Global Taste, Local Twist: Mark Kirkham’s Vision for PepsiCo’s Future

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In this episode of The Speed of Culture podcast, Suzy founder and host Matt Britton sits down with Mark Kirkham, svp and marketing lead for Pepsi and sparkling brands at PepsiCo. Kirkham shares how PepsiCo leverages AI to enhance consumer engagement, the importance of maintaining brand relevance, and the challenges behind balancing global consistency with local adaptation.

With a vast portfolio of iconic brands like Pepsi, Gatorade, and Mountain Dew, PepsiCo navigates the complexities of global markets while staying true to its core values. In this episode, we explore how PepsiCo’s commitment to innovation and consumer relevance is driving the future of marketing.

“The day I stop learning is the day I stop being a marketer,” he says on the podcast. “As a marketer, you should be fundamentally curious and always be looking to understand your consumer better.”

Kirkham brings over two decades of experience in the consumer

goods industry, having held significant roles at Gillette and Procter & Gamble before joining PepsiCo. Since 2010, he has been instrumental in driving innovation and brand relevance across PepsiCo’s international beverage portfolio.

Listen to Mark Kirkham on The Speed of Culture podcast for insights into how PepsiCo stays ahead in a rapidly evolving F&B landscape.

Key takeaways:

02:09-03:34 Navigating the Complexity of Brand Relevance – The significance of brand relevance has only grown in today’s multifaceted media environment. The way brands engage with consumers has evolved dramatically, making it more complex yet vital to stay relevant. The challenge lies in maintaining strong connections amid the clutter of various communication channels. For PepsiCo, continuous adaptation and innovation are key to keeping their brands at the forefront of consumers’ minds.

05:27-06:28 Mastering Social Media and Influencer Strategies at Scale – PepsiCo has successfully scaled its social media and influencer marketing efforts globally. Kirkham reflects on the company’s journey from observing smaller brands dominate these platforms to leveraging PepsiCo’s extensive resources to compete effectively. By integrating sophisticated data systems, PepsiCo can craft tailored content that resonates with regional and global audiences.

00:06:28 – 00:08:20 Leveraging Data and AI for Scalable Personalization – By integrating first-party data with third-party and partner insights, PepsiCo develops detailed consumer profiles that inform targeted, meaningful messaging. PepsiCo is using AI and avatars to create immersive brand experiences, such as Gatorade’s AI-powered avatar that offers personalized advice to athletes. For instance, the Gatorade brand leverages data to provide athletes with personalized product

recommendations tailored to their needs and workout routines. This approach demonstrates how data and AI can revolutionize consumer engagement and create personalized experiences on a large scale.

13:43-16:08 Blending Technology with Human Creativity in Brand Building – Kirkham emphasizes that while technology plays a crucial role in PepsiCo's operations, the creativity and human insight behind it are what truly bring these innovations to life. The integration of technology should complement, not replace, the creative human elements that make brand interactions genuinely engaging and authentic.

25:18-27:55 Striking a Balance Between Global Consistency and Local Relevance – Kirkham highlights the delicate balance PepsiCo must maintain between global consistency and local market relevance. He uses the success of PepsiCo's zero-sugar beverages in Europe as an example, where strategic decisions to focus on specific product messaging led to market leadership. This experience underscores the importance of tailoring strategies to the unique dynamics of each market while upholding the core values of the global brand.

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