Keeping White Claw Summer Going With CMO Isabelle Sakai

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In this episode of The Speed of Culture podcast, Suzy founder and host Matt Britton interviews Isabelle Sakai, global chief marketing officer at Mark Anthony Brands International.

Sakai shares insights on driving innovation through deep consumer understanding, the importance of global experience, and the strategies behind creating and sustaining market-leading brands like White Claw.

“70% today of the population is actually considering a damp lifestyle: not really abandoning alcohol, because it’s still a lot of fun and pleasure and everything, but from time to time looking for something that is a true alternative,” Sakai says on the podcast. “So that’s why we thought we had an opportunity, and we learned all of that from listening to consumers.”

Sakai brings a wealth of experience to the CMO role, with nearly two decades at Procter & Gamble where she honed her skills in brand building, advertising development and consumer insight. Her global experience, spanning various markets and cultures, has been instrumental in her leadership roles.

Prior to joining Mark Anthony Brands International, Sakai held significant positions at Mondelēz International, further solidifying her reputation as a leader in the CPG industry.

Listen to Isabelle Sakai on The Speed of Culture podcast and gain insights into driving brand innovation, embracing global perspectives, and sustaining market leadership.

Key takeaways:

00:03:23 Embracing Global Leadership: Sakai highlights the transformative power of gaining global experience and cultural adaptability. By working in Zurich and frequently traveling to Dublin, Chicago and various Canadian offices, she illustrates how international exposure broadens professional perspectives. Harnessing these global insights can elevate brand strategies, making them more dynamic and adaptable to diverse markets. Sakai's journey showcases the value of stepping out of one's comfort zone to achieve growth and innovation on a global scale.

00:06:57 Understanding Consumer Needs: White Claw was born from the demand for a lighter, more flavorful, gluten-free alternative to beer. Recognizing this unmet consumer need allowed the brand to carve out new market niches and drive product development. Isabelle credits White Claw's long-term success to the brand's ability to deeply understand consumer desires. This insight disrupted the category, fostered innovation and built stronger, more loyal customer relationships.

00:14:33 Grab Life by the Claws: White Claw's new campaign, "Grab Life by the Claw," emerged from insights showcasing the market's need for social connection post-pandemic, and promotes togetherness and fun. By tapping into the emotional and social preferences of its consumers, this campaign underscores the brand's role in fostering memorable moments and strengthening connections. It exemplifies how aligning

with societal trends and consumer emotions can create powerful, resonant campaigns.

00:21:01 Innovating with Nonalcoholic Options: White Claw's entry into the nonalcoholic beverage market marked a significant innovation. In response to the growing consumer trend of reduced alcohol consumption, the brand launched White Claw 0% Alcohol. Sakai discusses how keenly listening to consumer preferences and adapting to evolving habits allows White Claw to continue to innovate and maintain its relevance in a dynamic market.

00:17:25 Creating Real-Life Connections: White Claw prioritizes real-life engagements to foster direct consumer interactions, moving beyond just digital and social media. The brand's presence at major music festivals and events, like the White Claw Shore Club at SXSW, Sundance and the Kentucky Derby, offers comfortable lounge spaces, custom merchandise and interactive activities. This strategy highlights the significance of combining online and offline efforts to create a unified and engaging brand experience.

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