



Season 6: International Marketing and Brand Management Episode 2

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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 Michele Chapuis, a multilingual global marketing professional with over 20 years of international team leadership experience. Her global roles have spanned a variety of industries including food and beverage, commercial goods, nonprofit travel and tourism, and consumer products across many categories. Currently, Michele is a senior international marketing manager on the global beauty team at SharkNinja, responsible for marketing the company's haircare line outside the U.S. Michele has worked at leading companies such as Newell Rubbermaid, American Greetings, Rich Products, Mattel/Fisher-Price, and UNICEF, for which she worked in Geneva, Switzerland for three years. She's traveled all over the world and runs her own travel company called Europe Your Own Way. Michele and I connected years ago through our love of languages and one of my books. Michele speaks Italian, French, in addition to her native English. Welcome, Michele, it is such a pleasure to have you with us today.

Michele Chapuis:

Thank you. It's great to be with you.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, so let's get started. One of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there – more than just titles, right. So, you have extensive marketing experience, tell us what it's like to be an international marketer.

Michele Chapuis:

So, honestly, graduating from my MBA program, I wasn't really looking for a specific type of marketing or company. I knew it had to be an international for some reason, it's just it's in my DNA, I can't control it, I've tried. But it's just something about me and I need to be an international. But I was pretty open to evaluating the possibilities outside of that one requirement. So, I would say that my first job after my MBA kind of set me on my path forward. I was recruited by Rubbermaid from my MBA program – they recruited 20 of us from international MBA programs as the founding class of a new program they were starting, called the Global Leadership Development Program, which was set up to help bring more international thinking into the organization. So, and



this was a long time ago, mind you. We did two one-year assignments in different divisions of the company, and then were placed in a more permanent role. So, I did my first year in Hudson, Ohio, at Little Tikes, which was their toy division that they owned at the time. And there I was working on a project to update all of their packaging to multilingual 14-language packaging, so that the products could be more widely distributed. And this is more complex of a project than you would think, in terms of coming up with a layout that would accommodate 14 languages and communicate still. So that was my first step into working in a corporate role in the international field. I had a variety of different projects along the way. Just international can be such a... it's so broad, and you get an exposure to a lot of different areas of the company. After Rubbermaid... I worked for Rubbermaid for about five years, and then I decided to relocate to Ohio, where I was hired by American Greetings to manage the card lines developed for the English speaking markets, and then also the Spanish line of greeting cards. And they're, you know, it's a completely different industry, social expressions. It was interesting, but it was so focused on certain areas, regional areas, that for me, it wasn't as interesting. I mean, you know, when you say 'international', it's so broad it can be a variety of different directions. So, that led me to a position with Fisher-Price in Western New York that I just loved, and this was kind of my go-to fit for international, you know. People who are in the international roles, they might gravitate towards one area or another, and for me, this was my sweet spot. So, I was responsible for my line of products everywhere outside the U.S. Similar very similar to what I do now with SharkNinja. The complication with my products at Fisher Price was that many of them were speaking toys. So we spent a lot of time localizing products for different countries. When I started in that role, we were localizing into 17 different languages. And by the time I left, eight years later, we were in 43 different language variations. I loved it, but I also wanted to do an assignment overseas. I mean, I loved the toys, I loved the role that I was in, but I was... I really, really wanted to have the experience of an international role, you know, overseas. And that's what led me to UNICEF in Geneva, Switzerland. UNICEF was looking for someone to lead the marketing for their greeting card program. I happen to have the unique experience of greeting cards and in international education, which made me a great fit for the role. And they run on contract period, so I was hired for a two-year contract that was extended by one year, and then it ended. And it was amazing three-year opportunity, professionally, but also personally, and allowed me to expose my then middle-school age daughters to a lot of amazing travel experiences. On the professional side, it was so interesting working for an organization like UNICEF, which is actually part of the United Nations. Aside from the mission of UNICEF's focus on children around the world, which was amazing to be a part of, there were layers of bureaucracy and a strong focus on organizational hierarchy that was just... it was just so interesting to me. And you really can't get a more diverse workforce than the UN, right. So, I was, I was working with people from so many different countries, it was just a really unique experience. And that's just another example of how, "international" can lead you into so many different directions. And then, upon my return to the States, after my stint at UNICEF, I was job hunting and decided it was the perfect time to start my own little travel business, as you mentioned, because I do love organizing and planning, you know, and leading travel. And I started Europe Your Own Way, which I still run, it's my passion project and my little side hustle that keeps me connected to Europe. But then, continuing on in the corporate role, I had a short run at Rich Products, as you mentioned, it was a more interim role while they sorted out their international structure. And then, that leads me to where I am right now with SharkNinja, working as the international marketing lead on the global beauty team. Based in the U.S., but in my current position, I collaborate with all of my international counterparts outside the U.S. to help launch products that are relevant to their consumers, but also follow the, you know, our on-brand, our branding, and you know, keeping it globally consistent in communication and launching. An example of that – I love examples, because it just brings things to life – an example of that is the use of our hashtag that we use. It's #forallhairkind, and even though the words may not mean anything in some of the markets, we are using that hashtag and communications worldwide, along with local market interpretation to leverage the U.S. and global success and keep the engagement there. So it's an interesting combination of local and global. I mean, yeah, local and global, but also leveraging digital and marketing and social media.

Stacie Berdan:

Wow. So I'm gonna... Yes, it's fascinating. And I'm gonna dive in, I have so many...let's unpack that... lots of follow up questions, I'm gonna take little bits and pieces. So, definitely recognizing that international marketing is



this big, broad thing, kind of nebulous. But, you've had tremendous experience, as you've just described and shared with us, so thanks for that. But what do you think it takes to be successful, and all those things, maybe, that you've done... that colleagues... for listeners who are starting out in this path and think they want to do kind of like a job like you do, a mirror job like you maybe... What does it take?

Michele Chapuis:

So, I think the first thing I'd like to point out is that international marketing is very different from traditional marketing. You still need to understand and be able to use the principles of marketing, but as someone in an international marketing role, at least, you know, in my experience, you're in a more diplomatic role that's more about advising and consulting the markets versus creating and executing marketing programs. I think that's just an important thing to point out because it's not the same type of role. If you're in an international marketing role at a U.S. headquarters, you're working with your international counterparts to help launch products and make sure that the communications and messaging is on brand and consistent. So, the skills needed for that type of role are, of course, the knowledge of the marketing basics and business principles, but also patience (one), diplomacy, cultural sensitivity, a sense of humor is very helpful... And a hugely important skill is the ability to work as part of a team. It's... you're working on teams, you're working on the U.S. team, you need to be considered part of all the local teams... So that's just an important skill to have.

Stacie Berdan:

That's wonderful. Okay, so how do you successfully market? You know, you're on this team, you're responsible for all the haircare line outside the U.S.? How do you actually market one product or brand across various cultures in different languages around the world?

Michele Chapuis:

Yeah, it gets complicated, because now that we're in this, you know, digital space, and you're talking to consumers worldwide, you don't... there aren't... the country lines are blurred. You know, you have retailers that are pulling you across country lines, you have consumers who are also seeing you in different markets – they don't stay just on their own home websites – and things like that. So you do have to be able to support that global market for your product, you have to have the infrastructure to be able to support the communication worldwide. The worst thing you can do is set up a channel or some platform that allows consumers to speak to you, and then not have the resources to be able to continue that conversation. Because you just need to be able to promote the engagement, otherwise it'll just drop off. So, a lot of it is having the resources to be able to support those different launches. We, you know, you want to launch everywhere, but at the same time, you have to pull back a little bit sometimes to be able to support and do it the right way.

Stacie Berdan:

Now, you mentioned digital, because you're right, people are looking at your products in one country or language, but they can go anywhere, right, and do that. How has digital marketing changed the industry over the last several years? And how do you tackle it on a global scale?

Michele Chapuis:

That's something that I've had to learn on my own really, because it wasn't really part of my education when I was learning marketing or international. It's being able to, like I said, be connected to your retailers and your consumers globally. You know, where we have... Our partners are, you know, for example, Amazon... you have Amazon EU, and it just crosses borders. So we have teams, you know, that support those global retailers. We have, you know, our consumers that we have to collaborate with, especially when you talk about regional, we have our region of the EU, we have Asia region, and Latin America... We have to use kind of a regional approach so that we're consistent with our communication across all of our consumers and our retailers. So yeah, it's challenging. And that's why it's



so important, this role of this... You know, I kind of see myself as the middle of the spokes, you know, that... connecting the local markets with the global team, so that we can make sure we're consistent around the world. Otherwise, you have very decentralized approaches that water down your brand.

Stacie Berdan:

Hmm, wow, that is great. So much to think about. So much... Complicated, as you said, it's not just the marketing skills – there's diplomacy, and obviously patience, curiosity, all kinds of things there. What do you think has been one of the biggest challenges or changes that globalization... that you've seen in globalization, that is affecting marketing in the past couple of years?

Michele Chapuis:

I think the biggest challenge remains the same whether it's the past five years or 25 years, actually. It's how does a company grow internationally and be seen as a global player, but still act locally, and allow the flexibility to accommodate the local market needs? So, you know, in my opinion, U.S. companies have a more difficult time doing this than companies starting out from other countries, because the U.S. market is so huge. Many U.S. companies can grow successfully for many years without international expansion. But there comes a time when the U.S. market matures. Or maybe they don't have to focus on it, on international expansion. It still happens organically, possibly. But there comes a time when the U.S. market matures. And the biggest area for growth for that company ends up being international. So, the U.S. company then has to figure out how to deal with all these different cultures and languages. But companies starting out from other countries, they need to understand how to expand internationally right from the beginning because that is their primary path for growth. So, I think that's something that kind of... it's existing, it was always the biggest challenge, and it still is. But separately, I think another area is, as I was just saying, the digital side of things, and the fact that the digital world has forced companies to think about launching in international markets, connecting customers, retailers, consumers... And you know, our consumers are becoming more global. And digital platforms definitely have had a huge impact on globalization. So the use of social media and the ability to reach consumers, it's a huge opportunity, but it's also a big challenge.

Stacie Berdan:

I'm gonna go back to something you said about the marketing, maybe a U.S. company, yeah, growing, maybe it's going to have a harder time to expand, vice versa. So, for students or listeners looking to actually go down and look for a global marketing job – do you think it might be more prudent or more interesting to actually try to work for one of these smaller startups, smaller companies outside the United States, since they know the US market? Or, you know, what do you think about the jobs that are out there now for recent grads?

Michele Chapuis:

For somebody who's really interested in being involved in international, ideally, yeah, you have the...if you're, you know, someone who grew up in the U.S., you have the U.S. knowledge – you can leverage that with a company based in another country. The biggest challenge with something like that is being sponsored, because you don't necessarily have the right to work in some of those countries, and it's very difficult to get that opportunity. It's expensive, and a company has to kind of prove that there's no other person in their country that can do that job. So that's very difficult sometimes. But, but you could be if they have a U.S. base, you could be that person connected to the company that's based in another country, but work on the ground in the U.S. And you could still have that international exposure, and, you know, leverage your knowledge of the U.S. market for this international company. There are just so many different ways to go about it, that I have to say, the role that I have right now is more... it's not as common to find an international marketing role in the way that... that mine is right now, the being that connection between the local markets and the global market. Maybe it's starting to be more common, but it's a challenging goal for U.S. companies, because they often, and I've experienced this, they often have like an



international department that focuses every... that does all the product lines everywhere else in the world. And then the marketing team that's in that company is only focused on the U.S. And then, you know, there comes a point where you need that collaboration between the U.S. marketing team and the international group that's working with the markets outside the US. So, there's always that balance that a company is trying to create between the International and the U.S. side of things. The challenge with having an "international department" is that it's not really a profit center for a company. So, at a point, it becomes hard to justify having, you know, a whole department focused on communication with the outside teams. So they ended up pulling some of that international role into the marketing team based in the U.S. that's more of a profit center for them. So, yeah, it's... there are just so many different avenues you could take. I would say that finding if you're U.S.-based... I think the citizenship piece of it has a lot to do with where you would end up, but if you're U.S. citizen, finding a role within a multinational company is probably the more likely way to break into an international role.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, well, speaking of citizenship, I know that you now have dual citizenship – U.S. in Italy – and it took a while to get it. What inspired you to pursue it? What's your next step?

Michele Chapuis:

Well, how much time do you have? I'm actually writing a book about this whole quest for the international life, because this is a big... it's a big chunk of that subject. It's a more difficult goal to achieve than it sounds. And I've always been on the "list of associates who would move overseas", you know, at all my companies – you know, sign me up, I'm raising my hand, I'll move, you know, I want to do that assignment. But when it came down to it, as I mentioned, it would always come down to sending me as an expat versus hiring a local person. And it was always less expensive to hire a local person. So when I finally got a job in Europe with UNICEF, I was so excited, and my original contract, as I said, was a two-year assignment there. You know, I was happy to find out that I was getting renewed, but then, ultimately, the contract was going to be terminated – they go on a fixed amount of time. So I set up at that time, I set up to see if I could find a job that would allow me to stay. And ultimately, unless I were able to find a position with the UN organizations or another NGO, it was next to impossible to stay. Private companies recruiting for positions had a hierarchy of nationalities, which I thought was really, really interesting. So first, and I was in Switzerland, so first was Swiss nationals, second was European nationals, and third in the pecking order was citizens from any other country. And that's where I fell. So I was just, I just was grouped into people from everywhere else, you know, and I applied for a lot of positions within the UN and the NGOs, but didn't really have the qualifications for those agencies. I was in a unique situation at UNICEF, because they're not usually looking for people with marketing backgrounds, it's usually field experience and work with administration. I was very qualified for many of the jobs within the private sector, but they wouldn't consider hiring an American. So, I had some great conversations with a few multinationals in Switzerland and they would have, like I said, they would have had to prove that no one in Switzerland or the rest of Europe could do the job they needed to hire me for. And then they would have to sponsor me. It's just a very time consuming and expensive process for them. And it's on purpose because they want to keep the jobs there. So in fact, when I found out my contract was going to be ending, I met with a recruiter. And his first question to me was – you know, upon hearing that I wanted to find another position in Switzerland – was what nationalities do you have? And when I told them that I'm a U.S. national, his response was, do you have any other nationalities in your back pocket? And that, I mean, that pretty much sums up the complicated situation there. I thought it was funny, but also really sad. So, during that process of going through this frustrating job search, and these conversations about nationalities, I stumbled upon the realization that Italy grants people citizenship through bloodline. As long as you can prove your bloodline leads to Italy, no matter how many generations back and with the certain requirements, you could request to be recognized as an Italian citizen. So Italian citizenship meant European citizenship, which meant that I could work anywhere in Europe. And it also would extend to my daughters as well, so they could study, live, work in Europe. So it opened up a whole continent. And that realization, and the fact that a branch of my family tree comes from Italy, initiated a project that kept me busy for over 10 years. It was not an easy process. It's not as easy as just telling someone in Italy that I



have the bloodline – I had to collect official birth, marriage, death certificates, etc, translations, all that kind of stuff. And it, like I said, it took me about 10 years of research and talking to attorneys and everything, before I had my passport in my hands. So that just happened in February. So now I can start thinking about what those next steps could be. So who knows, maybe I'll be heading back to Europe at some point. I would definitely consider that. I mean, I like I really love Europe and, and the working experience there, and the life in general. So...

Stacie Berdan:

That is great, Michele, thank you for sharing that story – I can't wait to read the book. Because I know so many people... and it's one of the pieces of advice we give to... just students are like, oh, I want to go overseas... It's like, well, you know, what differentiates you? And there are others, right, so there's Italy, there's Ireland, I know Israel... there are all kinds... so that's great. So thank you for sharing that. That's is so cool.

Michele Chapuis:

Yeah, definitely look into it if you have Italian in your bloodline.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that is great. And I know you speak Italian and French, and a little Spanish. And you've embraced a global mindset, as you said, it's in your DNA. You know, it's so interesting because it's a phrase that I use a lot. It's like, I don't really know why it is, but it is. But why do you think these skills are important in the workplace today?

Michele Chapuis:

Yeah, you know, it's... learning a language gives you insight into a culture, it's so closely connected. And living in another country, really immersing yourself in that country, gives you insights into the culture too. So, those experiences open your mind and allow you to think in a way that's more globally aware and not, you know, ethnocentric to your home country. It's helpful in the current business environment for global expansion, but it's also super helpful as more and more business environments are made up of cross-cultural teams. I've worked on teams with people from across the world and my experience learning languages and living overseas has made me more culturally aware and sensitive to the differences. For example, some cultures in general are less comfortable, maybe, expressing a conflicting opinion on a subject in a more public situation. So asking those team members for their opinion on a product in a global marketing meeting with 100 other people is not going to be effective, they're not going to give me their honest opinion. So, what I've done in those situations is I set up separate time with some of my counterparts from those more reserved cultures, just to connect with them in a less public forum, that allow them to provide their honest feedback to me. You know, those kinds of things – they're subtle, but it makes such a huge difference in effective working relationships, just something you're more aware of when you take the time to learn a language or learn about a culture.

Stacie Berdan:

That's wonderful. That's great example, that is good. And I'm sure there are so many more but similar applications. Yeah. You're so thoughtful, Michele, this has been a great conversation... Is there a piece of advice that you think about maybe and say, hmm, I wish I could go back and give my younger self this piece of advice?

Michele Chapuis:

I would tell, I think, I would tell my younger self to recognize my value and negotiate opportunities. When I was just starting out after my MBA, I was applying and interviewing at a lot of different places. I was so excited to land a job at all, but also that the job was with Rubbermaid and then it was international. So I was in the airport on my way to do some apartment hunting for my move to Ohio to work for Rubbermaid, when I got a call from a company I had interviewed with. They wanted to know if I was still available because they wanted to offer me the job. And I



was just so naïve, I just... I mean, it was so new to this whole business environment, instead of allowing them to make me an offer, I immediately told them that I had already accepted a job. And you know, who knows where that path could have led me... The job they were going to offer me was with the Italian Trade Commission in New York City, and while I'm pretty sure that the pay wouldn't have been... you know, that the pay would have been lower than the salary I was going into, the role was marketing for Italian companies coming to the U.S., and more specifically, wine companies. And it included organizing wine tastings at restaurants in New York City. But I never gave them the chance to make me an offer. So my advice is to listen more than you speak and understand the strategies in negotiation.

Stacie Berdan:

That's excellent advice. Excellent advice. And you, at the very least could have used that offer to go back to Rubbermaid and say, I just got this other offer, what are you thinking? Oh, my gosh, oh, my gosh... Well, this has been great. And I know you are super, super busy. So I'm going to wrap up with one last question, which is kind of open ended. Is there anything maybe that you'd like to share with our listeners that I haven't asked you about?

Michele Chapuis:

I would say, learn how to network. It's such an important skill. Opportunities come from the strangest places that... you know, I've seen in my own experience, and many times from within your own network. I would say, that's a huge piece of advice that I would give to anyone. And, on that note, I also welcome your students to feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh, that's wonderful. Thank you. Thank you for that offer. We really appreciate it. This has been a fantastic conversation. I am so envious and jealous of your career, your dual citizenship, so many things, it's just fantastic. So thanks for taking the time. This has been great, Michele.

Michele Chapuis:

Thank you. Thanks so much, 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!