



THE
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OF MARKETING

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FOR TOMORROW



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MEETING YOUR MATCH: ELEVATING YOUR BRAND THROUGH EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION



Timberland is an outdoor, adventure-inspired lifestyle wear retailer. It has over 200 stores worldwide and earned revenues of US\$1.5 billion in FY21.*

Drieke Leenknecht is CMO at Timberland. She is a global marketing and business leader with more than 20 years of global communications, product, marketing and general management experience and has built her career around elevating leading consumer brands and driving category, product, and organizational performance. She has spent much of her career with Nike, holding leadership roles in Europe, China, and the US, most recently as global vice president of influencer marketing and collaborations.

The Capgemini Research Institute spoke to Drieke about the importance of brand collaboration and how Timberland is focused on being a purpose-led brand.

*V.F. Corporation 10K report, 2021

COLLABORATING WITH CONSUMERS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC AGE

How has the pandemic impacted your brand strategy?

— When the ability to connect with people in a face-to-face manner is suddenly denied to you, the innate need for human contact becomes more pressing. The pandemic accelerated the development of virtual connectivity, and an even bigger acceleration of everything digital and now meta.

At Timberland we have been transitioning to an always-on digital marketing model. As a result of Covid, we accelerated this process – pivoting our marketing model to include not only the usual digital touchpoints, but touchpoints in the metaverse that have become a crucial part of many of our consumers’ journeys.

We knew we needed to go where our consumers were going, that we needed to be agile in order to keep up with their shifting mindsets. We’ve found that people of all ages are present in meta, for example, on popular games such as Fortnite on the Epic online gaming platform. We started to evolve our plans to correspond to tastes, and tailor our content for those platforms. For example, in 2021, we partnered with The Fabricant, a London-based digital fashion house, to create virtual products from our Night Sky collection for the metaverse. The collection was inspired by the Northern Lights and came to life stunningly in meta!



Drieke Leenknecht
Chief Marketing Officer,
Timberland – a VF Company

How is Timberland collaborating and co-creating with consumers?

— Consumers today want to engage with brands, and even more, they want to partner with you in a more active way.

We acknowledge this. For example, we are launching Construct 10061, an innovation project that helps us take Timberland's design and craftsmanship to the next level. Construct brings together Timberland's industrial designers, and innovators with leading external footwear innovators and craftspeople. They get together at our innovation lab called The Shed to create new products and push the boundaries of footwear design. As the pandemic has catalyzed the shift to digitized systems, virtual collaboration has become a key tool in our design and innovation processes.

However, what makes the Construct program unique is the possibility for consumers to engage with and participate in the footwear innovation process itself. It not only inspires the footwear aficionados across the globe, it also gives our design innovators great insights.

Virtual collaboration has enabled our brand marketers to share Timberland with the world and invite footwear aficionados to play an active part in the brand they love.

The opportunity presented by digital product creation is amazing. The 3D digital footwear content that we share with our consumers has one of the highest engagement rates on our social platforms. The language with which consumers connect, communicate, and interact today is a hybrid of digital and metaverse – and it is no longer niche, it's universal.

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Executive Conversations

Brands in the fashion and lifestyle space are collaborating more and more with consumers. Are there still untapped opportunities?

— Brand-consumer collaboration will only accelerate. We can only project the future based on current data and insights, but I think we can be confident of this. The days of an exclusive relationship between the product and marketing teams, with no outside input pre-production, are gone; that model is completely exhausted. Consumers in today's market want a hand in every new season. It's time to rewrite the playbook and direct our efforts toward new technologies and this evolving consumer demand.

MIXING IT UP: THE ART OF CROSS-BRAND COLLABORATION

How do high-touch relationship marketing models set brands apart?

— Relationship management has always been a critical part of brand building. At Nike I was part of a team that started "energy marketing" 15 years ago. Energy marketing is an extension of traditional marketing that's about generating demand and building community by tapping into shared passion for a brand and its products. And collaborations are the highest form of energy marketing. Collaboration is now the paradigm for brand-consumer relationships. Brands need to create relationships with the people that are influencing customers; this kind of collaboration is now key to brands' survival.

"When you collaborate effectively, the relationship is mutually beneficial, productive, and elevates your brand. But you have to be wary, as ill-judged or executed collaboration can harm your brand."

When you collaborate effectively, the relationship is mutually beneficial, productive, and elevates your brand. But you have to be wary as ill-judged or executed collaboration can harm your brand.

Should a brand limit its collaboration to retain a mystery and novelty factor?

— It's crucial to choose the right collaborations and to execute effectively. Quality, rather than quantity of exposure will drive brand growth. When

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evaluating a potential collaboration, you should ask what the prospective partner could add – and do you need that? You need to understand your brand's voids and opportunities, whether they are in product range or consumer connection, for example. You should choose the partner that can best help you fill those gaps.

It's also crucial in any collaboration that there is

a balance of respect. Take Timberland's recent collaboration with Supreme or our project with Tommy Hilfiger this past fall. Each of these came from a working relationship where both teams showed passion and there was mutual respect from the start.



BUILDING PURPOSE AND SUSTAINABILITY INTO YOUR BRAND PROMISE

Timberland has a very purpose and mission-driven business model. What role does marketing play in this?

— The best-known global brands are strongly purpose-led. When I set about the transformation of a brand, one of the first aspects I look at is consumer value proposition and whether that is fully aligned with our purpose, across the business. As a brand marketer, to be successful, your definition of purpose and mission statement must be adopted by the enterprise at large. This is definitely the case with Timberland: brand, product, and marketplace are all aligned with our purpose. That is what we are aiming for with the transformation of Timberland.

Timberland is a global iconic brand with a 50-year heritage. Our mission is to inspire and equip our consumers – we call them "Adventurous Doers" – to step outside, work hard together and move the world forward. Our vision is to build a more equitable and green future. It's the brand at large, the enterprise at large that galvanizes this purpose. It's what drives our commitment, engagement and service to our consumers.

Brands that stand the test of time, and grow stronger as they do so, do three things right: first, they celebrate their histories and brand identities; second, they bring energy and passion to the business; and third, they make sure they are keeping the brand's edge, making it relevant for new generations of consumers.

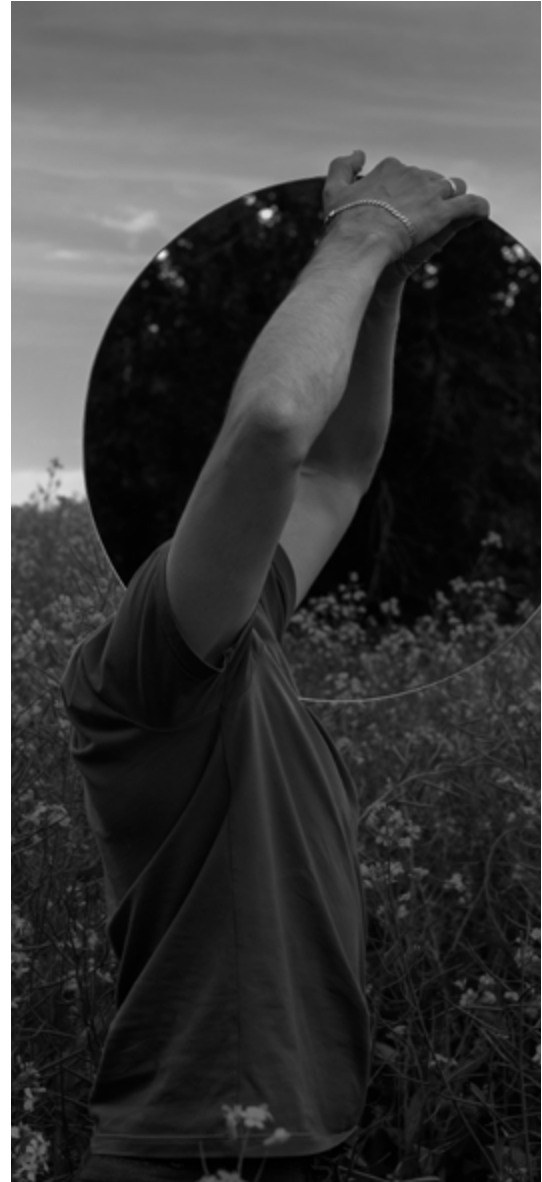
Why is it essential for consumer brands to take a stand on important social and economic issues?

— A brand must be confident in its core, its defining values. This confidence will be transmitted to the consumer when they look to commit to a brand.

Younger consumers, especially, are holding brands accountable on their purpose and identities. They want to see action that fulfills the headline-grabbing promises. The beauty of consumer-led brands is that the consumer has a voice; their opinion becomes an important one in deciding the direction of a brand.

What do your customers expect in sustainable products?

— We began building eco-innovation into our products from the early 2000s, before it was relevant to a lot of consumers. Eco-innovation stands as our best opportunity to minimize our impact and work toward a greener future. Circular design and sourcing our natural materials through regenerative agriculture are two crucial areas of focus for us.



Executive Conversations

Our consumer research categorically shows that it is non-negotiable that brands be sustainable going forward. And it's our job as marketers to listen to the voices of our customers and to make sure we speak to them in a language they understand. We need to clearly explain the steps we are taking with each product: whether it's the materials we're using or special methods of make.

Earlier this year, we launched our circular-design platform TimberLoop™, which encourages consumers to return any used Timberland items for refurbishment and recycling. In addition, we launched the TimberLoop™ Trekker City Hiker on Earth Day (April 22nd). It's our first circular product designed specifically for circularity – it's engineered to be disassembled and recycled at the end of its life. These are just two examples of the kinds of innovations we're focusing on: innovations that we know will speak to the consumer.



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