

From Hooters to Building a Health Empire at AG1 with Kat Cole

Recorded on the sidelines of Brandweek, this episode of Adspeak by ADWEEK features Ryan Joe in conversation with AG1 CEO Kat Cole.

Kat shares her journey from a Hooters hostess to leading a global wellness brand, unpacking how resilience and intuition shape bold leadership decisions.

She explains AG1's evolution from a single-product DTC business to a multi-product, multi-channel brand, including its first global "Good Morning Moon" campaign created in-house with Rick Rubin.

Cole also reveals why AG1 redirected marketing spend into \$20 million of clinical research, upgraded its core formula, and positioned a new sleep product to compete with Netflix, not supplements.

What you'll learn:

- How to involve your CEO in creative development from concept to launch
- Why rebranding at \$160 million in revenue is worth the risk
- The power of listening to customers closest to the transaction
- How to redirect marketing spend toward clinical credibility in saturated categories
- Why reformulating a bestselling product is a calculated

courage play

- The importance of knowing who you actually compete against

With a distinctive career trajectory spanning restaurant franchising, brand turnarounds, and large-scale portfolio management at Focus Brands, Kat brings operational excellence and entrepreneurial thinking to the health and wellness space.

She transformed Cinnabon from a \$300 million struggling brand to over \$1 billion in revenue within two years and spearheaded the evolution of Carvel, Jamba Juice, and other iconic franchises.

Episode Highlights:

[03:51] Rebrand When the Category Becomes a Constraint – Rebranding from Athletic Greens to AG1 at \$160 million in revenue was risky, but necessary. Kat explains how category-specific names can limit growth into new audiences and products. The shift unlocked a broader daily health positioning, enabling AG1 to expand into retail and launch new products like sleep support without diluting its core brand. Thoughtful messaging across customer segments preserved loyalty while signaling ambition. The lesson: When naming restricts growth, bold redefinition can create new revenue headroom.

[07:26] Bring the CEO Into Creative Early – Kat argues that CMOs should involve CEOs throughout the creative process, not just at final approval. Large campaigns unfold over months, during which market dynamics, customer insights, and operational realities can change. Without regular CEO touchpoints, creative risks drifting away from business priorities. At AG1, early involvement revealed that “Athletic Greens” alienated half their female audience, prompting more inclusive executions. Structured check-ins reduce late-stage

revisions, build alignment, and ensure creative drives real business impact, not just aesthetic success.

[13:23] Listen Closest to the Customer – Kat's leadership philosophy centers on listening to those closest to the problem, often customers or frontline teams. They frequently recognise misalignment before executives do, but lack the language or authority to act. At AG1, female customers over 40 felt excluded by the brand name, despite representing half the audience. By systematizing feedback and surfacing insights monthly, leadership acted decisively. When customers respond with "Finally," it's proof that the decision was overdue and market-validated.

[23:50] Invest in Science, Not Just Spend – Facing supplement-category saturation, AG1 cut marketing spend and redirected \$20 million into clinical research at UC Davis. The goal wasn't louder messaging, but defensible credibility. Double-blind, placebo-controlled trials created a moat competitors couldn't replicate. During a quiet two-year transition, AG1 relied on conviction and loyalty. The payoff came with a reformulated product backed by published data. Kat's takeaway: in crowded markets, reallocating budget to research and innovation can outperform advertising over time.

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