



Stanford eCorner

Consumers Shape Marketing and Product

Tina Wells, *Buzz Marketing Group*

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Tina Wells, founder and CEO of Buzz Marketing Group, explains how corporate marketers can no longer dictate consumer tastes because technology gives them a greater voice and more choices. As an example, she points to Michael Dell as an entrepreneur who excelled at listening to consumers and giving them what they want.



Transcript

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.