and she said to me you're talking about all these companies that are really interesting. Of course the ones that I like, like Warby Parker - I love Warby Parker. She said what I

want to know is if the girl in Kansas loves Warby Parker. And I think that is a great question because we sometimes can become a little obsessed with what's happening on the Coast and we don't realize it's a huge company - a company - huge country with so many different opinions and so I try to not let one idea dictate when I think something is cool. And I also don't think that I had the answers.

I think you find a lot of people, I don't know if you guys experience this, I see it a lot in business where it's like because I have a child who is 12, I understand all 12 year-olds or I know Millennials, my child is a Millennial. And what I - I always take the approach is that I don't know anything and that I think everyday something is changing and everyday I'm getting new access to new research and information, and so I always try to approach it from I'm just here to learn and to observe and to interpret and I don't really have an end goal from it. I just want to know what's interesting. And so, I think you have to kind of do the work I do, just be very open to learning something new and not - I think the most important thing is to not go into it, any assignment for me, with any pre-conceived notion. And sometimes I think that's hard with my clients because they sometimes arrive at the end and then want me to justify it. And so that's sometimes creates a dilemma I think. Okay. I like that airport story. I'm just wondering, perhaps on a more personal thing, in the past few flights you've gone on, what step have you noticed? What's caught your eye? What have I noticed? I think - oh and I have to answer your question, sorry, about trends. I will tell you a bit about the trends we're predicting for next year.

I think what I'm noticing lately is what's missing. I'll give you an example. I don't think we've figured out a charging solution that makes sense for as many devices as we all have. I see a lot of people crowding around very few outlets, so needs of technology. I see in general airports becoming a more interesting hub of shopping and, specifically, I can speak to Philadelphia. It's not a joke that like the best shopping is in the airport. And so the airport as a destination but just from people in general it's that they want to be connected and that we've got to figure out how to make that connectivity easier. When you go to many other places outside of the U.S., it's really easy to get online and to have great Wi-Fi and to be online. And so figuring out that issue and it's funny, I'm seeing more problems lately. I see a problem of food quality in airports and what consumers are looking for and what they've access to.

So I think I see kind of more opportunity. And then in general with consumers, it's very interesting. There was a time where teenagers were called screenagers, because they were looking at so many screens. And what fascinates me is looking at boomers. I think everyone is so Millennial focused that they don't realize that there are other generations that there were really interesting things were happening. And so I think watching kind of the non-Millennial engage in technology with technology with so many different forms of technology, and figuring that out is something that's interesting. It's to really see how integral it is and that I think we're still a little bit behind. It might probably not be the case here. But there are places where what consumers need in that space, and how connected they want to be and that connectivity is not available at that moment. And in general to your question about other trends, so we've got working on our top 10 trends of 2015 right now and we're focused on some things like the Makers movement.

And talking to some of our buzzSpotters, what's interesting is there are those that consider themselves real makers who really make stuff and they are really put off by the idea that everybody thinks they're a maker, but I just think it's something that's becoming a bigger consumer play and we are seeing it in different areas. I was on my flight over reading an article in Marie Claire, when they were talking about how to make the perfect palette and you can buy this palette called a Z palette that - it's a plain palette and you can literally, if you want to put your make-up in the oven and you can unglue it and create your own palette and so I thought about how interesting it is that we deconstruct make-up that we pay a lot of money for to create our own custom solution. And so we've talked a lot about customization before and the need for customization, but to actually give consumers the ability to make things and participate in this different way is something new. We're talking about this idea of being selfie-conscious and it's not at all that Millennials are self-conscious. It's that I feel like, and through our research we have seen, that there is such an emphasis these days on perfection. There was a time where it was like you could just walk out, looking however you looked. I mean I went to college at a time where girls were going in like pajamas and Uggs or whatever boots they were wearing at the time, or Sneakers. And so, to think of a time now where everyone has to - think of your Instagram feed and how good everybody looks all day long. It's that pressure of you have to look good all day long, because there is no filter for that. And why didn't you get into this top college and why aren't you going to this top...? And so it's the pressure to be in all the right places doing all the right things and looking good and not looking stressed that I think we're looking at.

And that data is really important to our clients, because as they start to create brand messages it's important to understand just what's going on in life for the average Millennial. And I think we were exploring another trend called Instafeed, but I think the team is like moving that into selfieconscious where I was looking at the continuous feed that we live in where every moment in our life is something we're documenting and not just living and how does that affect things in general. We are talking about fitspiration. Fitness and wellness, and it's interesting. Again, I hadn't read Marie Claire in months, so I was catching up and listening to the - reading this editors letter, and she was talking about how they're totally changing the health section of the magazine and it's no longer about like how to do the perfect crunch, it's now about like a much more lifestyle approach to

fitness. And again Instagram has become a big inspiration for this kind of thing, but thinking about the images of people who are so healthy. I mean, how many people pop up in your feed that are like I am working out and people like Jen Salzer or whatever her name is, who are in Vanity Fair for how amazing their butt looks. And so, again, it's the power of image and how that's coming across in that medium to say, okay, now I have to be fit. And think of it like soul cycle, whether you go or not, you know what this thing is, right. It's like a cull, right.

I love when workouts are called culls, but it means that they're building some kind of brand culture that people associate with in some way, and so we are looking at that. We're also exploring net neutrality, it's something that's come up over - that's one of those moments where I said I never tried to say what I think a Millennial will or won't do. I remember when we did our original research on net neutrality and I said, I don't even know if this is an issue they even know about. And I was so wrong, just in - and not only the knowledge but also why it was important. And I think that there is an interesting trend happening now where traditionally parents told children what to do, right. And they were the authority and we've explored this in different trends like hand-me-ups where Millennials were actually handing up older phones to parents because of shared cell phone plans and the Millennials were getting the better technology and there is also this divide where they're also explaining technology and that's something that's become a really interesting thing to explore, right. When you think of very traditional companies, think of like food companies, grocery stores, how they talk to consumers about what's important and their issue - their image of family and what they project, a trend of who - it becomes a lot of like who is the making the main decisions in the household and so exploring that kind of trend. I'm trying to think if there is anything else that's really interesting. I mean, that's a preview so far. I think I like selfieconscious, I like looking at what that means, and looking at how also, to your question of ethics, are we as marketers putting that pressure there to look perfect and saying that perfection has never been more affordable.

You can dye your hair in 10 minutes, why would your roots be showing? It's so easy to fix. As we create really easy fixes to things I think we also don't allow room for imperfection. And so, that is creating - it becomes a predictor of will you, as a generation, pushback on that. I think we also look at your position on government, and this has been a really interesting thing. We pull this a lot and we found that in general Millennials might be a little more centrist than people think. When we did research five or six years ago, the percentage of Millennials that said that they were Democrat was much larger than what we are seeing today. But then also we are looking at the implications of - even if they're - number one thing, one trend, that's interesting. They don't identify. We did two types of identification. Are you Democrat, are you Republican or are you independent or do you think that you are more centrist? Like we used different words and got different responses.

And then becomes the idea, totally separate idea, that they don't think government is actually working for them and in that case they feel like other Millennials or other people are better solving problems outside of government. And MTV has done a lot of research and a lot of work around this, and that really creates an interesting conversation around problem-solving and if Millennials start to approach problem-solving outside of a government structure, what does that look like? And so I think this is the year for us asking really interesting questions and just looking at metrics and data. I think it's one of those kind of transitional years to say, okay, like we know the traditional things are happening, like digital is more important than ever before that you're digital natives and that for brands they have to speak in this way but it has to be authentic. Like I think so many of those things now are known. I think what's happened is that it's become a year of like I don't know if you all ever feel this way, but I feel like people talk about Millennials like a species they've never seen before. Instead of just understanding like you have to engage like you would with any other demographic and there are lot of people out there that talk about what what what what all day long and no one talks about how. And so I think for us as an agency next year is really about having conversation about how. How do you engage, how do you know what's important and how do you take into consideration all the trends we have talked about from massclusivity to a couple of years ago we talked about warholism, which is the idea that all Millennials believe they can be famous. It's not as interesting as it used to be. I remember growing up at a time where only seven real people ever made it to TV and they were on MTV's Real World.

Now think about your younger siblings, you can record your own show on your iPhone, cut it, put it on YouTube and you're instantly famous to your 100 followers overnight. And so, can people sell you fame the way they used to be able to sell to my..? And I guess I'm technically still considered a Millennial, but I'm the oldest of the Millennials. So I might even be like the youngest GenXer. And so, the power of celebrity to someone my age is very different and I even take it younger. Fisher Price created a toy, it's a karaoke machine that you hook into your TV and a little girl, little boy sings her favorite songs and sees their face on TV. How do you then explain to them there are people who are super famous? You mean on TV like I was just on TV two seconds ago? So that idea of what fame truly means, I think, is something that's really changing. Also I was probably into my 20s before there was Perez Hilton, but the minute you start drawing on celebrities' faces, kind of it's an interesting value proposition. That's why we start to talk about this bigger concept of are there really true celebrities left? Are there really true stars? Because I think that there are entertainers, there are people that we allow to entertain us, but are there people that we kind of uphold as this unbreakable celebrity image that there was when I was growing up. I don't necessarily know that that exists. So I think that there are a lot of questions to answer right now.

So, Tina, especially in a business where it's all about understanding people and given your fascination with people and

having seen so many different types over your career, what would you say has been the most interesting or meaningful or valuable thing you've learned about people, and how has this impacted the way that you interact with people on a daily basis or chose to approach your business? That is a great question. So I would say ... Can you repeat the question? Sure, I will repeat the question. So I was just saying that I've seen so many people and interacted with so many people, I guess who, what segment or what groups have the biggest impact on me and how I see things? Is that pretty much the essence? Yes, and I guess just meeting people in general, what's been most valuable that you realize about what motivates them? Okay. So I think there are probably two experiences. First, I would say post recession talking with Tweens, I'm completely fascinated by Tweens, because they've more technology than we've ever had. It is something that's like digitally native for them. So I explain it like for people my age we didn't have to discover TV, right. It's always there, it was always interesting, it wasn't a big new thing that happened in our lives, we get it. TV is awesome.

Same way a seven, eight year old sees technology and when I was writing my book, I had this theory that technology was ruining Millennials. And what I actually realize is that it's the other generations that have the biggest issue, because Millennials have always had it in a very appropriate place in their lives, in your lives where it is what it is. I can - and when you want to spend time with friends, I find that the engagement can be much more - I hate to use the word real, but you understand the place of technology. And so that was an interesting finding. And so when I think about Tweens, their access to information and just how smart they are, I'm fascinated by them. I mean, we were doing some research and my favorite quote ever: we asked Tween girls how has the recession impacted you and a girl said I have not been impacted at all: my grandma just gave me \$20. And I thought I just love the optimism in that. My life is great, I have \$20, life is awesome. And I love that for them anything is possible. They're not quite yet at the age where they have any reason to kind of be defeated.

It's like anything is possible, I'm going to keep moving and I've got the tools to do it and so when you see girls who can mix their own music or what technology is doing and allowing children to do, and how imaginative they can be, that's fascinating to me. And I'd say another group - when I was in Uganda and met entrepreneurs there I realized that we truly do not understand what it means to run businesses with challenges. I walk into a room, I know that if I flip the switch the lights will work, I know where the nearest bathroom is, I know how to get out of the room in an emergency, I know that if I send an email my internet is going to work, and to go to a place where none of those things are certain and to see people still work so hard and come up with unbelievable solutions. I was on a remote island called Bussi Island and met an entrepreneur who had developed a solar backpack that basically lit this clinic where women would have to go if they could get there to give birth. And when - if they happened to give birth at night, there was no light. So babies were born and the first thing this baby is doing is inhaling smoke. And so, we don't think about those things, about the impact of those things and to see an entrepreneur - they came up with a solar backpack, now there is lighting, simple solutions. And so I think so many of us spend so much time thinking about very complex things and to see entrepreneurs focus on things that might seem so simple, but were so life changing for so many people. We also met a group of Stanford students, recent graduates who were living in Uganda, and had come to open a company focused on clean cook stoves. And it was amazing, because no one understands the importance of a clean cook stove.

That if you cook up over an open fire, it is the equivalent of smoking five packs of cigarettes a day. And think about the fact that most of these women are doing this with a child on their back and so the child is also inhaling smoke. They came up with a solution that's less than \$10 that heats food in this kind of clay pot for five hours and so to see how the developed world was working with the developing world, I think, was really interesting. And I have spent so much time, I think, trying to think of these really grand ideas and to see that something so simple meant so much to so many people, I think, has been interesting. And the last one was - actually this was a day, Global Accelerator, it was an entrepreneurship day at the UN and entrepreneurs were pitching us ideas and one guy had created a bicycle ambulance, which really made sense for parts of Africa, where he was using it. And again, we think of such big technology and this was really the safest best solution at \$1,500 and the statistics and research he had done on how many lives he has saved, it was unbelievable. And so I think that I walked away from that trip realizing that it's the small innovations that sometimes can really have the biggest impact. And if you take away the comfort that we're used to and we just had to - there are so many entrepreneurs. People who created clean filtration systems that changed the lives of children at boarding schools. So the idea that I think for me at this stage is thinking how simple can we be to come up with solutions; that's been the most interesting.

Yes, sorry I can't see you. I will ask a couple, if there is room, if we have time. So should I stand up or is it ...? Okay, so I've got a couple of questions I want to ask to make sure that these guys get answers too. Okay. You're in the business of separating - of finding signals amongst noise. And I think one of the biggest areas of noise or questions is what should I do with my life? And lots of people have passions. Few people are able to pursue their passions and actually convert those into real businesses that they can make a livelihood after and thrive in. How do you know - and you have done this multiple times, in multiple different forays, when is there enough of a signal to indicate that a personal passion has - you should have enough conviction behind that personal passion to pursue that as a business when your parents are saying go to law school, go to medical school or all of your friends are going and working for the hot company? So I'm a big fan of not drinking your own Kool Aid. I think first, I always start with what are you passionate about, because the thing that people don't tell you about

entrepreneurship is that sometimes it really, really sucks. And so you have to really, really love it, because the days that really suck, really, really suck and so if you are not passionate about it, that's the day where you are kind of like I'm over it, this is done, and that's that.

So that piece is so important. And I think people I have seen recently - it's like well, I can make money doing this thing but at the end of the day, I don't care how much money is in a deal, there is going to come a time where something is just going to be like not for you and you've got to have that passion to say I really believe in this thing or I just love it. Everyday I love the job that I have and I love what I get to do. And then, I always say knowledge is power. So the minute you have an idea - we all have the ability to be researchers and you really need to independently - not all of your friends and family, they love you, they will tell you. I was fortunate that my friends and family didn't really understand what I was doing so they couldn't have told me they thought it was great anyway, because they didn't get it. But what I didn't realize at the time was early on those 40 companies that thought that my insights very interesting kind of proved that I had a client base before I even knew what that meant. And so you really have to spend the time saying what's my total market and what's my target market, and you always have to be able to answer that question. Not I really think this is great, because...It doesn't matter. We are not that great.

And there are people - I think what's interesting today is I really do believe that there are entrepreneurs who are creating solutions that will change the world and are changing lives everyday and making our lives, whether it's more beautiful or easier or more creative, but at some point they had to quality that. And so I'd say - and quantify it. What are your total and target markets and my favorite thing is when people say there is no competition. There is always competition. As a marketer, I will tell you, consumers can choose to do nothing. You always have competition. And so, take a minute and be independent and say how do you qualify the idea? Who is your test market? We all can find a hundred people to say is this something you are interested in and then is there a way to prove that concept? Can you start to sell something at least to one client and how do you get through that sale process and then always be kind of refining, don't be so set on this is the way it has to go and always be in that research phase. But I always hear, especially with technology, I think it's a little bit of a different story, right, because there is the like analysis paralysis. When do you launch your product, when do you let people test it. But what's great about technology is consumers always from the minute it's launched get to tell you what they like and what they don't like.

And so, get yourself immersed in the ability to hear what your customers want from day one I think would be the most important. Yes, that is always the most important - the empathy. How and - okay, great. There you go. Hi. You talked earlier about some problems that marketing has in terms of putting pressure on people always to look good, always to... Have you found yourself in a position that you had to request from a customer that conflicted with your ethical views and in case you had it, how did you cope with that? So, every client, I don't... Repeat the question just for... Sorry. Sure.

So the question is have I ever had a client that kind of conflicted with our ethical views of the company? And so, what most people don't know is that we have a panel of our own buzzSpotters that help us determine if a client is someone we should work with. And that's always a part of our process because I now have 30,000 buzzSpotters all over the world, 7,000 momSpotters, so I've got 37,000 people that give their time and energy, and when appropriate contract with our clients and are paid to give their insights and so that's a really important network and I want them to know we're always representing their thoughts and views. And so, it's happened a few times where things just didn't make sense for us, but it comes down for me is someone trying to dictate something or are they truly - do they truly believe in their product and do they truly believe that they want the customer to be as excited about this product as they are. So if I have a client that's really not into what they're doing, that's not the client for me, because the amount of time my team and myself personally, that I will dedicate to a project to get something to launch; it's a lot of time. I always say, I can always make more money, I can never make more time. I can't get that time back. And so that for me is the biggest thing; do I want to spend my time engaged in this issue with this client and obviously 18 years into the business, I think I've the ability to say yes and no much easier than maybe I even did when I was younger. But ignorance is bliss at 22. I probably said no to things that I should have never said no to but I didn't care. So that has always been what has driven me and this agency.

And like I said earlier, we might be a lot bigger if I were willing to do things and take on some of the clients but if I don't really believe in their product, it's not something I'm interested in. And I just want to clarify, it doesn't mean that I think every product has to be healthy or good. I think that there are some brands today that are on this healthy good kick that we all know we do not go into those restaurants or into those places to get something healthy or good. We go in just because we like it and it's interesting. So I don't necessarily think that we have to - we are also in a place where we're like saying this is bad and that is bad and I think as consumers we have to say, I like this, so I'm going to do it or I'm interested in this, so I'm going to eat this. It doesn't mean I'm going eat fast-food everyday. But if I want to go have a burger, I'm going to have a burger and that's fine. And I think that's what I appreciate about Millennials is the idea of like it's fine. If I want to eat at Chipotle three days a week, that's actually cool and it's fine. And so I kind of like that approach to things.

Can I ask you a question about gender and identity for the Millennial generation? I mean, is it ... Interesting question. ... is it an issue? So is being female an issue with whatever you want to pursue, is being black an issue with whatever you want to

pursue? And is it an issue, is it a liability, is it an asset? What's your read and take both objectively and personally? Yes, you know, it's funny, I was asked that question when I got older and I didn't get it. And I said, at least speaking from my personal career, I came up at a time in '96 before Backstreet Boys and Britney Spears and Elle Girl and Teen Vogue and Teen People and I kind of rode into the teen wave and I happened to be a person who just had more insights than anyone else. And so I'm a big believer that, at least for me, the only color people saw was green and my ability to make money. I always say that; like the only color people saw with me is green. I think that this is one of our trends again for next year, we're talking about this Power Girl trend and I'm a little put off personally, it's probably the most controversial thing I'm going to say today, by people who think they need to tell girls that they can run as fast as boys today. I have a niece who is five, I never want her to hear that. I want to know - I want her to know to run fast.

She's growing up - my sister is a sociology professor, she thinks her grandma is awesome, her aunt runs a company, Phoebe already knows she can do whatever she wants to do with her life. And so I'm a little put off by that older - and again even my journey, right, that would like me saying guys entrepreneurship is so hard. You don't know what it's like the last 18 years. Like my world, my journey is very different. I couldn't build a website for less than \$1,000, get business cards for less than \$35 and have a business up and running via LegalZoom in two days. That's an opportunity you have and I think I have to respect that. And so I'm a little put off by campaigns where it's like girls are just as good as boys. It's like I don't need a campaign to say that. And it's hard because I think that -- are there inequalities that exist? Yes. But also I can't truly speak to that because I've always created my own job and my own opportunity and so I will say one of the things that made me really love Dell was they talked about empowering women and every time I was in a meeting there, there were woman running the show in a way and really empowered within that company, and so it was great to feel like I wasn't just saying something and then sitting in a room with all men dictating and so that's important to see that if you're promoting a company culture that you're living it and I very much felt that they were.

But yes, I have a problem with - I think girl power is the issue of the day and so people have decided that... And there are a lot of trends we can speak to in politics that we can see, we're trending toward this movement and so I think that Millennials see through all of that. I just think that pandering - it's like oh, now we're going to talk about girls and how awesome girls are. I think that toys for girls and things like that - I didn't have a course in school that was like this is math for girls. Most people don't know, I took advanced math and science classes from middle school until I graduated at college. So ... And it didn't even go through your mind that that was an issue? Never, no. Until somebody said that, yes. Or that girls were - my girlfriends were like sitting next to me in classes. This is what we did and so I have a problem when we kind of call that out as like hey you, you can be successful too.

Like that's kind of like okay. Yes, fair enough. We have time for one final question. Any - yes, we got one right there, back there. Based on what you just said, do you think that being like a good sociologist is kind of an essential part of market research and like how have you gained those skills? I do. And the question is? Sorry, do I think that being a good sociologist is an important part of my job? So, I'll tell you this. I, in general, I tend not to hire marketing people to work for my company. I tend to hire people who come from some sort of social science, because I think what's really important is in marketing sometimes we're taught to create the voice of the consumer and I feel like we're living in a time now where we have to actually interpret what the consumer is saying to us and create for consumers what they're looking for from us. And so I also think it's a very European style of marketing, where they really spend a lot of time understanding people and saying, okay, we now have these consumer segments and now we're going to create these products to satisfy that and I've seen that through - I've had some people work for my agency from Europe and that was very much the way they came into the experience versus I have the best new car idea and now how are we going to sell it? And so I think that I look for people that bring those kind of skills to the table because we really are in a time where technology is really creating - I keep talking about this democracy where consumers can tell us instantly and it's ever happened before. I use this example, when I was a teenager if I wanted to know if Jane Cosmetics tested on animals, I'd call an 800 number on the back of the package, if someone answered, I'd ask a question and then go with what they told me.

Right now if you want to know that, you can find out in a minute or less. And if you don't like what you see, you can start a petition on change.org. And so what consumers can do and how quickly and instantly you can do it I think has totally changed what we as marketers do. And so I really look for people who - cultural anthropologists; people who are really, really interested in what people want and not interested in coming in with absolute outcome. They cut it off. Thank you so much, Tina. Thank you. Thank you so much.