

# Aleco Azqueta Transcript

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**[00:00:22] Matt:** To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now, and how you can keep up. Welcome to "The Speed of Culture."

Up today on "The Speed of Culture" podcast, we're thrilled to be joined by Aleco Azqueta, the global vice president of marketing at Grey Goose Vodka. With over two decades of experience in brand building, Aleco has played a pivotal role in transforming Grey Goose into a symbol of modern luxury and cultural relevance. This year marks a significant moment in his journey with Grey Goose, continuing to break new ground in consumer engagement and cultural partnerships. Great to see you, Aleco.

**[00:01:07] Aleco:** Likewise, Matt. Great to be on, and thank you for that intro. I appreciate it.

**[00:01:12] Matt:** Absolutely. So, of course, we are doing this podcast in early September. For those that live in the New York area, that means one thing: US Open season. I know one of the big drinks at the US Open is the Honey Deuce cocktail, which has really become a cultural symbol that transcends sport. You see it on all the newscasts that are covering the US Open. What does Grey Goose have to do with this famous cocktail, and why do you see it as a big cultural and promotional driver for the brand?

**[00:01:41] Aleco:** You called it "US Open season." We actually call it "Honey Deuce season." And the Honey Deuce is something we like to say is an overnight success, but eighteen years in the making. So, I think it's a real testament to the consistency of the partnership with the US Open, and it's really unbelievable just seeing what a cultural phenomenon this cocktail has become. It really is a marketer's dream just seeing your brand being such an integral part of the cultural conversations. I don't think you can go on social media right now and not see something on your feed about the Honey Deuce at the US Open.

**[00:02:19] Matt:** Yeah. So, of course, Grey Goose is the official vodka of the US Open. This is the nineteenth year the brand has been behind such an activation. What goes into, first and foremost, the strategic planning to decide, "Are we going to go in for our nineteenth year?" And then when it comes down to activation, how does your team get together and look at all the different components and cross-sections of this event to make sure that you're activating it in a holistic manner?

**[00:02:44] Aleco:** Yeah, I mean, this is a huge event for us, obviously. Internally, we almost call it our Super Bowl, and it's really all hands on deck. Planning begins the year before. So, after a US Open ends, we get together as a team. We really delve into what's working, what's not, and how we can improve it for the following year. But also, sometimes, I think you just catch a little bit of magic, and I think that's what this cocktail has become. It really is right now the top cocktail in all of sports, and I really think a lot of things go into that. But, in a way, it's something that started really organically. I think it's to the point that you can't really experience the US Open without having a Honey Deuce. It's just become one of the traditions of the US Open.

**[00:03:36] Matt:** Yeah. And, of course, in 2025, if you want people to have awareness of an emotional activity like what Grey Goose is doing with the US Open, you can't obviously overlook the creator economy and partnering not only with creators but in this case, athletes. We'd love to hear about how some of the collaborations you've had with top tennis players and other celebrities have helped not only efforts like this but more broadly with the Grey Goose brand.

**[00:04:00] Aleco:** Yeah, for sure. When you think about partnerships in general, a lot of times, the brand might default to getting the number one player, number two player in the world, or the most famous person. But I really think brand fit is more important than fame when it comes to a partnership or a collaboration. If you look at our brand, we say our brand is all about "joie de vivre." It's a brand that really promotes an elevated, balanced lifestyle, and we're a brand that really brings people together.

So, for the US Open, we partner for the second year with Frances Tiafoe, obviously one of the top American players. Frances, he's not a top five player, not a top ten player, but what he is, is electric at the US Open, and he just really personifies our brand. When you look at how Frances Tiafoe plays tennis, he just has so much joy that he brings. He has great fits. You know, he's all about style. His energy is style, and he's a must-watch. He's also a big brand fan, too. We just had an event at Grand Central Station where Frances Tiafoe showed up. He actually got behind the bar, served up some Honey Deuces, and he is that embodiment of the balanced lifestyle. That's really what our brand is all about.

**[00:05:14] Matt:** Absolutely. And, overall, when you look at the creator economy and partnering with celebrities, and in this case, the "long tail," even though Frances is obviously gaining popularity within the sport, how do you look at the importance of this type of activity relative to some of the more traditional media vehicles that brands like Grey Goose have leaned into in the past, whether it be out-of-home, TV, or print? Do you find this leveling up in terms of its importance as part of your planning?

**[00:05:45] Aleco:** Yeah, I think it's, honestly, a full ecosystem that we look at. What is really important, I think, is how you're connecting with the consumer segment that you're looking at, and you want to do it in a meaningful way. So, I think when you look across the different ecosystem, it's not necessarily "when" you're connecting, but it's "how" you're connecting.

We've always been big believers in experiential marketing on Grey Goose because I really think it's where your brand can come to life. We're all about elevating moments for people and helping people connect together. And that's what being part of events like this can do for brands.

It's challenging nowadays, just media, because I think as we all know, people have so much control at their fingertips, and they're getting inundated with so many messages and things. But when it comes to an event like the US Open, people are making the conscious choice that they're going. They're going to put all the hecticness of the world and all the responsibilities on hold. They're there to have a great time and to really enjoy themselves, and we really want to be part of that moment.

**[00:06:52] Matt:** Absolutely. And, of course, there have been other innovative activations Grey Goose has been a part of. One that caught my eye was that you're leveraging Uber Eats to deliver cocktails directly to consumers in New York and Miami. Talk to me about that activation. Obviously, we saw during COVID consumers finally starting to accept at mass the ability to order not only groceries but alcohol into their homes. So, how do you see that space evolving?

**[00:07:17] Aleco:** Yeah, and I think you bring up a great point, like, during COVID. Because another thing that happened during COVID is the US Open still happened, but there were no fans. There were no spectators there. So, as we said earlier, the Grey Goose Honey Deuce has become so synonymous with the US Open and part of the tradition. So, we wanted to make sure that even though fans couldn't go and experience the US Open, they could still get a taste of the US Open at home. We actually started doing Honey Deuce cocktail delivery to people's homes, and that's something that we've continued to build on. So this year, if you live in New York, we've expanded it to Miami and Chicago as well. You could have Honey Deuces delivered to your home.

The other thing that we did this year that was really cool was that the last Honey Deuce at the US Open doesn't necessarily have to be your last Honey Deuce. We did a pop-up at Grand Central Station. We called it "The Last Serve Bar." As you know, the seven train from Grand Central is where you had a lot of commuters to and from the US Open. So, we literally created a bar where we were handing out Honey Deuces, and it's really what our brand's all about. We want to bring these moments of surprise and delight. When you think about Grand Central, you have over 700,000 commuters going through their day, most of them just with their blinders on, wanting to get home. And here, you're just bringing a little bit of joy to their life by giving them a moment of pure pleasure where they can actually enjoy a Grey Goose Honey Deuce.

**[00:08:48] Matt:** Yeah, very cool activation. I agree. When you're interrupting consumers in a moment like that, you don't want to ask them to fill out a form or bother them. But if you can give them a drink, that's a great brand interaction that will definitely carry its weight in gold.

We mentioned COVID, and it's interesting how often COVID still comes up in interviews with those partaking in "The Speed of Culture" podcast, even though this pandemic was done four

years ago. But it really did rock the earth to its core and the consumer. And one way during and post-COVID was this shift that you had between on-premise and off-premise distribution. So, obviously, during COVID, there was no on-premise distribution because bars and nightclubs were closed, and you obviously had to focus on the liquor stores and getting your product into people's homes. And now we kind of see this shift to the experience economy where consumers are roaring back, and we've seen record numbers, like the Taylor Swift tour and sold-out NFL games, as well as the booming nightlife industry. When you look at the overall mix for the brand, now that we've kind of come full circle, where are you leaning in, and where do you see a lot of the opportunities to gain share?

**[00:09:53] Aleco:** Yeah. So I think on-premise has come roaring back, which is great, obviously, because I think this is where people go to connect, to make connections. So, meeting with your friends and colleagues that still happens at a bar or at a restaurant. And there's no better way to enjoy that moment than with a cocktail, whether it be a Grey Goose Martini or another cocktail, but it's all about creating these moments that matter. So, the on-premise has really come back in a great way, which is great to see.

I also think that one of the things you're seeing in the world of hospitality and the on-premise is we've also had to up our game because what happened during COVID was you had the rise of the home mixologists, and people learning how to make these cocktails were starting to be more challenging. So when you do go now to a bar or restaurant, "vibe dining" has become a huge trend. People are looking for these great experiences. For example, we have a new product from Grey Goose called Grey Goose Altius. That's an ultra-premium vodka. The way people now have been consuming this at restaurants is through a ritual called "Goosebumps" where they're having the Grey Goose Altius with caviar as well. So this is something that they wouldn't be having at home, but they're going to share that experience with their friends. And then on top of that, I think people also want to show and share these experiences that they're having through social media as well.

So that's really an unbelievable dynamic that we're seeing right now. And honestly, I think that's also a huge part of the success of the Honey Deuce, as we were talking earlier. People want to be part of the experience economy. They go to the US Open, but having that Honey Deuce in their hand, that's also cultural currency for them. They can now share, "Hey, I'm not just a passive participant at this cultural event. I'm actually an active participant."

**[00:11:48] Matt:** They get more stake in the game, so to speak. Right?

**[00:11:50] Aleco:** Exactly. And they're having the same experience that a celebrity or an influencer would be having at that same cultural event.

**[00:11:57] Matt:** We'll be right back with "The Speed of Culture" after a few words from our sponsors. Another shift we've seen in the last couple of years is just an evolution of younger consumers' relationship with alcohol. Some stats are showing that Gen Z is drinking about 20% less alcohol than millennials. I've heard Gen Z called the "moderation generation," although they

certainly partake in lots of other activities, especially with the legalization of cannabis, which has seen a rise of usage of cannabis here in the U.S. over the last five to ten years. How are you looking at that trend in terms of your ability to continue to drive growth? Because obviously, it's a macro trend that's not unique to Grey Goose by any stretch, but it's still something that you need to contend with as the Gen Z consumer becomes the main purchaser of alcoholic products moving forward.

**[00:12:43] Aleco:** I think for us specifically, what we promote is moderation, and it's not about excessive drinking or anything like that. It's more about helping people have these experiences and sharing and connecting with friends. So, for example, when you go to the US Open, you still want to be part of that experience. That experience is a Honey Deuce moment. If you're going for a celebratory moment, if you're connecting with friends after work, it's more about bringing people together and helping them create memories as well of just having a great time, but doing it in a responsible way.

And even when we look at the people that we align ourselves with as a brand, we just did a new campaign on Grey Goose, "Make Time Wait," where we've created a Grey Goose hotel, which is really the embodiment of the Grey Goose lifestyle. The heroine in our campaign is Zoe Saldana. So, like Frances Tiafoe, Zoe is also a great example of someone that's multitalented and lives a balanced lifestyle. There are moments that they're going to lean in, have a cocktail, and enjoy themselves, and then there are other moments that they want to be active and be with their family in a different way. So, that's really what we're promoting. That's the lifestyle that appeals to Gen Z as well. So, yes, they might be drinking less, but they're still looking for those moments to share and to experience and, ultimately, just to make memories.

**[00:14:12] Matt:** Yeah, I think that's the right approach. And, obviously, for you to be a lifestyle brand, I think a big piece of your overall strategy needs to be around storytelling. And that word, while often overused in the marketing world, I think is more important than ever before. As you pointed out, consumers have so many choices for the consumption of media and content. What has worked for you as a marketer, especially with the Grey Goose brand, in terms of storytelling-based approaches? And how have you found storytelling to be an effective overall strategy with your consumer?

**[00:14:46] Aleco:** It's critical. At the end of the day, I think a brand needs to stand for something to have a really strong point of view. So, as a brand, I don't think you can be all things to all people. With Grey Goose, our point of view of the world is that now, efficiency is what's valued, even in things that should give you pleasure. If you're going to have that morning cup of coffee, you're ordering it on an app. You look at Netflix. They even have the "skip fast" feature, but this should be a moment where you're just sitting down and enjoying a show. You see all these lists come out, like, "How to see London or Paris in one day." So, everybody's valuing efficiency.

As a French brand, we really look at the ethos of the French people, that they really know how to enjoy time. For them, time is the ultimate luxury. There's a reason why when you look across countries of people that spend the most time enjoying meals, enjoying coffee, a glass of wine, or a martini, it's the French. So this ethos is what we tap into as a brand: that pleasure can't just be a luxury for people. Pleasure has to be a necessity. And we really want to be the biggest proponents of that, and that's what our new campaign is all about, "Make Time Wait," that basically, you don't always have to be in a rush. You need to take time to really enjoy those moments that really matter.

**[00:16:11] Matt:** I think it's a great overall approach. And, obviously, I think a lot of companies are looking at storytelling and the components of AI as yet another opportunity. There's been so much written in the last year about AI kind of entering the fray in terms of how marketers initiate and engage in their internal processes and ultimately manifesting up to the work that consumers see. Where does AI play a role with Grey Goose, and where do you think it's going to grow and become of greater importance heading into 2026?

**[00:16:41] Aleco:** Yeah, I mean, AI is just evolving every day, and it's so fast. I think we're all using it whether to help plan our day out, get a quick answer for something. In the marketing world, when we do research now, you can really get results quickly with AI versus before. You would have to do these very long, costly studies. But I also think that depending on your brand, it's not always going to be about AI.

For Grey Goose, we really are promoting this elevated lifestyle. We have a very clear brand world with everything that we do. So when we shot our new campaign, for example, we actually didn't want it to feel like AI at all. We actually wanted it to be incredibly cinematic as well. So we went to Lake Como, and we shot the campaign with Zoe Saldana in this Grey Goose hotel that we created, really giving people a window into this world. I think AI is going to continue to be critical with everything that we're doing, but it's also no substitute for experiences, as we were talking about as well. I think people are still going to want to see the world. They're going to want to share experiences, and they're going to want to attend these big cultural temples as well.

**[00:17:56] Matt:** Yeah. And I mean, I think there could be a counterculture quickly brewing as well with consumers really focused on things that are uniquely human at the same time as AI steals the headlines, etcetera. I think things that are uniquely human and real might even catch a premium with consumers over time. We'll be interested to see how that dynamic evolves.

**[00:18:16] Aleco:** Yeah, and there's nothing more real than, honestly, connecting with someone you care about over a cocktail. I think that's why we feel really good about the future of the industry of Grey Goose, and you're always going to have these moments of connection and of human celebration.

**[00:18:34] Matt:** I don't want to live in a world where that goes away. So hopefully, it sticks with us for quite some time. Right. So you've been in this space for a while and had been

working at Bacardi and now the Grey Goose brand in various positions. What do you think has been the key to your success in this industry, particularly? And what are some of the areas you've leaned into over the course of your career that enabled you to be in the seat that you're in today?

**[00:18:58] Aleco:** I think, really, you have to maintain your curiosity at all times. I think you have to try to be as in touch with culture as you can. For me, I look at our consumer base. It's very broad. You know, it's diverse. They're culturally in tune. So I also need that reflection with my team as well. So I always wanted to have a diverse team, having a young team, because I think mentorship goes both ways. So, yes, my team will learn from me, but I'm going to learn as much as I can from them as well because they're the ones that are the best reflection of the consumer that we're trying to talk to and resonate with. So I think that's critical.

**[00:19:40] Matt:** They get to celebrate a lot more than you and I do, I would assume. They do.

**[00:19:44] Aleco:** And I think the other part is it's important to experience yourself, like, these moments that you're also trying to capture. So you can't just be in your office just looking at research the whole time. I think it's really important to be out there as well and see how people are interacting with your brand, see how your brand's coming to life in these moments. To me, that's really critical as well. It's both, yes, you have to do the research, you have to do the work, but you also need to be fully engaged and leaning also on your agencies and on your team to really help craft the vision for the brand as well, and how you're trying to connect.

**[00:20:22] Matt:** Yeah, I'm glad you brought up agencies. A question I have for you that I've asked at certain points throughout the history of the podcast is, obviously, I'm sure you have no shortage of vendors and agencies willing to get your time and to work with you. And obviously, you only have so much time. You only have so many resources you can deploy to working with partners. What does it take for a potential partner to win your attention, ultimately win your business? Throughout your career, what has that approach been consistently that has worked?

**[00:20:51] Aleco:** First of all, I think when I talk about our agencies, they're just an extension of our brand team. We're at Grey Goose, we call ourselves "The Flock," and that's whether it's the brand team or our agency partners. When we go into a program, we work with what we call our "IAT," our Integrated Agency Team, and really making sure that across all touch points, our agencies are feeding in. When we're looking at agencies, I'm thinking, "Okay, how are they going to fit in with a broader team as well? Are they going to be collaborative? Are they going to be working together, not just seeing their specific discipline in a silo, but more overall, like, what we're trying to accomplish as a team?" Are they bringing some new thinking to the table as well? So, are they bringing thought leadership? That's really important to us as well. And then creativity is huge. I think also, like, are they going to be constantly bringing new ideas, giving us a fresh approach to something that we've been doing before, and especially seeing it

with a program like the US Open, where we're going on year 19? We want fresh thinking every year, coming in.

**[00:22:01] Matt:** And fresh thinking is not easy in this day and age where there are so many new brands popping up. Sometimes it can feel like all the good ideas have already been done. And to come up with truly fresh thinking, fresh ideas, fresh strategies is not easy, and I think there's no way around getting there but putting in the time and the work. When agencies and partners do that, I think they often put themselves in the position to succeed.

**[00:22:24] Aleco:** Absolutely. And I think they have to completely understand your brand as well as you do—the DNA of your brand, your brand world, what's your key positioning, who you're going after. So agencies have to be just as intimately involved with your brand as you are.

**[00:22:41] Matt:** The last thing I want to ask you about is just about leadership. You've mentioned how you get ideas from the younger people in your organization, etcetera, and how they're a critical part. And I love the whole philosophy that a great idea can and should come from anywhere. What are one or two attributes that you think young marketers today who want to end up running a brand like Grey Goose should focus on in the earlier stages of their career to really set themselves up for success down the road?

**[00:23:08] Aleco:** So I don't know, Matt, if you know the story about the two lumberjacks. So there are two lumberjacks in the woods, and one guy is just chopping wood like crazy from sunrise to sunset. Then there's another guy that keeps taking these breaks in between. And after a month, the guy that's been taking the breaks has been chopping more wood than the other guy that's been going all day.

**[00:23:30] Matt:** Sharpening the axe?

**[00:23:31] Aleco:** And that's exactly what he was doing. He was sharpening the axe. I think when I think of my younger days, I was always just chopping the wood. You're so into the execution phase of what you're doing. You just want to kind of show off to your boss how hard you're working and what you're doing. But, especially in marketing where you're building a brand, you need to take that step back to, one, strategize a little bit, see what's working, but then also taking the time to work on yourself a bit and how you can hone in your skills. So that would be the advice that I would give younger marketers that are out there.

**[00:24:05] Matt:** Yeah, I love that. And I think the one issue I think younger people have, not just in marketing but in business in general, is that we're in this Instagram-influenced economy and society where everyone sees everybody else, quote, unquote, "killing it," when the reality is people are just sharing their highlight reels. You don't see the hard work and the failures and the ups and downs that led to getting that. Because of that, a lot of people early in their careers lack that patience, and that's why they just want to chop, chop, chop, and not sharpen the axe.



And I think it might feel good in the moment, but I do agree, really refining those core skill sets before you dive in is what makes somebody a great marketer or great in business in general.

**[00:24:45] Aleco:** I couldn't agree more. I think it's taking the time to really learn something before you're ready to just move on. Your career is going to come. You're going to get the promotions as long as you're putting in the work and you're also staying curious, and you're open to feedback. So I couldn't agree more with you. I think that would be advice that I would give younger people coming into the business, but yeah, even my younger self as well.

**[00:25:12] Matt:** Yeah, it's awesome. Well, to wrap up here, and this has been such a great conversation, I would love to know from you if there's a saying or mantra that helps define your professional journey today. We often ask our guests that same question to wrap up the podcast.

**[00:25:25] Aleco:** Yeah, it's a great one. I think one of the, just because I heard him being interviewed the other day, Quentin Tarantino. They were asking him, "Did you go to film school?" And he's like, "No, I just went to a lot of films." So I do think it's important, obviously, to do the work as far as understanding the craft of what you're doing, but then it's also really important just to continue to stay out there, to get out there and stay hungry with everything that you're doing. And I think also as you get older and you move up, the temptation could be to just stay in the office, do your research, but it's really important to get out there, feel the energy, and see what's working firsthand.

**[00:26:04] Matt:** Yeah, it's clear that you've done that successfully, and I hope you've had a chance to get out to the US Open this year. It's obviously been great. And I'm going to have a Honey Deuce in your honor tonight as well.

**[00:26:14] Aleco:** You're going tonight?

**[00:26:15] Matt:** No, I'm just going to do it at home.

**[00:26:18] Aleco:** Wonderful. That's great. You can have the experience. Yeah, it is great. I mean, you're a New Yorker, so you know that it's just such an unbelievable cultural event in the city. It kind of marks the end of summer, and I think it just gets bigger and better every year. Yep.

**[00:26:33] Matt:** Well, thank you so much for taking the time to share your insights and your experiences. Congrats on your success for this US Open and in general for Grey Goose, and we'll continue to watch your ascent from afar. So thanks so much for joining.

**[00:26:44] Aleco:** Great. Thank you, Matt. I really enjoyed it.

**[00:26:45] Matt:** Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and Adweek team, thanks again to Aleco Azqueta, the global vice president of marketing at Grey Goose Vodka, for joining us today. Be

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