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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 86: JENNIFER DIMOTTA – SUMMER LOOK BACK: CREATING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. We launched our podcast series in September of 2015. And since then, we've posted over 80 episodes and featured guests who shared their expertise pertaining to leadership, communication, marketing, innovation, and many other topics. Well, now that summer is upon us, we thought we would look back at our series and repost and replay the top four episodes of the past year. Based on the number of downloads and feedback we received from you and other listeners. This week we start our summer look back series with an episode that was originally posted last fall with Jennifer DiMotta, who talked with us about the changing landscape of retail and the way retailers are working to connect with their customers in a variety of ways. DiMotta is Vice President Digital and Omni channel for Blue Mercury, a leading luxury beauty retailer. She talked about creating the customer experience. Here's our conversation from last November with Jennifer DiMotta of Blue Mercury.

Ken White

Jennifer, thanks for taking the time to be with us. This is your first trip to William & Mary. Welcome.

Jennifer DiMotta

Thank you. I'm glad to be here very excited.

Ken White

It's a beautiful place, isn't it?

Jennifer DiMotta

Oh, it's gorgeous.

Ken White

Yeah.

Jennifer DiMotta

Yeah, it's gorgeous.

Ken White

We'll have to get you around a little bit more, but I know you're going to be talking to some students. Some MBA students and a group of students here as soon as we're done recording, and I know they're really looking forward to hearing from you. You live in especially interesting space. Would you call it marketing? What would you call it?

Jennifer DiMotta

That's a very good question. I would call it. I guess business. My boys managed e-commerce businesses, and you've gotta understand all the aspects of business when you manage e-commerce for everything from marketing to supply chain to finance to operations. It all counts when it comes to running an e-commerce business.

Ken White

Yeah, no kidding. Yeah, and a big piece of that is Omni channel.

Jennifer DiMotta

A big piece of that is Omni channel. Yup.

Ken White

I think people know what it is. They may not know the term.

Jennifer DiMotta

Right.

Ken White

How do you define that?

Jennifer DiMotta

Well, even get that in retail space as well. I think people have different definitions for it. My definition is pretty simplistic. It's looking at it from the customer's point of view, so how does the customer want to interact with retail? And more and more, I think you and I know, a long time ago, it used to be that the customer interacted one way with retail. They went to the store. That was their one real option, and now there's many channels, and they want to interact with them depending on what they're doing at that moment. They want to

go on their mobile phone. They want to go on their desktop. They want to do research there and then go shop in the store. They want to go the store and do research, and shop online. And really, this is a very customer-focused way of looking at. What do I need to do to grow sales in the retail industry? It's coming out from an Omni channel perspective.

Ken White

So creating the relationship with the customer is what it's all about.

Jennifer DiMotta

That's right, yes, yeah.

Ken White

How do you and people who work in the field like you? How do you balance all of those channels? There is a heck of a lot of it.

Jennifer DiMotta

It's not easy. Definitely not easy. Some of it, you've got to be consistent because the customer is looking for those cues to be consistent, whether it's a marketing promotion, the products that they're trying to research, the prices that they're looking for when they're buying a product or service. Those are the kind of the consistent pieces. The inconsistent pieces are giving the flexibility the customer is demanding for. So if I'm online and I want to reserve that product go walk in the store have it ready for me right up at the front. Those are the things where you bring together the two channels, and they don't even look like channels anymore. They're just one continuous path of purchase for that customer. Research and data kind of shows you quite a bit. There's a lot of great avenues for data, and this anymore used to be very difficult to understand what is a customer doing online and then how are they also doing something of the same transaction in stores, but the data is pretty omnipresent at this point in time.

Ken White

In your experience, are customers using that many channels, or do they tend to have one or two channels that they go to?

Jennifer DiMotta

Customer, I think it's very ubiquitous at this point in time. They are using a lot of channels. They're just using them for different paths in the purchase, and their purchases don't look the same. So my purchase today for something might look different than what my purchase looks like tomorrow, and it's because what I'm doing today versus what I'm doing tomorrow. I'm here at William & Mary today. I'm at work tomorrow. So all in, what I'm doing throughout the day will be very dependent on how I react and because I know I

have that flexibility at my feet. I use that to my benefit, and that is knowing that customers are doing that is really how you think about the Omni channel world.

Ken White

How much is video? How much of a role is that playing? I mean, before, it was print and photo. Now video, right?

Jennifer DiMotta

So important. People want to watch and visually see things. Shopping has always also been about visually shopping. And so the stores you're walking in, you're not reading as much content in the stores. You're looking at things. You're touching things. You're trying things on. It's your eyes that are either going toward something that's visually appealing or not. And in e-commerce, it's taken a little bit of a longer road to get to that point because we originally thought we needed tons and tons of content. The customer wanted to do a lot of research. And what we're finding more now is the customer actually doesn't want to do any more research than they used to do. They want to do a little bit more, but they need it to be very fast. Customers need convenience. They need insights just like retailers actually do. They don't need the data to be all in kind of a sprawled raw format. They need very quick insights, and video tends to connect all those dots very quickly. So if a customer can watch a 1-minute video and pull together as much information as what they can intake in that one minute, they're going to be much more satisfied than a picture or description or anything like that.

Ken White

Yeah, it wasn't that long ago content was king.

Jennifer DiMotta

It was king.

Ken White

Now video.

Jennifer DiMotta

And it's still content. It's funny. That's another definition that's kind of thrown out there quite a bit in a few different ways. The new content marketing is now becoming video, and it's not just video on your site anymore because customers are spreading their wings and where they actually make transactions. They're making transactions in Facebook. They're making transactions in Pinterest. They're making transactions really across the web wherever they are. I have a dash button for my smart water that I use, and I push the dash button, and Amazon delivers me smart water every couple days, and it's fantastic.

Ken White

Yeah.

Jennifer DiMotta

So those types of things are content, including video that's creating interest enough for somebody to transact right where they are.

Ken White

Does this mean that people in your field are now video production professionals? How do you tackle the video? That's not easy.

Jennifer DiMotta

It's not easy.

Ken White

Writing a text is one thing.

Jennifer DiMotta

Yup.

Ken White

A really well-produced video because many of our customers, millennials, grew up seeing terrific production.

Jennifer DiMotta

That's right.

Ken White

That's kind of what they expect.

Jennifer DiMotta

Yes. Yeah. I think even the younger generations expect it on some level. But as long as the customer is getting the information that they really want. I think that's the king part of content to me. If the aesthetics are not always there that's not going to be the priority. Every analysis we've done asking our consumers what is your priority when we're serving up marketing materials to you or when we're trying to develop the next beautiful website. What's priority to you? And often, their content requests are. I want the right price. I want to know the products in stock. They still have those very generic needs that you need to fulfill, even within some sort of content like video. So the aesthetics of it isn't as important as we think it is. The other parts of it, the meat of the content, becomes really important.

Ken White

So some things change some things.

Jennifer DiMotta

Some things stay the same, yeah.

Ken White

Yeah. What's next in terms of reaching out to customers? It seems like the tools we have at our disposal are really so many.

Jennifer DiMotta

Yeah.

Ken White

And with social media and the very audio, video, and somewhat. What do you think is next?

Jennifer DiMotta

Well, one of the things that I think is next is social. It's going to play a much bigger role in the transaction and service of retail. So if you think about the Internet of Things is important because customers you know how customers used to go to stores, and they still do. But they now have other avenues. Well, now that's going to also change for our dot coms. They don't have to necessarily go to your dot com. You need to be where they are. They don't need to be where you are. So if they're in Facebook or they're in Pinterest or they're in Instagram or they're on Twitter. If you're where they are, and they can touch base with you, they're highly likely. So we talk about things like chatbots things that are coming up in the picture and all these new words and opportunities, even beacons or apps for mobile. One of the best things about apps for mobile is you can push a communication to your customer, and the value of that to the consumer is only if the information that you're providing the customer is right time, right place, and so the more you think about right time right place. Transactions can easily happen in social because people are always in the social environment these days. They practically live there, right? We all do, and it's becoming a multigenerational activity, and that's how we're all connecting. We're going to connect the consumer to the retail more and more and more inside of those areas as well.

Ken White

We'll return to our conversation with Jennifer DiMotta of Blue Mercury in just a minute. Today's episode is part one of our four-part summer look back series, where we're reposting and replaying the top four episodes of the past year from our Leadership &

Business podcast series. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you, and your organization get to the next level by designing and delivering a leadership development program that specifically fits your needs and gets results. To learn more, go to wmleadership.com. Now back to Jennifer DiMotta on creating the customer experience.

Ken White

Now you're with Blue Mercury now, which is beauty, cosmetics. You were with Sports Authority very different.

Jennifer DiMotta

Office Depot before that.

Ken White

Those are three different.

Jennifer DiMotta

Really really different, right?

Ken White

So what was that like moving from one to another? Some similarities and some differences, I guess.

Jennifer DiMotta

Super similarities retail is fairly similar regardless of the product you're selling. Same functions. Lot of the same leadership styles I would say. Retail is a very flexible environment because it's private most often. And that brings on, you know, the energy to change or the energy to grow. And there's a lot of sense of urgency in retail. We're always moving very, very quickly. Yes, there's some nuances when you're selling the different products that you're selling, and especially it kind of lands at a little bit higher level, so in Office Depot, those are consumable products. You're buying paper every so often. The consumer is different because it's most often businesses. So you think about that in a different way. The Sports Authority world is very fashion. So it's changing every 90 days. Nike's always coming in with something, or Under Armour, whoever the brand is, but it's always changing its constant fashion. And then the interesting thing about beauty is there's two different sides of it. Skin care is very consumable, so it's very similar to the Office Depot. It's the same people they're coming back, and reordering and reordering, and then the makeup is the fashion side. And that's changing every 90 days. So I'm glad

I've had both experiences because those can you really have to think about those types of marketing vehicles and how they work for both of those types of products very differently.

Ken White

But the common thread seems to be it's all customer-centric.

Jennifer DiMotta

It's all customer-centric.

Ken White

It's all about them.

Jennifer DiMotta

It really is. Yes. Yeah.

Ken White

And it sounds like retail is in your blood. You love it.

Jennifer DiMotta

Love retail. I've been in retail for 20 years. I've been in digital about the same period of time, so really sort of growing up in digital and seeing the huge differences. I mean, we didn't have mobile phones when I started in digital. We didn't even think dot com was going to be that much of a driver for store sales. And it's now a huge influencer of store sales, and we just thought it kind of sit over there, and it's own little island and do its own little thing, and it's really come a long way. It's really very interesting. I love it.

Ken White

You know, we actually have a lot of alumni and corporate partners in retail here, and a question they tell me they're asked often is what's going to happen to the brick and mortar.

Jennifer DiMotta

Yeah.

Ken White

What do you what do you think? I mean, moving forward.

Jennifer DiMotta

Well, it's still about 89 percent of sales. It's not going anywhere. There's really holistic reasons why customer shops in a store and shops online. We are no longer an online buyer or a store buyer. We are that's where we are an Omni channel buyer. So sometimes you want to go the store because you want the tangibility you want it right now. You want to talk to somebody. It's a social experience. It's kind of like reading a magazine and pulling up your Kindle or your iPad. You kind of want that blend because, you know, in the end, there's a social side of stores, and there's a really non-social side of e-commerce. But there's a really great convenience in e-commerce. It's super fast. It's easy; I don't have to get off the couch. So it's all how do I feel today. What do I want to do? What am I buying, and do I feel comfortable doing it online, or would I rather do it in-store? And it's very contextual. It's one shopping experience at a time.

Ken White

You mentioned leadership in the retail space and in, the marketing space and all of these areas of business. How do you approach leadership?

Jennifer DiMotta

This is my favorite part of the last 20 years. So I've always been on the digital space, and most often, I'm building the e-commerce team from the ground up. It's been really fun, and I've had to bring it in a different way. So we're in a space right now where we have a lot of wonderful, amazing, intelligent digital folks. But 15 years ago or 20 years ago, there was no one. And even myself, I had limited experience. So I looked for potential. I looked for those things that I think we all look for now in leaders. You know you look for good analytical skills. You look for someone who's trusting, influential. Those are the things I was looking for when I was hiring 20-person teams or 40-person teams. And then you have a whole fun path after that because once you hire a bunch of new people, you watch them start interacting with each other, you start developing plans together, you start developing processes, you build team building. On top of that, you are the group that's making quite a bit of change. You're shaking things up in a store business. You're shaking things up in a catalog business. So leadership skills are incredibly important when you're the one kind of shaking things up, and it may not be well-liked across the board, and in other areas, they love it. So you have to be super influential. You have to be very persuasive. You also have to be very patient, listening, trusting, transparent. It's really one of the most important parts of being in a digital land, especially when you're in a company where the store sales are a good 90 percent of the business right now. Yeah.

Ken White

You've worked in three different industries, so to speak. How much, and I asked this of a lot of leaders. How much does passion about the industry? How important is that in terms of the way you lead?

Jennifer DiMotta

You mean for like the beauty industry or the sports industry?

Ken White

Yeah, those are two different industries.

Jennifer DiMotta

Yeah.

Ken White

So do you approach leadership differently, and I guess more importantly do you have to love the industry in order to be an effective leader?

Jennifer DiMotta

You know, that's a good question. I would say that you don't necessarily need to love the products, but you need to love what you're doing for the customer and for the industry, so if you're really bought in and so passionate about what you're doing for this industry that's how I've always approached it. And I love learning while I'm at a beauty industry or while I'm at a sports industry. But I think what people read in me is seeing that passion for digital or just passion for helping the customer, or I'm a digital person that has a lot of passion for helping move customers into our stores because a Blue Mercury one of the big differentiators is we have true experts in our stores. And you know you're not going to get that on e-commerce. You're not going to get that feeling in e-commerce. You'll get that fact, but you won't get that feeling. And so that passion in me leads me, I guess, to the right decisions and the right strategies.

Ken White

Nice to have a job you love.

Jennifer DiMotta

I love it. Yeah.

Ken White

That's our conversation that was originally posted in November with Jennifer DiMotta of Blue Mercury, and that's our podcast for this week. Installment number two of our summer look back series will be posted next week. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your organization, check out our website at

wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guest Jennifer DiMotta and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.