

Agency For Change Podcast : Michelle Dziuban, Marketing Manager at Rowdy Mermaid

Announcer:

Welcome to Agency For Change, the podcast that brings you the stories of people creating positive change in the world. We explore what inspires these changemakers, the work they're doing, and how they share their message. Each of us can play a part in change, and these are the people who show us how.

Lyn Wineman:

Hi everyone. This is Lyn Wineman, Founder, and Chief Strategist at KidGlov, and we're starting with something a little different today. Did you hear that? In honor of today's guest, Michelle Dziuban, Marketing Manager at Rowdy Mermaid, I'm drinking a Lion's Root kombucha while doing this interview. So, pardon the glugging sounds.

Lyn Wineman:

I have to say, I love this brand, and I love Michelle's energy and passion for making the world a better place. And at the end of this episode, I'll tell you whether or not I love this Lion's Root kombucha. Michelle, it's great to have you here today. Would you start by sharing more about Rowdy Mermaid?

Michelle Dziuban:

Yes, absolutely. Hi, Lyn, so happy to be here today. Happy to introduce you guys to what we like to call the cleaner, crisper corner of the kombuchaverse. Rowdy Mermaid is a low sugar, low acid approachable kombucha that is safe enough for a three-year-old to drink, but palatable enough for an adult to enjoy.

Michelle Dziuban:

Beyond the benefits that come with consuming kombucha, just think about your beneficial acids, your B vitamins, and your probiotics, we brew things a little bit differently. We brew functional flavors using only what nature created: plants, fruits, roots, mushrooms, and botanicals, to create function forward blends. Lyn, that kombucha you're drinking today, Lion's Root, the function is clarity, and that is because we use an ingredient called lion's mane mushroom, a natural nootropic, which helps with brain function. On top of the flavor names of all of our kombuchas, you'll see the function for each one, which is something super unique and special.

Michelle Dziuban:

And lastly, we're known for turning kombucha skeptics, or kombucha haters, into kombucha lovers, because our kombucha isn't too sweet or too sour, or acidic. So, Lyn, I would love to actually hear if you've ever consumed other kombucha brands and how Rowdy compares to it.

Lyn Wineman:

Okay. Michelle, this is why this is kind of a unique experience. Three years ago, I was a kombucha fanatic, and I drank a lot of kombucha. And then I got very sick, and I blamed it on the kombucha and I haven't had one since. That I opened this is only due to the fact that I was reading up on it, and if you say it is safe enough for a three-year-old, it's probably okay for me. So, fingers crossed here.

Michelle Dziuban:

Yeah, definitely. I'm happy to chat a little bit more about the safety as well. That's something that really sets Rowdy apart. Despite other kombuchas ... Well, let me take a step back. Kombucha is fermented, right? So, naturally alcohols do occur. And despite other kombucha companies trying to raise the alcohol limit for a beverage to be considered non-alcoholic, which is 0.5% ABV to 1%, we stick to what we know. We have a patent pending for a process for how we control the alcohol to ensure that it is always below 0.5% ABV throughout shelf life, which is really special.

Michelle Dziuban:

We create a product that is safe and under spec in both sugar and alcohol for kids, pregnant women, recovering alcoholics to enjoy. It's really, really cool that we're able to produce something that is safe and something that we're proud of, and know that it's good enough for everyone to enjoy from a three-year-old to an adult, such as ourselves, who really like the flavor and the unique ingredients.

Lyn Wineman:

You know what? This is really crisp. I'm taking another sip. It is really crisp, and I taste the pineapple. If you told me I was drinking mushrooms, I'd be a little bit freaked out. I didn't realize that's what Lion's Root was. But I know mushrooms have a lot of beneficial aspects to them.

Michelle Dziuban:

Absolutely.

Lyn Wineman:

And clarity is a really important thing, too. You know, Michelle, I am a huge believer that what we put into our bodies has so much effect on, not just our physical health, but I also think our brain health, how we sleep, and so forth. And, I just think it's neat that Rowdy Mermaid can be a part of that.

Michelle Dziuban:

Definitely.

Lyn Wineman:

I'm fascinated by people's stories. I want to talk about you for a minute, and then we'll come back to Rowdy Mermaid. I'm curious, Michelle, how did your path lead you to this position at this point in your career? Did you grow up and on the playground you said, I want to be the Marketing Director for a regional, soon to be huge national kombucha brand?

Michelle Dziuban:

It's a great question. I was born and raised in Chicago, and growing up, we'd always come out to Colorado, and I just fell in love with the mountains and the mountain life. I grew up camping and always was connecting with the outdoors. I think my first camping trip, I was two years old, which was really special.

Michelle Dziuban:

I was living in Chicago and I knew after, I don't know, maybe my fifth trip to Boulder, I knew I belonged there. I thought to myself, how can I make that shift, because I was working for a software company in Chicago, just living the city life, the hustle and bustle. And I remember looking for even the smallest bit of nature in the city, and I would just go and meditate there, because I knew I needed to be in nature, and I needed that. It was part of who I am as a person. And so, I thought to myself, how can I make this shift from working for corporate America to going to work for a brand that I really love? And I always knew that working for a company that provided healthy products for consumers was super important to me, just because I lead a healthy lifestyle.

Michelle Dziuban:

Long story short, I moved out to Colorado to work for another tech company, and then I met people in the industry. And if anyone listening knows Boulder, they know that it is the Mecca for natural foods. I just networked my butt off, and I ended up working for a company called Skratch Labs, which creates better-for-you Gatorade, essentially. It's just sugar, salt, and real fruit. It doesn't have any of the chemicals, which is really cool, and aligned with what I was doing.

Michelle Dziuban:

And then, I think it was the day I moved to Boulder, I tried Rowdy Mermaid when we were still in glass bottles, and it was at a coffee shop. And I thought to myself, this product is so special and it's so different. I thought, how cool would it be to work there one day? I think it took maybe two years of me just being a huge fan of the product and thinking of different ideas that I had for the company in my mind.

Michelle Dziuban:

I eventually met people at Rowdy, and the rest is history. I was super excited because not only does Rowdy create products that are better for the environment. The way that we source, the way that we look at ingredients, and the way that, instead of just taking from the earth, how can we give back to it? They aligned with all of my personal values, and the number one is sustainability and climate change. I'm looking for ways that we can fight that. It only made sense. So, that's the story of how I got to where I am, being a mermaid myself.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that. The brand is really special, and I think, Michelle, there's so much magic in finding a career where you can both use your talents, but also use them for a product or a company that you really love that aligns to your values. I think that's really cool. I'd love to, based on that, take a deeper dive and talk about how Rowdy Mermaid kombucha is making a positive impact on the world.

Michelle Dziuban:

Cool. I feel like I could probably talk for hours about this, because we are doing so much, which is amazing. I want to break this out into two different sections, if you will. First, talking about the product or the liquid, what's inside the can. And then, the foundation or our missions and values of Rowdy Mermaid as a company.

Michelle Dziuban:

So, first, as you know, I said that Rowdy Mermaid is a low sugar, low asset approachable kombucha that is safe enough for a three-year-old, but palatable enough for an adult to enjoy. The first way that we're different, or how we stand apart from others, is that we're approachable. It tastes really good. Like I said, people that are scared of it, or don't like kombucha, they love Rowdy. What I like to say is, after a run or something, I can just crush it. Whereas a lot of other kombucha brands, you have to close it up, and put it back in the fridge, and finish it off later.

Michelle Dziuban:

Another thing to touch on that shows how we're different is the function. As I mentioned, Lyn, the Lion's Root that you're drinking now has a function forward benefit to it. And that is clarity, because of the ingredients that we choose and that we source.

Michelle Dziuban:

And then, lastly is the safety. I mentioned that we have our patent pending process for how we control alcohol. We actually have an in-house laboratory, and we conduct DNA research on the bacterial streams of every single batch of kombucha that goes out the door. This helps us better understand how we can improve both our process and our supply chain. And then, again, this led us to control our alcohol, sugar, and our ferments to make a clean and safe product that sets us apart. The kombu that you're drinking was tested for sugar, acidity, and alcohol levels, which I think is super cool and something that not every kombucha company is doing.

Michelle Dziuban:

The other part of this is our mission and our values. We have this healthy systems initiative that drives everything we do at Rowdy.

Lyn Wineman:

That's really interesting. Tell me a little bit more about that. I love that your value system is all based on health, and I imagine it's all kinds of health, not just physical health.

Michelle Dziuban:

Absolutely. Essentially, it's a holistic approach that begins with the recognition that everything is connected and works in coordination. It mandates that every part of that system, from a botanical extract that we source to a type of ink on our label, has to fit our standard for what is considered, quote unquote "healthy". Our commitment to healthy systems means that we must support the plants, the processes, the people, and the communities along our supply chain, and everything has to be vetted for sustainable, ethical, and inclusive qualities, which is something that's super, super unique and something that I love about Rowdy.

Michelle Dziuban:

A few of those actions that speak to the healthy system. The first is that we use sustainably sourced ingredients through the entire supply chain, working with small farms and suppliers, so our customers benefit from plants picked at their peak. It's what inspired us to obtain our full organic certification in 2019, and it's what fuels our goal to become the first fully regenerative kombucha. Within our healthy systems, we also have diversity inclusion, pride and gender equality, and women's empowerment. And all of the information about what we're doing to drive those actions can be found on our website.

Lyn Wineman:

Michelle, that's got to make it feel really rewarding to work for a company that's got those kinds of values. But I think today, people are also more impacted as consumers. And we want to put our money into a product that we like, but also a product that we know is doing good things for the world. I think that's a really cool thing about Rowdy Mermaid and the brand. Now, you mentioned that you are very passionate about sustainability, and I have heard that you were involved in the process of changing from bottles to cans. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Michelle Dziuban:

Yes, absolutely. We knew that with sustainability being at our core, that shipping glass bottles and storing glass bottles, they're just heavier. We also found out that aluminum cans have a recycling rate of 67%, compared to 26.4% for glass bottles, which was really interesting. And so, we knew as a company, we had to switch from glass bottles to cans. However, back when we made this change, cans were just not seen as a method for holding the kombucha liquid, right? You think of kombucha, you think of glass bottles. It seems more premium. And so, we made a daring move, as we like to say, and we were the first kombucha company of our size to 100% switch, from glass bottles to cans. A lot of kombucha brands, when they make that switch, they'll launch their can next to their glass bottles on the shelf. And we decided just to do it all. And since doing that, we've seen a 40% increase in velocities since the switch, which is amazing.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow, good for you. You know what? I have to say, too, for anybody who hasn't seen the cans, they're really cute. When I went to the store, knowing I was getting ready to talk to you, and bought this kombucha, they're really cute on the shelves.

Michelle Dziuban:

Oh, thank you.

Lyn Wineman:

They've got the great mermaid tail and the design is very clean, and so, it's neat. I'm glad that switch worked out well for you. It's great to see companies who make bold decisions, and then it's great to see them work out. Michelle, I'm really curious then, as you're somebody who's leading change, making a difference, working with a company that makes a difference, what are some of the biggest challenges that you face?

Michelle Dziuban:

That is a great question. I think that the biggest challenge is being able to move fast enough and be nimble enough, especially at a company of our size, where we're growing so quickly. It is important to understand that things change quickly, and you have to be constantly flexible.

Lyn Wineman:

You know what, I feel that too, that since we're in the middle of COVID and a national and global pandemic, it almost feels like things are changing even faster now than they did six months ago. So, that's a reality. Michelle, what advice do you have for people out there who, like you, would like to lead positive change?

Michelle Dziuban:

That is a great question, as well. I think it's important to know that there will always, always, always be someone who tells you that you are wrong, puts your ideas down, and tells you that they are not good enough. I think that it's very important to remember your values, who you are, and what you stand for, and what matters. I think that's the best advice that I can give.

Lyn Wineman:

That's great advice. I think always following your values is really great advice. Michelle, you and I are both in marketing, and I always have to ask one marketing related question. Can you share how you get the word out about the good work that's being done at Rowdy Mermaid?

Michelle Dziuban:

Well, I will say it's been a little bit difficult with the world we're living in now with COVID, because I know that when people try Rowdy, they are instantly a fan. Demos have always been really great for us, or trials. Getting the product in front of people at events, or at Whole Foods demo stand, or what have you. That has been difficult, but I know that once people try it, they're sold. That is important.

Michelle Dziuban:

Know what people like about your product and focus on that. We know that we have a kombucha that tastes completely different than anything else on the market, and so finding your why, or finding how you're different than others, and focusing on that. And then, also staying up to date on industry trends, especially during COVID, when things are changing so much, so drastically. We actually found out, we learned that people are starting to order more products online. They don't want to go to the grocery store. So, we just recently launched our B2C website, which is super exciting. And that was a result of being nimble and staying up to date with what is going on in the world. I think those are my biggest pieces of advice.

Lyn Wineman:

That's fantastic. I am going to say it was hard to find where I am, so I would definitely participate in the B2C website. That's really cool. Another thing I love is motivational quotes. Could you give us a few of your own Michelle Dziuban words of wisdom?

Michelle Dziuban:

Absolutely. Lyn, I have to say, I thought on this one for a little bit, and I think what kept coming up when I thought about this question is - to just control what's in your control. I've been thinking about this a lot lately. Personally, climate change is very, very important to me and I think, oh my gosh, we need to stop it. We need to stop it right now. And it's, when you think of the big picture, it is so overwhelming. But if you say, "Hey, what can I actually control right now?" And it's reducing single use plastic. It's maybe not eating as much meat. It's these different little things that I personally can control and that can translate into work life as well. That is the quote that I wanted to share today.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that. Control what's in your control. I feel the same way. That's an outcome of the pandemic for me. You have to get comfortable with knowing that there's opportunity in shifting sand, as long as you keep looking for it. I think that's great.

Michelle Dziuban:

Absolutely.

Lyn Wineman:

Michelle, for our listeners who would like to learn more, how can they find out about Rowdy Mermaid, and where can they purchase the product?

Michelle Dziuban:

That's a great question. First and foremost, follow us on Instagram, @rowdymermaid. And then, as I mentioned, we just launched our B2C website this month, rowdymermaid.com. You can purchase all eight of our kombucha functions, or our function forward kombucha flavors there. In person, you can find us on shelves at your local Sprouts. We're also in Whole Foods, Natural Grocer, and the Fresh Market.

Michelle Dziuban:

And we actually have a mermaid locator on our website. If you go to Rowdymermaid.com and then hit store locator, we'll be able to find a retailer near you.

Lyn Wineman:

Fantastic. Who doesn't want a mermaid locator? I love that.

Michelle Dziuban:

I know, and I will say, Lyn, we have a lot of exciting things in the pipeline in 2021. So, for folks listening, definitely stay tuned for some exciting things from the mermaids at Rowdy Mermaid.

Lyn Wineman:

Fantastic. I love that. Hey, this is the moment of truth. And you know, when I took the first sip, when I opened the can and took the first sip, I don't know if the look on my face revealed it, but I was a little bit nervous, because a lot of kombuchas have a little bit of that weird taste. This is delicious. It's light, and crisp, and really tasty. I think I could drink more of this. So, thank you for introducing me to the product. We'll see if later this afternoon, people can notice if I have more clarity than I did earlier this morning, as well.

Michelle Dziuban:

There you go. You have to let us know how the workday goes. In the meantime, we'll have to get your address so we can send you some more kombucha to try all the functions and flavors.

Lyn Wineman:

I would love that so much. Hey, this has been a blast. I really appreciate you taking the time. I know you're busy, and I know that you have so many exciting things happening. I encourage people to go and check out more about what Rowdy Mermaid is doing. Thanks so much, Michelle.

Michelle Dziuban:

Thanks, Lynn. Thanks for having us today.

Announcer:

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