



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

Episode 114: Digital Businesses - Community Involvement

Guest: Kelly Stewart

This is Prove It. A podcast for impatient business owners, overwhelmed marketers, and PR practitioners with no time for podcasts. In just 10 minutes they answer 3 questions and offer proof of what's working in marketing communications today. Here's Debbie Albert, President of Albert Communications.

Debbie Albert: Hello, there. On this episode of Prove It! we're going to look at purpose-driven businesses. It may be hard to say, but bear with me, because although this may not seem directly related to marketing, it absolutely is. I've asked Kelly Stewart to join me for this episode. Her firm is called The Positive Business, and you can find out more about it and get her website from ours. As you're about to hear, Kelly is passionate about this topic. She describes herself as a champion for positive businesses and a practical optimist, which I just love. Her background is in client services, new business development, and marketing, and today, she helps business leaders develop strategies that will help them do well by doing good. So Kelly, welcome to Prove It!

Kelly Stewart: Well, thank you, Debbie, I'm delighted to be here.

Debbie: Thanks so much for being here, let me get right to it. As you know, it's ten minutes, three questions, and a Prove point. So I'm going to ask my first question right away, which I'm sure our listeners are wondering about. **What does it mean to be a purpose-driven business?**

Kelly: Awesome, okay, sure. A purpose-driven business is the big why in business, and if we can just roll back to the 80s, 90s, back then we used to operate off of a mission statement, which was really the statement of really how things are done. We're the best widget maker on the west



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coast, and that was good, right, and okay, but what did that mean to me as a potential employee? What did that mean to me, as a customer, even? How were they qualifying best? So, purpose today is really more about how a company reaches all of its stakeholders, and what it hopes to accomplish, and that's typically beyond just a singular pursuit of profit.

Debbie: That's interesting, so tell me a little bit more about that. **You talk about the why, when things are done well. Can you explain a little bit more about that?**

Kelly: Sure. A company's purpose today is really, as I said, it's broader and bigger than ever before. It's less about doing no harm, to intentionally doing good in business, as part of the core business activities. It's not something that sits on the side, or something that's only done in good economic times, right? It's about the every day business practices that in some way, shape, or form improve the world.

Debbie: I love that. I love the intentionality of it, I love, say that again. It's no longer doing no harm, it's actually intentionally doing good.

Kelly: Doing good in business, and in the core business activities, I think a lot of people miss this, right? But it's in the way we intentionally bring out the best in our employees. It's the way we lead with authenticity. It's the way that we look to work, maybe with local suppliers, or employ a group of people that are chronically under-employed. And all of that is part of the core business activities, while of course, we're trying to also improve the planet. Again, doing no harm to the planet, that's a good place to start, if that's where you're coming into this, but this is really a purpose-driven business that's doing it well, is say, "oh, we can do better than do no harm. We can actually do better." There are few large companies, I believe it's Nestle is one of them. There's an alliance and they're looking to create plastic bottles out of bio-based material, right? So not only is that innovative, but that's really good for the planet.



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Debbie: And I guess the efforts aren't just environmentally-focused. There must be some that are also hiring-focused, HR-wise-

Kelly: Absolutely, and yeah, that's true. There's a lot out there that is baked into purpose, and some of your listeners might be hearing this. It's bringing compassion into business, right? Leading with love, mindful negotiations, developing apprenticeship, right, mentorship, this idea of coaching people. So that's a lot of what we see on the HR level, diversity, inclusion, there are great companies that are doing a lot of things. Diversity is a lot of things, and there are companies out there that are, again, intentionally employing people who are cognitively diverse, right, for whatever reason, because they have found roles within their organization, they took a step back and strategically, and that's important about purpose, it needs to be strategic. Strategically looked at this, and said, "how can we leverage cognitive diversity?" Where that just wasn't a conversation that was happening 10 years ago, 20, 40 years ago.

Debbie: Help me understand, I think I told you before we even decided to do this, that I'll interrupting, because it's such an interesting conversation. **How is a purpose-driven business different from what, when I was in corporate America, we called corporate social responsibility?**

Kelly: Oh, sure, thanks, Debbie, I get asked that a lot, so I'm glad you did. Corporate social responsibility is good. I always say, here at the positive business, we do not judge. Anything that's being done that's good and benefits others is a good thing. What a lot of it is evolving today, and traditionally, corporate social responsibility, or CSR as it's known by, sit a little separately from the core business activities. It was a separate initiative, or division, of the company, and in that way, it was very vulnerable to changes in the economic conditions, and very vulnerable to changes in leadership. So when companies are authentically purpose-driven, they do all of those good things, right, and some of that looks like the good things that are done



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through corporate social responsibility, but it's also part of these core business activities, and it happens in good times and in bad, and the leaders do their best to ensure that what they're doing transcends into the next leadership team.

Debbie: That's a great, great answer, because so this is a complete integration of doing the right things in business as part of business, not as, "oh, we need to have a CSR department, because that's what people are doing these days."

Kelly: Exactly, and that's called purpose-washing, and I will tell you, in the post-Internet social media era, we all operate in informed, connected, and transparent markets, and people will find out if you, well, not you, Debbie, but if a company is doing it less than authentically, right? And they're doing it because they think, "oh, we have to have this purpose stuff, and we do things that look like purpose." And a big part of being a purpose-driven business is also measuring the impact that you're making. So, it's a business initiative. It's strategic, right, so it has to be aligned to a goal, maybe that's paying a living wage, right, or reducing waste to a landfill by manufacturing or creating upcycled products. So it has to be strategic, and it has meeting some of these new standards that I was talking about, like bringing out the best in your team, operating with authenticity, minimizing your energy usage. But, then it also has to be measurable, so if you don't set goals for something, then you don't know, well, first of all, you don't know if what you're doing is working at all, if you don't take a baseline, but then you have to set the goal for, oh, how are we going to improve that number? And I think that that's, again, a hallmark of an authentically purpose-driven business is they keep those measurements, they set new goals for themselves. They make it core to their strategic business activities, and then they're super comfortable being transparent, and that's a great thing.

Debbie: No, that's wonderful.



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Kelly: Then they can talk about what they do.

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Debbie: We'll get to the Prove It! Part, and then I might have some questions during when you prove it, but if you prove it, tell us about a company that really did benefit, and did well by doing good.

Kelly: Mm-hm, well, okay, so many to choose from. Oh, this one is actually near and dear to my heart, because they are in our local community, where I am, but it's AWeber Communications, they're the e-mail marketing company, and they do fabulous things with their culture and with their community, and I recently spoke with someone from their organization who was talking about the business side of it also, and in the technology world, and I'm sure I won't remember all of her statistics, but the general gist of it was that certainly in the technology world, in the economic climate that we're in right now, hiring is tight, and with the things that they do, which is really taking care of their employees, so they provide healthcare for not only the employee, but they cover it for the family as well. They do on-site yoga, they have chefs come in and create healthy meals three times a day for their employees. I believe they have a garden out back, so they even grow some of their own food. They do a lot around health and wellness, and as that is paying off for them, in just the general, again, and this is a hallmark of a positive business, too, is that you just do these things because they're good, right? So not only do these things benefit their employees personally, but it's helping their businesses in terms of retention. They're surpassing all types of industry averages for how long people will stay with them, and that ties to how well they can serve their clients, in terms of better products, better services.

Debbie: Absolutely.



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Kelly: Because they're staying together, right, working together as a team. There's so much goodness that comes from that, and I'm sure I haven't done that story justice, but that's a company to check out.

Debbie: Well, for sure, if you can prove that doing the right thing is going to lead to a higher retention rate, which means the morale's going to be higher in your business, you're going to be able to serve clients better for a longer period of time. You're not changing over the team they're working with. That's a real Prove point for me.

Kelly: It really is, and it's really for me this reframing of business as usual, right? I think that collectively, we've all just accepted that this is the way business has to be. Over the years, you talk to people, "oh, how's your job going?" "Ugh." Or I noticed some people who own their companies, or the business leaders, "hey, how's it going?" "Ugh." Right, and everyone just seems to accept that, "ugh" is okay, and I think what we're seeing is this shift of saying, no, it doesn't have to be like that, and of course, it doesn't have to be like that. It's 2018, there's a lot that we can do.

Debbie: Absolutely.

Kelly: And there's a lot of really proven research that goes into these things that have been, the research has been being done for 25, 30 years. Some of this research goes back to the early 1900s, it just wasn't talked about a lot.

Debbie: Right.



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Kelly: Now, we can share these things, and so I think AWeber is a great example of that. Certainly, there are other companies like Ben & Jerry's, Athleta, which is the women's apparel line, outdoor apparel line of Gap. Not only do they do a lot of great things as you might imagine by and for women, but I think it's like 40% of their products are currently made by recycled or sustainable material, and their goal is to be at 80% by 2020.

Debbie: Oh, that's terrific.

Kelly: Cool stuff.

Debbie: Well, that is good. We are out of time, but I want to tell the listeners that if you want to learn more about how to turn your business into a purpose-driven company, go to Kelly's website, which is the Positive Business. All the information is on our website. Kelly, I want to thank you, because I find this topic really fascinating, so thank you so much for being here.

Kelly: Well, thank you for having me.

Debbie: And I want to also thank everyone for listening. If you have thoughts about this episode, leave your comments on our website, and stay tuned for more episodes of Prove It! to gain even more clarity in what's working in marketing communications today. Take care.

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