

Dmitri Siegel Transcript

Dmitri: We're leaning into our store experience too. I mean, we have a couple of hundred stores across the United States that are platforms for interacting and creating community. And that's really what we're seeing drives online too. So like obviously TikTok social, is a huge focus for our consumers, but what works there we're seeing is real-life experiences amplified through that channel. And the more we issue content in our stores or hold events in our stores, that's the best-performing stuff on our social channels.

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, we're excited to be joined by Dmitri Siegel, a seasoned and creative executive currently serving as Chief Creative Brand and Digital Officer at Urban Outfitters. Dmitri, so great to see you. Thanks for joining today.

Dmitri: Thanks, Matt. It's great to be here.

Matt: Absolutely. I was looking at your background. It was interesting to me because it looks like you had a stint at Urban Outfitters way back in 2006. You were there for five years and then kind of going round trip and coming back to the company. Talk to us about your original experience at Urban Outfitters and what drew you there to begin with.

Dmitri: I had an amazing experience on my first run at Urban. I think it's indicative of the kind of company it is too. So I came to Urban as a creative director. I had studied design, got my MFA, and came as a digital creative director. And in my time at Urban in that stint, got the opportunity to take on a whole bunch of marketing functions. We launched social marketing. That was the early days of performance marketing. So I ended up buying on a spreadsheet. We used to just send an actual spreadsheet to Google AdWords. Chicken out, just crazy to think about. And ended up as the executive director of marketing. So overseeing e-commerce business. Back then there was a catalog business too, and the creative. So it's a kind of career opportunity that wouldn't happen in a lot of places. You know, a young person with a design degree. But Urban is such a creative-driven company. They taught me so much at that time in my career and unlocked a lot of potential in me that I didn't even really know was there. So I had an amazing experience at Urban the first time around.

Matt: Yeah. And I noticed in just reviewing the notes that you reported to the CEO at the tail end of your stint there when you were originally there at Urban Outfitters. Talk to us about, I guess, the benefits. I'm sure there are so many of them in terms of reporting to a CEO and getting that type of exposure at such an early, informative point in your career.

Dmitri: It was an amazing opportunity, and I'm still grateful to have had the opportunity to report to CEOs and founders and learn from them, but also learn that creativity, it fits in many different places in the P&L, if you will, and understanding how creativity is part of an overall business. It's not something that operates in isolation of the business. I've come to believe that all value is created through creativity in business. So it's either a product or a marketing campaign that creates growth and value, and that's been validated everywhere I've worked. But

when you're working with a CEO or a founder, you realize that there are a lot of other pieces to the puzzle, and marketing has to be part of an overall business strategy and fit with that business strategy. It's kind of not productive to come in with your idea of what the marketing strategy should be without understanding how that fits into an overall business strategy.

Matt: Yeah, I'm so glad you said that because I've been at the Cannes Lions Awards, I'm sure you have as well over the years. And sometimes you see this creativity, celebrate it, and there's no mention of business results. And I think in this world of performance marketing and the amount of data and big data that brands have access to, there's no getting around the fact that your creative has to be accountable. And you can come up with some great whiz-bang idea that quote-unquote is buzzy, but if you can't connect it to business results, well, then you're not playing in the world of business. You're just playing in the world of art, which is fine, but then don't go work for a profit business. I guess, has that changed the way that you've approached creatively? Like having that impact early in your career, were you able to see the correlation between ideation and creativity and business results? Had that, as a result, changed the way that you look at sort of the creative process?

Dmitri: Yeah, I think, like, I've been fortunate to work for amazing founders and CEOs who intuitively and in their bones, like, understand the value of the brand and that there's a real business imperative, particularly with the brands that I've worked with. And to use Urban Outfitters as an example, I mean, there's no question that creativity adds value when you work at Urban Outfitters. Like, that isn't something that you have to argue for. I've been in other situations where you do have to argue for it, and that is painful, for sure. So, look, I've been fortunate, but the way it changes my approach is I've always had a left-brain, right-brain experience as a marketer. I grew up with that sort of performance marketing revolution, even though I had this creative background as a design student and an art student before that. And now I think we're at the tail end of that performance marketing wave. I think it's kind of run its course, but there's always been a sense of the balance and that you have to understand the art and science of what we're trying to do. And because I've also run an e-commerce P&L, usually in tandem with running marketing, you sort of, like, have to connect that into an overall P&L structure and your strategy into an overall structure and not think, like, in the abstract, I'd love to do this creative thing. I do think that is how value is created. So I don't want to underplay the cool ad that you saw at Cannes. I think those things do create value. There's a reason why people do this, but that has to be put in the context of like, are we in growth mode as a business? Are we optimizing for profit? Are we about to go public? There's just a lot of bigger context to what a marketing objective is at that moment in a company's life cycle.

Matt: I think creativity, and I agree with your point earlier in terms of whether it's on the product side or the marketing side, creativity is where value is created. I guess my only point is there have been instances where I've been exposed to where it was sort of disconnected from it and the whole notion of measuring how that creative drive business results got thrown out the window. And I think I also agree with you that we then went to a point where the pendulum swung the other way, where it's all about performance marketing. When you say we're at the tail end of, I guess, that kind of momentum swing into performance marketing. Why do you say that?

Dmitri: I think that it's sort of an observation about the online experience. It's become so pay-to-play. If you just think about a Google search results page.

Matt: Yeah.

Dmitri: There were three ads that you could buy at the top of that page and the rest was organic. And now I challenge you to find the organic search result on a Google search results page. And that applies to all these quote-unquote performance mediums. And so the ability to break through and the ability to connect with consumers that way is becoming just really a function of how much you're going to spend. So I think that's one reason it's at the tail end of it. I think also that there's a big disruption happening in big tech itself where their priorities are shifting. AI is becoming the North Star priority for these platforms. And helping us low-league e-commerce businesses generate traffic is not the primary priority anymore. And I think what we're seeing is that you need to have great creative. You need to be able to connect with consumers for real in a broader sense, those tech companies and those platforms, they were taking a whole bunch of venture capital money and subsidizing all of our marketing efforts with it to convince us that this was like, these were the greatest advertising platforms in the history of the world. Now, when they have to become profitable and they can no longer subsidize our marketing efforts, all of a sudden it's like really becomes a question about whether that dollar is best spent on a tech platform or brand activation, or a more traditional advertising medium. I think that just sort of the playing field between platforms has leveled out a lot more.

Matt: Not to mention the changes in privacy and cookies and pixels and everything else that kind of created that magic that we saw from, let's just say, 2017 to 2021, 2022, when you had the birth of all these D2C companies, whether it be Warby Parker or Allbirds, these companies that were able to drive dramatic returns for their shareholders because it was incredible targeting and in a lot of cases, violating some ideals of consumer privacy. So I think as that has and continues to get torn down with the crumbling of the cookie, I think that also takes away some of the efficacy of performance-based marketing.

Dmitri: Yeah, and don't forget, most of those companies were never profitable. So they were through all that activity, and it was great for us advertisers for a while. But certainly, when Facebook went public, I think that was the first penny that dropped in terms of how this was going to go. And I also think there's been hearing the phrase a lot online, the internet just isn't fun anymore. And I think there is a shift in the experience of users that is undermining that as a marketing platform for us. And we as marketers, always have to be adapted to what the consumer experience is where they want it and what's fun for them. And I wouldn't say whole cloth that the internet's just not fun anymore, but it's not as fun as it used to be. I think I can say that.

Matt: Well, we live in such a more divisive culture too. I think if you look at any open platform where people could freely share ideas, so much of it has become political and ugly as well. And that's kind of taken over the tenor of so much user-generated content.

Dmitri: Yeah. I think it's a regression to that balance between art and science. Like there's always been art and science to marketing. Media mix modeling is 50 years old. It's not like a new technology. There's always been that sort of analytical component to it. And I think we went way into the, you know, you could just give this platform money and they'll give you back traffic. Now we're just regressing to like, I always grew up with the rule of thumb of creative is a 40% kicker on your media spend. And I think we're getting back to that understanding of like, it's not just enough to rank by the media, like the creative and the brand and the message all matters as well.

Matt: So you also had a pretty interesting experience and were there for quite a while at Sonos, which I'm personally a huge fan of. It piqued my curiosity in terms of your time there, because Sonos is an interesting brand to me because it's not a big tech player, so to speak, but plays such a big role in terms of the ecosystem of the smart home and kind of the consumer entertainment experience. What was it like during those, I guess, high-growth, exciting years at Sonos? And what were some of your takeaways throughout your experience there?

Dmitri: The experience at Sonos was amazing in a lot of ways, but one of them you alluded to there was just being really in the center of the big tech competition frenemy system that exists between those giant tech companies. And we were there for the advent of voice control, which was a massive disruption that drew the first wave of this AI-assisted thing that's still happening. And Sonos was really at the core of that. So two big disruptions of technology streaming. So like audio streaming, Sonos was right in the middle of that. And AI voice control is right in the middle of that. Some of the crazy experiences of just having to triangulate between Apple, Amazon, and Google at the high levels of their product organizations are to say like, no, you're going to be able to listen to Amazon Music and Apple Music and Spotify all on the same device. I mean, there's no other tech platform that does that. So it was a very unique position. We had to do some very interesting things to maintain that position. And some of those had to do with marketing. Some of those had to do with relationships that we developed through marketing. But that's where I think I became also very aware that like any company existing in the world today has to develop a strategy about how they relate to big tech. You can't avoid it. It's like it's an index fund of the entire economy. And what they do drives a massive disruption for everybody downstream from them. And that's all of us. So we were constantly evaluating our strategy about those companies and what they were doing next what their priorities were and what their strategies were which, of course, change over time. So one of the most sort of traumatic experiences that I've had in life or business was shortly after I started at Sonos. I was headed to my first executive offsite and I was in the car with the founder and I was like, what do you think we'll talk about today? And he said. Oh, Apple's launching a Sonos killer speaker and they're building it in the same factory as us.

Matt: The HomePods? Right.

Dmitri: This was the launch of the HomePod, and it's like...

Matt: Yep.

Dmitri: You can imagine that's your worst nightmare. Okay, Apple is directly targeting us. And then Tim Cook goes on stage at WWDC and puts up a picture of a Sonos speaker. And it's like, we're going to destroy Sonos with the HomePod. Like, I mean, it's business night.

Matt: And yet they didn't, right? So what happens?

Dmitri: And before that, Amazon had come out with the Echo. Facebook had launched speakers. Google had launched speakers that ended up losing a lawsuit to some of us related to the IP that they put in them. So it was this existential experience of, okay, we're the little guy, you know, we're this independent tech company in Southern California. And we have all the biggest companies in the world that are targeting us basically because they want to get their voice assistants in the home. And we had to like find our center, play our game. Like there was just so much that went into surviving that and going public and having great IPO and all that

stuff. It was the best learning experience could ever hope to have in the end, as hard as it was in the moment. But the brand played a huge role in that. We had to change what we meant to consumers. Sonos was the tech disruptor in the audio category. And then all of a sudden you had all these tech companies coming in and we couldn't be the tech disruptor anymore. Like we couldn't out-tech Amazon and Apple and Google, we couldn't change what our brand meant to people. So yeah, it was a great experience, amazing people there, damn amazing CEO, amazing founder.

Matt: We have the CMO of Sonos on an upcoming podcast. So looking forward to that. The other interesting thing about Sonos, I think, is if you look at hardware, which has generally been an unsexy category unless you are named Apple in the last decade, I think one thing that Sonos did or does that other hardware component manufacturers don't is they do create good software that's easy to use that creates some type of lock-in effect where if you look at your television, whatever television that you have in the home, you're probably not even using their interface. You're probably using Apple TV or using the Netflix interface or whatever it may be. Because they just aren't good at it. And ultimately, that just means they're a low-margin component company that's right for disruption. And that's why a company like Vizio could come in and have a lower-priced product and disrupt the market. Where I think Sonos, there's an ecosystem where at a minimum, just the notion of you connecting your Spotify account, you connecting these other accounts to Sonos, and then you having the speakers that are all connected and naming the speakers and setting it up, that creates a very high switching cost for them to come in and just get one HomePod device. There's no way I'm going to switch out of Sonos because I'm just too invested in it at this point.

Dmitri: Yeah, I mean, they are predominantly like a software company. They're like 55% software, 45%.

Matt: Right.

Dmitri: I'm sure DJ will have another clever way or better way of saying it.

Matt: Yeah, exactly.

Dmitri: But it's true. And it's what they always talked about, the fear of being a dumb speaker. Like if you're a dumb speaker, then you just go buy a \$75 Bluetooth speaker.

Matt: Right, right to the bottom, right?

Dmitri: Yeah.

Matt: Absolutely. And so this year in February, you rejoined Urban Outfitters as Chief Creative Brand and Digital Officer. So what led you back to Urban Outfitters? Did you ever think that you'd be coming back to work there one day when you left 15 years ago? And tell us about the impetus behind your return.

Dmitri: I always had an amazing gratitude to Urban for what they did for me in my career, the opportunities and education that they gave me, and the talent of the founders. So I was always open to coming back, I would say. And another thing for me was that I've had three sort of personal experiences with Urban Outfitters. As a customer walking into Store 5 in Georgetown,

seeing the broken glass window, thinking, what the heck is that? Walking in, seeing the display of vintage Levi's, I mean, and then going downstairs into the men's. I can picture every moment of my first Urban Outfitters experience. So as a customer and someone who was... In a band and went to art school, I was like, oh, this is a place for people like me. And I didn't feel like that about other stores. I felt like other stores were trying to sell me a uniform to fit in with everybody else. Then I had this amazing experience in my career, which we talked about, where I was like, wow, this company is made up of people like me. And they're successful and they're using creativity and all these things that I love to win in the marketplace. And then I had kids and now I have two Gen Z weirdos living in my house. And I'm like, I want there to be a place for them. I do see Urban as filling this place in the culture of a shopping experience and an outfitter, if you will, for people who are creative and define themselves against the mainstream. And then. I see in my kids' lives, they have a lot more options for sure than I did, but they still resonate with the brand. They still see it as different and speaking to them. And so I don't know, there's partially like a sense of that sense of purpose and coming back as well as just like loving the company and the people involved.

Matt: We'll be right back with the speed of culture after a few words from our sponsors. When you described the store layout when you first went there, it's very much the same today. But at the same time, no company can be successful and have the staying power that Urban Outfitters has without evolving with the times. So as much as things have stayed the same, what were the biggest changes that you observed about the organization, either internally or externally, from your first stint there to your return to the company this year?

Dmitri: One internal thing is just the sophistication of the company from a data perspective or main perspective. When I left, like I said, it was the early days of digital. We would go in and put up our Facebook page like any consumer would do. Again, we're doing performance marketing on a spreadsheet and completely disconnected from any other reporting in the business. So coming back, I was like, wow, this company has great data, has great platforms. The level of analytics that are possible, I would say, is like... I don't want to say superior to what I experienced in working for a tech company, but definitely on par. So that was one thing. I think the biggest difference... Overall is just that their customer have changed. We have a Gen Z consumer, and the gap between millennials and Gen Z is profound. It's a lot like the gap between baby boomers and Gen X. There is a generation gap here that I think... It's forcing us to think about our customer much more deeply and spend time with them and listen to them and understand how their points of view on things like coming of age, which is kind of the life stage that we service, they're different. They have a different experience than millennials and people before them. And we're only going to be successful if we really are obsessed with who they are and listen to them and know them well. So the archetype of Urban hasn't changed. It's this brand for that creative person in their coming-of-age time, but that person is so different now. And that's really what's driving a lot of the change and a lot of the things that we're doing inside the brand and externally.

Matt: And from a merchandising standpoint, I have to believe that that's not an easy challenge to solve because it's not like you just sell one type of goods. When you go into urban, there are all different sorts of things you can buy there from record players and records to t-shirts and accessories and all sorts of different things. So I guess painting the picture of your new consumer through your merchandising strategy must be something quite complex to make sure everything kind of fits together to the genre of who is your current consumer.

Dmitri: Absolutely. I just feel it is a very thin slice of a department store for a very specific person. It's got everything. It's got men's, women's, home. And then merchandising, which is not what I do for a company, but I'm in awe of what they do. It's insight-based. It's really specific. It's like one thing about this consumer, for example, is they put a high value on things that existed before the internet. We're selling CD players and tape players and vinyl through the crazy. Part of that is this nostalgia.

Matt: It's amazing. Yeah.

Dmitri: But it's also like a value that I think that if something could be important before the internet, then it's really important. Like if something's important now on the internet, they sort of discount that a little bit. Like, yeah, that's just the internet. That's just TikTok or whatever. So there were just these interesting, specific. Insights about like what drives, what they're interested in. And we have a team of amazing merchants that are just all day, every day, thinking about that testing product, looking at what works, listening to consumers. It's endlessly fascinating.

Matt: And in terms of effectively reaching those consumers and breaking through the clutter in a way that isn't the performance-based, more like race to the bottom type of activity that we were discussing earlier, but instead focusing on outreach and content that adds value to the lives of your consumer, what are some of the things that you have your eyes on in terms of things that are working or that you want to be doing more of?

Dmitri: Well, one of the things we've heard in all of our conversations with all of our consumers, every segment, is that they shop vintage, that they love the experience of vintage. It's something that Urban Operators has always had. Like I said, when I walked into the store in Georgetown all those years ago, vintage Levi's was, I remember, the very first merchandising display. So it's always been a part of our mix. I think that we got fragmented in how we presented that to the consumer, and we didn't stand for it as something that was part of the Urban Operators' experience. And so this month, we did a big relaunch of that under the vintage, and remade banner. We brought together all of them. I mean, we have an incredible team in Los Angeles that sources one-of-a-kind vintage and also does these amazing remade projects where they'll take den stock or other items and make current items out of those. They collaborate with artists to do that. So we're putting a big push behind vintage and remade because it's something that we're hearing from the consumers they're interested in. Similarly with music, like we were talking about, music has always been a part of the Urban Outfitters experience. We're, I think, the second biggest vinyl retailer in the United States and certainly the broadest assortment. So the biggest ones would be those major retailers selling millions of copies of Taylor Swift's CD.

Matt: Right, Target. Yeah.

Dmitri: What we're doing is much more broad, we just had an exclusive one-of-a-kind vinyl release with Billie Eilish. We do a lot of exclusive vinyl releases. As I said, we're leading the way on the CD trend, which blows my mind. So music is another component we're leaning into. Our store experience too. I mean, we have a couple hundred stores across the United States that are platforms for interacting, and creating community. And that's really what we're seeing drives online too. So like obviously TikTok, social, huge focus for our consumer. But what works there, we're seeing is real-life experiences amplified through that channel. And the more we

issue content in our stores or hold events in our stores, that's the best-performing stuff on our social channels. So I think those are the things that we're focused on. And then there's always this what-the-fuck factor with Urban Outfitters. Like there's always a product, that will make you laugh or make you smile or start a conversation. And that brought me a cool collaboration. I mean, we just had Wiz Khalifa do a mushroom-growing kit and we were selling it. It's like... That type of stuff is just fun and people talk about it and it's in culture. And so we're focused on amplifying that. And that's part of who we've always been that maybe got lost in the mix over the years that we're seeing this Gen Z consumer respond to.

Matt: And when you launch that collaboration, the Gen Z mushroom growing kit with Khalifa, how much testing goes into a launch like that? Because it's so eclectic, it's so random. Part of it makes me feel like it's more like a loss leader. You're not relying on a lot of volume, but it's more something that creates buzz. But how much stock goes into those things?

Dmitri: Again, this is a merchant-driven process. It's a part of science just like marketing. There's so much research into what might be coming down the pike. And then there's iteration and testing. So I'll give you another example. We do incredibly well with these Sunny Angels small figurines. So then the merchants are like, well, what other small... So what people like about it is that it's this figurine, they can carry it around. It's like a totem. All of them are different. What else can we do? And then this year we're launching Manchichi. It's another kind of stab at the same thing. And they'll test a bunch of different things, products like that, and they go after what works. So the beauty of e-commerce in particular, but our platform, is that we can launch products in the market fast and learn fast about what works and iterate on that really with what the consumer's buying and what they're interested in. But a lot of the stuff like the mushroom growing kit, I wouldn't say it's a lost leader, but it's definitely... Our founder, Dick Hayne, was telling me they put wind-up toys in the front of the very first store. That was there from the very beginning. Because people would come in. First of all, it wasn't intimidating. Like, do I go to the men's section or the women's section? Or are they jumping for what I'm wearing? Super not intimidating. Go in there, you save these wind-up toys, you get relaxed, you sort of have fun, and you're smiling and you're laughing. It just sets the tone for the experience. So I think it's part of the overall fun of shopping. And I think that's one thing it's easy to forget. The Roman Forum was part of entertainment. It wasn't just a place to go and get goat smoke or whatever. It was partly a thing to do on a Sunday. I think Erden's always been good at that part. And part of it is this, a huge part of it is the merchandising strategy.

Matt: Absolutely. And speaking of merchandising, another area of the business you oversee is Urban Outfitters' e-commerce business. So when you look at the world of apparel and all the other products that you sell, what makes e-commerce a unique opportunity? What are some of the challenges that you face when competing with more mass e-commerce players like Amazon in terms of creating value? And obviously, convenience is a huge piece of e-commerce. So when you look at loyalty and shipping and all those things, how are you looking at the e-commerce strategy?

Dmitri: I think one of the good things is that the operational and fulfillment components have become commodities. So I think we can find on shipping and people's expectations. I think we also saw people's expectations lower on that front during COVID. I would say in the first early years of e-commerce, it was like a race to just fastest, cheapest, and freest. That was a mantra. You've got to be as fast and free as you can be on shipping. And then I think people have now moderated on that a little bit. Like I'll pre-order an item. Oh, it's not like food or something. I

can't wait for it. So part of it is the consumer's expectations. Part of it is just like the capability Urban Outfitters is pretty much on par with Amazon in terms of fulfillment. I think the challenge right now is really around the traffic-driving and marketing side of things. Like we were talking about earlier, costs are going up for everybody. Big tech disruption around AI intercepting traffic. So you got the big tech platform, it's generating all this AI content. And directing that traffic where they want to versus the authors of content or the creators and culture like ourselves getting that traffic. So I think there's a real challenge there with e-commerce in general. I hear that from all my peers who are running e-commerce businesses. I think the beauty of e-comm is that you can offer a really wide assortment without necessarily having that depth across the whole assortment. And I think we do that well. So you get a clean look at like the full idea of Urban Outfitters. But it's a super disruptive time. Like how much are people going to want, I wouldn't even say about is what the consumer wants, but TikTok is going to want you to buy within TikTok for sure. They've launched a TikTok shop. We're up on that. We're up on Instagram shopping, testing that, understanding it. But particularly TikTok is like, I see as much more of a trying to create a wall garden experience where you go all the way through the transaction. And so how many times will people come to our product detail pages anymore? Right. Let me check with us and what percentage. So it's not a huge part of the business right now, but certainly, there's always a lot happening in e-commerce. Part of why I love it is why I got into it in the first place. It's so dynamic. And we think we're at one of those generational shifts right now with the advent of AI and TikTok as a different kind of platform.

Matt: So let's talk about AI. And obviously, it's growing importance to society and business overall. I'm sure Urban Outfitters is not immune to a company that's looking at impact and trying to figure out how to put it into play for the business. Where are you right now? Where do you see AI's impact head in the future for Urban?

Dmitri: Well, I think for our consumers, what they're experiencing is this... Ever-accelerating trend cycle around Cowboy Cutie Cookhead Cutie or Cottagecore. And then it's the AI that is accelerating the generation and also the speed of death of these trend cycles. And we're hearing from the consumer. And then we're retailers who are bought into that and are really like their whole model is to spin up these TikTok trends from cheap product to market that capitalizes on them and then get out and get onto the next one. And they're AI-driven as well, those companies. We're a people-driven company. We're a bunch of creative weirdos trying to make cool products and sell cool products. So our model is kind of anathema to that. And I think what we're hearing from our consumers, they're getting exhausted by it. They're exhausted from trying to keep up with all these trends. They don't like the waste of like... Mob wife aesthetic outfit and wearing it once and taking a picture and throwing it away. It's kind of starting to creep them out and just the exhaustion of keeping up with it because it's not human-driven. It's machine learning. So it's moving faster than humans can like, enjoy. So I would say that's the biggest impact on our business right now and where we're having to listen to our consumers and position our brand in a way that's relevant to them to say like, We're about your style, like not about manufacturing TikTok trends. If your style involves a leopard print coat, we're all for you and we'll have it for you. But we're not going to cram down the latest AI-generated trend down your throat. We're not expecting you to have a disposable approach to your aesthetic and your style. But AI is impacting us there, I would say. In the positive sense, as a tool within the creative process, it's really interesting and has some positive benefits, even for the environment, where we're able to design samples and create first versions of things without having to get the product shipped from China back and forth or from different design, different factories around the world. So there are ways that it's helping

us, empowering creativity, a human creative person trying to get a bunch of versions going and stuff like that. But I think culturally, I think there's this sense of like, again, this is like what we're hearing from our consumer of like, do I even know what I like anymore? Do I like this because I like it?

Matt: So interesting.

Dmitri: It so many times that I think I like it, and they're starting to question, what is my style? What's my taste? How do I win my belt in a world where look, every generation has to answer the question, who am I?

Matt: Right.

Dmitri: There's never been a generation that is being force-fed more answer to that question. We had to go out and seek it and find the answer to who am I. They're getting bombarded with like, this is who you are. No, this is who you are. It's this trend. It's that trend. This is cool. That's cool. And so I think we play a role in sort of really building a community where like, they can answer that question for themselves.

Matt: Yeah. And I think that to your point earlier, your physical stores give you a distinct advantage because there is this notion of authenticity and discoverability that you can't get just by having the e-commerce platform. So that's a huge part of the central core of the brand because that experience is different. There's no offense or butts about it. When you go into an urban, it's unlike any other store. But I think being able to hold on to that will allow you to kind of carry through that sense of uniqueness online as well.

Dmitri: And that's coming through in the data to the Business of Fashion published a research study about that, that Gen Z is much more highly likely to want to shop in a store than millennials. So they're also having that shift back to physical retail.

Matt: Interesting. Cool. So shifting gears, Dimitri, as we wrap up here, you've had such a cool career and obviously in a great role at an iconic brand, Urban Outfitters. When you look back on your career journey, we talked about Sonos, and we didn't even get a chance to touch upon your Patagonia. You've worked at so many cool places throughout your career. What are some of the decisions that you think you've made right along the way to set yourself up to be in the seat that you're in today? What did you lean into that maybe was the right move or maybe made a leap at a certain point in your career that was the right move or connections or anything you can look back on? You're like, wow, I'm glad I did that.

Dmitri: I guess there are three things I would say. One is to look for tailwinds in the economy. I was lucky that I went into e-commerce when I did, and there are massive tailwinds in that. And then I went into the streaming business at a time, tailwinds. So realize that the world is bigger than you are, and some things are driving the economy that can help you along the way. I would say your dreams are important, but opportunities are more important. So follow the opportunities, not just your dreams. And then finally, I think something really important is like, take your lumps. Like when you make a mistake. Own up to it, take the hit on that. And that could be something as big as like, we bought the wrong product and we need to mark it down and make that decision fast and take your lumps on it fast. Or we launched this campaign and it just didn't work. Admit that to yourself as fast as you possibly can and take your lumps on it.

You've got to disrupt yourself before something else disrupts you. And I think when people are very precious about the idea that you had or the risk that you took, there's a huge cost to not accepting the truth faster and not taking their lumps faster. So those would be three things I would encourage people to do.

Matt: Oh, great advice. And I love the point of following the tailwinds in the industry because I think a lot of people get romantic about what they think they're going to be. And then the timing just might not be right. And timing is so much of what constitutes business success. And a lot of the timing has nothing to do with you, but to your point, external factors, and putting yourself. And the position of win, I think, is half the battle.

Dmitri: If you're ambitious like I went to grad school for design with a lot of people who wanted to make art books. And I love art books. And I come at them, I buy them. And some people are doing that to this day that are super happy with what they're doing. But if your goal is ambition, and if you don't have that, like a craftsman, I want to do this thing your whole life, be flexible, really be open to what's happening in the world, and recognize that this marketing and it's commercial art, it's intertwined with business. That's what makes it fun. It's not isolated in a gallery somewhere removed from the economy. It's like... You're in there in the streets and that's cool. It's fun.

Matt: Absolutely. So finally here, Dmitri, we've covered so many great points today and interesting tidbits about the business and yourself. Is there a saying or mantra that you like to live by that comes to mind in terms of how you approach your career and your professional life?

Dmitri: So I worked for Yvon Chouinard, who is the founder of Patagonia. He says in his book, Let My People Go Surfing, I don't know the exact quote, but he talks about the Zen archer. And the Zen archer does not focus on the target, they focus on the feeling of the string between their fingers. And I go back to that a lot. I'm like, process-oriented, focused on what you're doing, and not obsessing about the outcome. And that's a mantra for me in terms of like, as what we're doing today, the right things, does this feel right that we're going in the right direction? Because like, the arrow's not going to hit the target for a while now. So you have to, from the feeling of pulling back the bow much more than the target. So that's easier said than done, but that's something that I go back to a lot.

Matt: I love that. Well, this has been an awesome chat. I'm so appreciative of you taking time out of your busy schedule to share your background thoughts and insights here with our audience at Speed of Culture Podcast. So thanks so much for joining us today.

Dmitri: Thank you, Matt.

Matt: Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and the Adweek team, thanks again to Dmitri Siegel, Chief Creative Brand and Digital Officer at Urban Outfitters for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate, and review The Speed to Culture podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Until next time, peace everyone, take care. The Speed of Culture is brought to you by Suzy as part of the Adweek Podcast Network and Acast Creator Network. You can listen and subscribe to all of Adweek's podcasts by visiting adweek.com/podcasts. To find out more about Suzy, head to suzy.com. And make sure to search for The Speed of Culture on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and

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