



USER FRIENDLY

Diversity and equity in media and entertainment

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Hanish Patel:

It's no secret that many individuals see a lack of diversity in the media and entertainment industry. For some, it can be difficult to understand the importance of prioritizing inclusive representation. But these issues often have lasting impacts, as media and entertainment is considered to shape the way people view the world.

So how might executives rewrite the script on equity in media and entertainment? On today's episode of the *User Friendly* podcast, Ellene Miles, senior vice president of Global Intersectional Marketing at Sony Pictures Entertainment, and Wenny Katzenstein, managing director, Technology, Media, and Telecommunications at Deloitte Consulting LLP, join me to discuss this very question. Ellene, Wenny, welcome to the show.

Ellene Miles:

Thanks for having us.

Wenny Katzenstein:

Thank you.

Hanish Patel:

All right. So, some may say that you can't have both or that the pursuit of equity will not yield the same returns as something

that is solely focused on the entertainment side. So let's kick off by dispelling just that. So Ellene, could you share where you have seen equity drive greater revenue and why that should be at the forefront of thinking as a media and entertainment executive?

Ellene Miles:

In my world, which is theatrical film marketing, I think every film is evidence of it, right? I think that on any given title, 30% to 40%—or even more, in some cases—the box office is propelled by groups, right? By the AAPI [Asian American Pacific Islander] community. By the African American community. By the US Hispanic community. And if we look at it as a whole, we can see that title over title, year over year, that these audiences are propelling these titles to the heights that they would not have been, had they not participated, had they not latched onto the marketing, had they not found something in the story that they wanted to support. And so for me, it's in everything we do. And it, to me, has been clear for quite some time, from a strictly data perspective, that these titles benefit greatly from multicultural lenses.

Hanish Patel:

So, you mentioned a bit around multicultural, and obviously your role itself talks about intersectional. Could you explain a little bit more about

the difference between the two and specifically about your role as it pertains to intersectional marketing?

Ellene Miles:

Absolutely. You know, I see it as a little bit of a switch on tradition, right? So multicultural has been the standard terminology when you're referring to, you know, obviously different groups and different types of cultures. And for many years, that was the standard. And the more I thought about it over my career, the more I thought about the fact that we are whole people, and we don't always see ourselves in one particular way.

So if I use myself as an example, an African American gay female. So, which one of those three segments do I get my information from, right? And in a world before social media and before the rise of the internet, there was not really a place you can go and get all three if that makes sense. And so, when I say it's modernity over tradition, it means, oh, now I can reach an audience in a different way. Now there is a place for all of these three things to live together. Now there is an opportunity to speak to me as a whole person.

And so I thought about that methodology in terms of speaking to audiences. And for what I do, which is theatrical film marketing,

how can I touch audiences where they really are and not just check a box and say, "Oh, we reached this Spanish language outlet, so now we've hit the Hispanic market." I think it's a lot more nuanced than that. And it's actually giving audiences, or at least I'm seeing audiences, in a different light. I'm seeing them as whole people.

And for me, that brought a different spin to the way I think about how to market a project.

Hanish Patel:

So I want to stick on [this] train, where you talked about reaching audiences. And if we look at how your role and how that drives marketing strategy, or a tactical approach to how you do both targeted and general marketing of content, I'd love to get your thoughts on the impact to that—and Wenny, I'd like to also bring you in here. Given you lead clients in the industry in this space, I'd love to hear from the both of you on how that role and what it does to really drive that marketing strategy.

Wenny Katzenstein:

Sure. I think what's been really great about actually working with individuals like Ellene is I think we've been able to provide a sense of how big is big, in terms of really utilizing a strategy, and providing some avenues of data that hopefully help Ellene make



connections back to specifics around executions that she's driving.

Ellene, are there some that potentially you'd be willing to share in some of the recent releases that you've been working on?

Ellene Miles:

Absolutely. I totally agree with what you're saying. I think having those tools really do offer us an opportunity to be bold and to be a lot more innovative in the way that we reach audiences. And so, one of our recent releases over the summer was *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, which obviously it's a big Marvel movie. It's got all of that sort of big, global attitude to it, broad reach. But at the core of it, you have an Afro Latino teenager from New York with a different sensibility than a kid from Boston or a kid from LA, right?

And the way that he lives and the way that he dresses and the music he listens to makes him so relatable to so many kids, but also to people like him. And so being able to take something that's super broad and find opportunities to make it relatable to individual families, or individual teenagers, from a regional as well as a cultural perspective, was really fun. And it also—it just proves the point that really specific stories have broad appeal.

And for me, that was a really great example, and probably always will be, a really great example of this concept of drilling down on audiences in a way, again, that sees them whole, that deals with language, that deals with culture. We're talking about the way people live in the world and show up in the world. And so, Miles Morales, who is the protagonist in that story, sort of becomes the everyman in that way.

And in typical marketing strategy, we wouldn't see, you know, a kid of color that's bilingual and bicultural, we wouldn't see him as something that everyone could relate to. But our campaign was able to do just that. And I think he's a great example,

and that story's a great example, of how this all can work across a broader medium.

Wenny Katzenstein:

And Ellene, would you even say because of that—the specificity but also the relatability of the story, and certainly Miles—that it actually yielded new opportunities, from a marketing perspective?

Ellene Miles:

I would absolutely say that. I think that he just opened up the world. And going back to the cultural aspect, we're able to dive into hip-hop, right? We're able to dive into fashion. We're able to dive into the cultural specifics of being a New York City kid. Speaking Spanish in the home.

Hanish Patel:

So I want to anchor in on—you mentioned New York City kid and how that can transverse across [audiences]—so it's very much relatable. What are some of those best practices or, frankly, myths that can be dispelled when taking on that intersectional approach to global and non-US markets where maybe someone from New York isn't as relatable?

Ellene Miles:

You know, I think this film, it really did well in markets like Brazil, areas of the UK, South Africa. This story resonates. And so, you can go to Senegal, or you can to São Paulo, or you can go to Johannesburg and see a kid that looks like Miles, right?

And so they all saw themselves in him. And I believe that that's part of the myth busting, right? Is this idea that we're not everywhere. (laughs)

And that people in a small town, or people in these different regional markets—what we call the flyover states—are not just as plugged in to this culture. And so I do think each campaign gives you an opportunity to knock down a myth and create a new reality and create a new marketing pillar. And that's also really exciting.

Hanish Patel:

And do you have to take a slightly different approach when you're looking about activations internationally? Or is it a case of you can try and hit it so beautifully with a title, like you just spoke about, that actually just goes far and wide?

Ellene Miles:

I think it really depends on the market, but I'll keep using Brazil as an example because it's cross-cultural, it's language, it's all of that. And I think that even a movie like *The Woman King*, which we put out last fall, we did a huge activation in Brazil because they felt really close to the story. And so, it's really just about finding the connective tissue, whether that's culturally, whether that's a regional specification. But just like all marketing, finding the thread. And then creating a narrative that tells the audience what we feel brings them closer to the product.

Hanish Patel:

I want to shift gears a little here and, Wenny, turn to you, because you and your team have been working on Media Reimagined for some time now. Can you explain to our listeners 1) what it is, and 2) share some of the key findings from it, because it'll very much echo what we've just heard from Ellene, as well, when it comes to *The Woman King*, *Spider-Verse*, etc.

Wenny Katzenstein:

Yeah, absolutely. So, Media Reimagined, it really started out as an eminence piece for us to answer some critical questions and, essentially, really looking at a few things. One is, does inclusion matter in content choice and revenue? Is inclusion enough, and whether or not the industry—and speaking specifically of media and entertainment—are we doing enough?

There's three statistics that I'd love to make sure the audience is aware of. One is when we look at segments that are really driving the US entertainment market today, it's really Black, Latino, and queer viewers.



They drive 36% of the total market. And it actually goes up to a little over half when we look at specifically Gen Z. But when we talk about the idea of what's actually driving revenue, through inclusivity, it's important to understand that actually all audiences are spending against content they consider inclusive. And that's at a tune of \$84.4 billion worth of spend, which is huge.

The other thing that we found fascinating is—and this is important relative to what we see in the marketplace today—as it relates to subscription services, there's actually about \$91.3 billion of current revenue that's tied up, in turn, specifically from Black, Latino, and queer audiences. And I think that has a lot to do with looking for inclusive representative content. So it provides some really interesting milestones for our media and entertainment organizations.

And I think what's interesting about the way Ellene has talked about things like connective tissue, you would assume that the media and entertainment at the core of the products that we put out into the marketplace should be automatically very connective to our audiences.

But the reality is what we found in our research, when we looked at US consumers who are actively engaging with at least one form of media a week—and we're talking about 50 to 60 hours a week—there's really one in four people that actually feel like they've been included within the way they've seen themselves in the media and entertainment industry. So that's a big gap from where the industry thinks it is.

Hanish Patel:

I want to stick with what you talked about “connective tissue”—or that both of you have. And I'm just kind of taking in those statistics as you were talking about those. And I'm trying to think about putting myself in the shoes of, say, a marketer for content. So, Ellene, I want to turn to

you—and also get your perspective, Wenny, on this as well. As a content marketer, what can they be doing to drive that higher sense of connective tissue, that inclusivity for consumers in their strategy, as well as just the overall marketing and communications, to make sure there isn't that disparity between maybe what everyone thinks versus maybe what leadership are thinking versus what's truly out there?

Ellene Miles:

Sometimes I think you have to go small to go big. And I think that a lot of our strategies involve going for the thing with the most massive reach, right? And the most massive reach is not always the thing that hits the most people. And I know that sounds sort of counterintuitive. You think big reach means “get everybody.” But we're looking in a world now, again, to my earlier point about just the segmentation and the hyper-segmentation of our audience and having to go into these deeper pockets to find them and really engage with them, I'd much rather have a bunch of outlets with the smaller reach than going and just putting all my chips on one big, massive reach.

Because when you go smaller, that means these people are more engaged, they're more likely to—more susceptible to the awareness campaign that you're doing. Otherwise, it just sort of glosses it over. And so I think it requires us to rethink what “general market” really means and begin to redefine that for ourselves, because massive reach doesn't always mean best engagement.

Wenny Katzenstein:

I love that, Ellene, because I think the other thing that you're essentially pointing to is that when you actually reach consumers and viewers in a very meaningful way, it's not just the singular spend on the content at the moment; it actually drives the entire value chain for people who feel like they're being seen and that they see components of what they're interested in then and, if not themselves, in the content.

We actually see a lot of opportunity in terms of people who are saying they will incrementally spend more when they feel like they're included. And we see that particularly not just in content consumption, like television and movies, but we also see that in social platforms and gaming as well.

Hanish Patel:

So, I love what you talked about earlier about fatigue. And clearly everyone can see how it's such an important aspect, like you said, to open up the audience, open up the consumer, particularly in our industry of media and entertainment. Thinking about some of the guidance you've given, if we think about our listeners right now, and some of the executives in this space, what would you like them to know? What advice would you give as they're either embarking on or in the journey right now to make *their* content, to make what *they're* producing, make *their* services significantly more equitable?

Wenny Katzenstein:

I don't think equity and great business is an "either/or"; it's a "yes, and." And I think what we've been able to see here with the work that we've done in Media Reimagined, and with those who are out in the trenches like Ellene, which is you can do really well for the world, but you can also do really well for your organization.

As Ellene mentioned, as the world gets a lot more fragmented and the demand for personalization to be seen by our consumers increases, equity is a must. And it does not bode well for organizations not to see this as a key component of how they go to market.

Ellene Miles:

Absolutely, Wenny. And it's funny when I think about it, but it's so true the more I crystallize it. There's an actress named Issa Rae, and she was doing an interview once and somebody asked her, "How would you define diversity?" And she said, "Normal." She said that diversity just means normal, right? (laughs) And I was like, "What?" And the more you unpack that, you realize that, oh, yeah, it does mean normal. It means this is the world, right?

And so, if we remove our conventional thinking of what works, like we talked earlier about, you know, global impact of certain films or what have you. I mean, there was a time—and it's still not *quite* gone—but there's a time when movies with African Americans don't travel. You can't open a movie overseas with African Americans, it just doesn't work. Sorry, guys. Doesn't work.

And then global stars began to realize Will Smith, Denzel Washington, The Rock, etc., and it became another myth buster. And so, I think if you're still thinking in a way that was common even five years ago, you're already behind. So, removing that conventional thinking, understanding that the normalcy of diversity and the normalcy of equity is not only the future but it's happening whether we're doing it or not.

So, do we want to be a part of the movement? Do we want to be forward-thinking and giving ourselves the best opportunity for success? Or do we want to stay in sort of comfortable, antiquated spaces? And I think that answer, when we pose it that way, you know the answer,

right? You want to always be on the future track. You always want to be thinking ahead and looking ahead.

And so, I think inclusivity and equitable practices go a long way to engage the people that frankly are the keys to our success, the keys to our financial success, the keys to our employees' success. It works on every single tier of a business. And I believe that understanding how to implement it is really the key.

Hanish Patel:

I'm pausing there because I'm just taking on board that statement, "diversity means normal." Now, that's really powerful. When you really think about what they're truly getting to the core of and it just made me think, and then just trying as I wrap it up here, there are things that both of you talked about where it's not a singular responsibility, it's prioritized across the entire ecosystem. And continue to think about how is it additive, you know? How can it further, and rightly so, open up audiences, open it up for the consumer?

So with that, I want to thank the both of you, Ellene and Wenny, for joining me today in today's conversation. And until next time, happy listening.

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