



EPISODE 41

Turning brand awareness into loyalty: Insights from Herbalife CMO Hanan Wajih

Host: Alan Hart, leader in marketing and customer strategy, Deloitte Consulting LLP

Guests: Hanan Wajih, CMO, Herbalife

Alan Hart: Today on the show, I've got Hanan Wajih, chief marketing officer at Herbalife. She's focused on shaping the company's global marketing strategy with a focus on purpose, innovation, and brand elevation. She has a pretty large remit focused on all things from brand and digital marketing to products and sports marketing, content strategy, communications, and the Herbalife Family Foundation. Prior to Herbalife, she was the CMO at Vytalogy Wellness and then spent 15 years at J&J at various global, regional, and local marketing roles.

On the show today, we talk about the enterprise transformation that Herbalife has going on and the CMO and marketing's role in helping to support and drive that transformation. That and much more with Hanan Wajih

Alan Hart: Are you ready to go beyond the basics of marketing? I'm Alan Hart and this is Marketing Beyond, where I chat with the world's leading chief marketing officers and business innovators to share ideas that spark change and inspire you to challenge the status quo. Join us as we explore the future of marketing and its endless potential.

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Alan Hart: Hanan, welcome to the show.

Hanan Wajih: Thanks for having me today, Alan.

Alan Hart: Yeah, you're my first conversation of the day. So, you get full Alan right now. Full energy.

Hanan Wajih: Perfect!

Alan Hart: But I hear you had a recent vacation in Maui. I have never been there, and I'm just curious, does it live up to the hype that I've heard?

Hanan Wajih: Yeah. Maui lives up to all the hype. It's an absolutely spectacular place. Not only the beauty, but it's so grounding. It really gave me an opportunity to reconnect with my family, with nature, and honestly with myself. Because I'm always on the go, always fast-paced, and it was really just a great opportunity to just disconnect and, of course, the amazing food. It was a great trip.

Alan Hart: It's a mix of sand and nature, right?

Hanan Wajih: Yeah.

Alan Hart: Because I've never been to Hawaii in general. So, what do you like the most—beach or touring around town and other aspects?

Hanan Wajih: I love the beach. I love water. Anything having to do with water—water sports. But we actually spent a lot of time in the rainforest. One of the key highlights was the Road to Hana. I don't know if you've ever heard of it, but it's this road through the rainforest in Maui.

And it has something like over 50 one-lane bridges, but the beauty is just breathtaking, and there's so many cool spots along the way. Tons of waterfalls, little side hikes. It was really, really enjoyable and just kind of this discovery journey. I have three kids, so there was a little bit for everybody along the way, and then they had these really cool vendors on the side of the road, you know, whether it's Hawaiian shaved ice or chicken barbecue or whatever it may be.

So there's a lot of opportunities to taste the culture. So that was a really fun experience.

Alan Hart: That's awesome. And just kind of slow the pace down of daily life.

Hanan Wajih: It's a very slow pace, you know. You just soak in all the aloha. Just grateful to have had the time there with the family.

Alan Hart: I love it. I love it. Well, you are the CMO of Herbalife. Where'd you get your start, and how'd you end up where you are?

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Hanan Wajih: Career progression was a little unconventional—maybe not linear in terms of the marketing world, but I actually started my career in supply chain.

Alan Hart: Oh, wow.

Hanan Wajih: Yeah, in a small startup you end up wearing a lot of hats. I did IT, I did marketing, and so I gained an appreciation for the complexity of business, but also I fell in love with the people. And I went to get my MBA, to be a career changer, to move into marketing.

I fell in love with marketing—the storytelling, the people, you know, the opportunity to really understand behaviors and translate that into business and strategy. And so, I went and got my global MBA in global brand management. I had a pivotal internship at Coca-Cola, which, when you think about CPG marketing, they're kind of best in class, and I learned a lot from there. And then I always looked at opportunities on how I can add value, what experience I'm going to get, and quite honestly, I love a good challenge. So I usually took the path less taken, in most cases.

So I spent a lot of my career in CPG and I've worked all over the world—local roles, regional roles, global roles—and in a US P&L line role in a huge developed market like the United States. I spent a majority of my career at Johnson and Johnson, and I'm very grateful for that experience.

My last role there, they acquired a beauty company. And I went in to replace the CMO at the time, and it was this incredibly innovative, agile company. But they didn't really have marketing capabilities at scale, but they had really passionate “beauty mavens,” I called them. And I was able to kind of go in there and kind of really understand their business—the way that they brought innovation to the forefront, how they drove agility—and marry that to big CPG-like strategies and structure. And the challenge was to really integrate the two to drive growth, and it was just an incredible experience, really upskilling the team, building the strategy and the structure, and really harnessing that entrepreneurial spirit to drive growth.

And we were, at the time, one of the fastest-growing haircare brands in the US, and having a great time doing it. And after that experience, I realized I love building. I love building brands, I love building businesses, I love building teams. And from there went to work for a private equity-owned company where I did more of the same for three years. And then that's when Herbalife found me and I found Herbalife. And honestly, I didn't know that much about the company, and I went on this discovery journey to learn more about the brand and the people. And it was the people and the opportunity that really brought me here. This incredible brand has such great assets that most people don't know about.

And when you come on the inside, you see this scale of this brand and company. The incredible people, the level of executives that I met and their authenticity, and the distributors, you know, and just the heart that's in this company.

I want to tell you a little story. When I was interviewing, of course, you do your research online, you meet the people. But then I went out to our nutrition clubs, and I wanted to see the brand in real life, so I met these distributors who own the nutrition clubs and are running them. And they told me their story. One was of personal transformation. How when they entered Herbalife, the impact it had on their personal well-being and wellness and

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what that transformation journey looked like, but also on the business opportunity that Herbalife afforded them and the impact it had on their family and their lifestyle and what they were able to build. Those stories were so incredibly impactful that I knew this was a place that I wanted to be.

Alan Hart: Help me set the stage. What's the scope of the organization that you run at Herbalife?

Hanan Wajih: It's broad and intentionally so. Within my organization, I have global brand, creative, I have insights, product innovation, digital marketing, and our family foundation.

Alan Hart: OK. All right. That's amazing.

Hanan Wajih: Oh, and I forgot—our sports sponsorships.

Alan Hart: Yeah. OK. All right. Yeah, that's a big remit. Well, if I think about Herbalife—and you talked a little bit about the power and the story of learning about distributors and the impact that it has for them and what they're able to do as being a part of this—how do I think about the mission of Herbalife? What would surprise me about the company?

Hanan Wajih: So our mission is to be the world's premier health and wellness company, community, and platform. And that's really through nutrition and wellness, our community, and our personal connection, which is through our distributors. And I think what surprises people most is that we're the number one active and nutrition lifestyle brand in the world.

Alan Hart: That's wild.

Hanan Wajih: It's incredible. And we're also the number one protein shake in the world. We serve about 1.5 billion shakes a year, which most people don't know.

We also have 63,000 nutrition clubs globally, which really serve as our community hubs. And so, when we talk about this one-to-one personal connection, we really have this global scale, but it's embedded really locally in these communities through our distributors and through our nutrition clubs, which is really (what we feel is) our superpower, to be able to deliver nutrition and wellness to these communities.

And then we have our sports sponsorships that I mentioned. We have 120 globally. What most people don't know is that it's not just a brand endorsement. We actually craft these nutrition programs for these athletes, customized for the individual athlete, for their sport, and it's kind of year round. It's not only when they're competing; it's on-season/off-season.

You know, when you think about that at scale, on how we're doing that across our multiple markets, we participate in over 30 different types of sports, and the nutrition requirements are completely different. And it's really rooted in our expertise on nutrition.

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Alan Hart: Yeah.

Hanan Wajih: And I think the other thing that allows us to do that is we have over 200 doctors, experts, nutritionists globally, that help craft a lot of these programs for these athletes. I mean, we have five Olympic committees. We also have our global nutrition partner, Cristiano Ronaldo, who's been with us for over 13 years. The scale and the power of the brand is truly incredible.

Alan Hart: I have to admit that I knew the brand, but I did not know all of those facts, and I did not know the scale. And frankly, it's a lot of complexity for a marketing organization to think about. Now we are at a tech summit right now.

I know that you're in the process of an enterprise kind of transformation of the company. Tell me a little bit about that. What does that look like? And where are you guys headed?

Hanan Wajih: Yeah, we're on this evolution as an organization and really looking at integrating technology in a meaningful way to allow us to lead in our space. And then, what does that mean operationally and for our people? And when I think about brand, as an example, and marketing and the things we just shared, at the heart of it is this storytelling and content. Because our big opportunity for Herbalife is we have actually really high awareness.

It's really this familiarity component, that people don't know who we are, what are we about, what's our purpose. The quality and the innovation behind our products, and, of course, we just talked about our scale. So, really thinking about that storytelling and content, and then when you look at the marketing world and all the technology that's there, there's so much innovation happening. And you look at the consumer behaviors, and meeting the consumer with the right message at the right time and the right place is becoming harder and harder than ever.

But there's also a beauty in that because that's personalization at scale. And that's really where all the technology and the marketing and actually the people behind the teams that come together to be able to drive this evolution. And if I think about Herbalife, we are a direct selling business model, which, you know, with our community and our distributors—2 million distributors globally—and millions of customers. As you said before, that's a lot of complexity. But coming in with a CPG background, it's really thinking about the brand discipline that CPG has and the marketing capabilities, and how do I integrate that into this incredible business model that's direct selling to really unlock that next step of growth.

Alan Hart: Yeah. As you think about marketing's role in helping to aid this transformation that you're on, and to your point, as a CPG background, you know, what is it, 2 million points of distribution? That's a lot! A lot of complexity to manage. How are you thinking about it? It may be early days, but what is marketing and your role in that process?

Hanan Wajih: So first and foremost, I think of our distributors. This incredible force of entrepreneurs that are with the customers every day. How do we create the right tools and the right content that powers their organization and businesses? And it's very different from when we think about customers and industries and the content and the storytelling that we need to tell there. And so there's two very different audiences when you think about tools and content and storytelling. And then, of course, there's the product piece.

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Product sits in my organization as well. We are also a product company. Thinking about innovation and then intersection with technology. How do we bring those two things together to serve our distributors and our customers in very meaningful ways so we can be at the forefront of wellness as it's evolving and this incredibly exciting time where you're seeing a lot of science and technology merge in the field.

Alan Hart: Well, as you think about your levers that you get to pull for growth at Herbalife, how do you think about them, and what are they, in terms of how you plan out your year going ahead?

Hanan Wajih: The first one is close to my heart, which is brand.

Alan Hart: Yes.

Hanan Wajih: And really the brand building.

Alan Hart: Right.

Hanan Wajih: You know, I was just at the CMO dinner last night. And we were talking about how brand building is so fundamental to growth.

And it's not about the short-term wins. It's about building that strong foundation that builds trust, brand love, and loyalty, which is your foundation for long-term growth.

And so when I think about Herbalife and all the things that I've shared with you, it's this incredible brand. And how do we really bring brand-building capabilities, both in technology but also in people and strategies, to really fortify this foundation of this incredible brand to unlock future growth. That would be number one.

The second is the personalization at scale. When we talk about the scale of Herbalife, nutrition and wellness, the different outlets we have, whether it be nutrition clubs, the one-to-one coachings. I think about that personalization at scale in terms of technology, in terms of content.

And then the last piece is the people. How do we ensure the teams are equipped with the right skill sets? We're here in the Adobe Summit and of course AI... How do we bring our teams along in that journey? Bringing them to the right capabilities with the right technology, but also making sure we have the teams with the right skill sets to really drive that growth and be able to fully realize this evolution we're part of.

Alan Hart: I am impressed by the brand and the scale of it, and I wish you well on all of the transformation that you're going through right now, and I'm sure you're going to knock it out of the park and the brand is going to grow tremendously.

One of the things we like to do on the show is to get to know you a little bit better. We know your recent Hawaii trip, but my favorite question to ask everyone that comes on the show is has there been an experience of your past that makes up who you are today?

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Hanan Wajih: Really great question, Alan. I think for me, I would say it's really my family and my parents. I'm so grateful. They were so, you know, loved me unconditionally, but also believed in me, like, relentlessly. Just a really strong family and extended family, which has really grounded me. And so I would say my family, but just to add a little bit more color to that, I have a very multicultural background.

My dad's Jordanian, my mom's American Italian. I grew up in the Middle East. I also grew up, you know, in the US as well. And so I've had really this diverse background of cultures and community, and it's really allowed me, I think, to see people from different perspectives, have empathy. You know, as a marketer, I love people and culture, and the sense of belonging for me has been a journey because I have such a diverse background. And I went to schools that had 60 different nationalities, and so everybody was different. And I think it's been so grounding for me, and I think why I chose a career—I always wanted to be in international business and global brand. And I think that's really at the foundation of it.

Alan Hart: I love it. Well, if you were starting this journey all over again, what advice would you give young Hanan?

Hanan Wajih: Yeah, I would tell myself to trust myself sooner and not wait to be a hundred percent ready. I always felt like I had to have all the experience and do everything in order to take the next level. And the truth is, if you have the grit and you're 80%, just go for it. And I think, you know, that's something that I would've done sooner.

Alan Hart: I love it. Well, what are you curious about in the world today?

Hanan Wajih: I'm really curious about AI, the tech component and the marketing integration, but honestly the leadership component. What type of leader do I need to be to lead in this era of AI and really support my teams during this transformation that's happening within the marketing world so we can lead, so we can be the futurists. And I think about that a lot because I think it's going to take a very different leadership capability and muscle, and I think one all leaders are really looking and learning [about] as we're evolving with this era of AI.

Alan Hart: What are you trying to learn more about right now?

Hanan Wajih: So, I'm really curious about Generation Alpha and Generation Beta. And I'm fascinated because, you know, Generation Alpha is the first generation that's growing up in a completely immersive technology environment.

And as a parent, I'm very curious. I do have Generation Alpha at home. But also as a marketer and as a leader, you know, as we think about the future and in terms of consumer behaviors and what is the environment going to be, and who are these future customers we're going to need to service?

Alan Hart: Well, as a marketer, what do you think as you look out, what is the biggest opportunity or potential threat that marketers face today?

Hanan Wajih: I think the biggest threat right now in this age of AI is authenticity and making sure we have strong values to navigate this human and technology balance that we're on the forefront of. And honestly, the courage just

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to challenge the status quo. Marketing is changing at the speed of light, and we need to be up for that challenge. So, really being able to be change agents.

Alan Hart: Well, I have one last question for you. We're at Adobe Summit, every technology summit at this point, AI you cannot escape. So if you had your pick, what would you want an agent or an LLM to do for you?

Hanan Wajih: Honestly, I would want it to be able to quantify the impact of brand marketing. [laughs]

Alan Hart: That's the Holy Grail.

Hanan Wajih: Something, the ROI we've been chasing for so long! [laughs]

Alan Hart: I love it. I love it. Yes. Let's stay hopeful. Let's stay hopeful AI could solve—

Hanan Wajih: Hey, anything's possible.

Alan Hart: Anything is possible. Hanan, thank you for coming on the show.

Hanan Wajih: I appreciate you having me today, Alan, and getting to tell a little bit of my story and the Herbalife story. It was a lot of fun. Thank you.

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