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Motion Fashion

Sportsgirl is on trend and leading the market with an in-depth understanding of who its customer is and where the industry is going.

Images by Estelle Judah Photography

As CEO of Sportsgirl, Elle Roseby has led the 65-year-old brand to new heights with 114 stores nationwide, 1,400 employees, and an interactive network of communication channels. *The CEO Magazine* sat down with Elle to discuss the brand's savvy forays into technology and social media and its unique relationship with the customer.

The CEO Magazine: In the six years that you have been CEO, what crucial shifts have you implemented across Sportsgirl?

Elle: We built our super flagship stores, we started our online business eight years ago, and we developed a community partnership with The Butterfly Foundation. We also developed a strong relationship with RMIT as part of the Industry Advisory and Program Advisory Committee's as well as a Visual Merchandising Program and the Young Essentials Program. In addition to this, we recently celebrated 10 years of SgLikes where we have collaborated with young design talent to create capsule collections,

which is an initiative that exposes brands to a wider market and provides an opportunity to work with our team on a big business scale. Instore, we've just launched active wear, and we're about to release sleepwear as well.

We built the community part of our website in 2007. In 2009, we established our presence on Twitter and Facebook. In 2010, we launched our mobile platform for the website, and then in 2012, we created Pinterest and Instagram accounts and launched our QR windows and our instore iPads.

In 2013, we created our Sportsgirl Explore app. We produce a magazine three times a year, and the app allows the customer to download content and shop from the magazine. It's a bespoke-built app that enables you to scan and receive content instantaneously.

How has the Sportsgirl customer embraced these communication channels?

She loves them! She has embraced them, she uses them, and she interacts with us. She's certainly very vocal in our community; I

think it's actually brought us closer together. It's enabled us to develop a relationship with and gain an understanding of our customer, so it's been really critical for the brand.

Do you think it's drastically shifted the way the consumer shops?

What's changed is the accessibility of shopping. Retailers used to have regulations around opening hours; with the online store, we don't have those restrictions anymore. It enables 24-hour access to your brand for her to browse, compare, and purchase, so that's certainly been a dramatic and important shift.

How do you see technology influencing the fashion industry in the future?

Technology will transform the shopping environment to a point where you will be recognised when you walk through the door, and there will be a history of what you have bought and what your shopping preferences are. This will enable us to have a closer relationship with the customer and



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- Elle Roseby

be able to reward and build a level of loyalty with them.

It will also enable us to make the purchasing step a lot easier than it’s ever been before. When you see something, you desire it, you want it immediately. It’s our job as a retailer, whether the customer sees it in a magazine, a window, or instore, to make the purchasing process as easy as possible for our customers. I think that’s where technology is heading.

How do you ensure Sportsgirl remains on trend?

We are very focused on who our customer is. We have great reporting systems, and we have very close connections with our store teams. We’re very transparent throughout the business, and we get lots of feedback from store teams, and vice versa. Our product teams

really understand their customer base; they understand what’s working and what they can get back into.

I think there’s great clarity over who our customer is, the different types of customers that come into our stores, and what she’s expecting from us from a quality, sizing, pricing, fashion, and service point of view.

How does Sportsgirl work with suppliers and strategic partners to ensure you are leading trends in the marketplace?

We are very transparent about all of our plans with our suppliers. Whether you’re a social media partner, a website partner, or a supplier, we’re always very transparent about the strategies of the business, how you fit into those strategies, and how we’re going to collaborate to achieve the outcome we need.

How do you shape and create the culture at Sportsgirl and create a ‘we’, not ‘I’ mentality?

I think that starts with how you are as a person, your behaviour and language, and how you work with people. I think that’s up to me and the management team as to who we are as people, how we work together, and how we then work with our teams.

‘Culture’ is a very interesting word; sometimes, it’s hard to define until you’re in it. I think the culture of this organisation is that we love the brand. Everything we ever do is about this brand. It’s not about individual success; it’s about the brand’s success and our team’s success. We’ve always put that first.

Once again, we’re very collaborative. We’re not always going to agree on things, but when we do make a decision, >



we're all in that decision together and we all follow that through. We take risks, but we're really happy to take them because we're all in it together.

Sportsgirl supports The Butterfly Foundation. How does the company work with the foundation?

That's an interesting case for us. Around eight years ago, we knew that we wanted to have a community partnership. Everybody's got a cause that they're really passionate about; for me, it was animals. But we said, 'What's the best cause for the brand? What's really right for our customer?'

We sent a survey out to all our girls and we asked them, 'This is what we're planning on doing; we'd like to hear from you. What do you think are the areas of concern or the areas that you think Sportsgirl could make a difference in?'

We received a 92-per-cent response rate, which is pretty staggering. Overwhelmingly, the responses focused on depression and eating disorders. No company was addressing eating disorders in the fashion industry, so we thought that was an area that we could make a difference in and raise awareness of this important health issue.

We brought in a consultant to help us. There were a lot of associations dealing with eating disorders across Australia. We then came across The Butterfly Foundation and met its founder,



Claire Vickery, who had experienced through her own family the pain of a family member suffering an eating disorder. We were really interested in the work that she was doing, so we decided to support The Butterfly Foundation.

Today, we've raised more than \$1.7 million for them. We have strategic meetings every quarter when we sit down and review our plans. Our view on eating disorders is that Sportsgirl is an enabler of raising awareness. We're able to get eating disorders into the national discussion and raise it as a critical health issue through having a presence in our stores. We're able to raise money and put it towards critical projects.

One of the recent projects we worked on was the national support line. The Butterfly Foundation wanted us to provide three-year funding to set up the support to prove to the government that it was a much-

needed access point for sufferers, carers, and doctors.

We granted \$340,000 towards that project over those three years, and, in the meantime, The Butterfly Foundation was able to gain much-needed statistics. Overwhelmingly, you could see that the community needed support. They then went to the Federal Government with these statistics, who were then willing to provide \$1.9 million to build a stronger presence for the support line.

We also helped with The Butterfly Wing at Westmead Hospital. Many families come in with their young children who suffer from eating disorders. They come from rural communities and they require accommodation. We helped fund the wing at Westmead Hospital so families have somewhere to stay.

This year, we're going to start a five-year program with the New South Wales Government and The Butterfly Foundation in the

development of a day hospital at Butterfly House. We want to help by supporting the families in their accommodation needs. We're always very aware of how eating disorders impact the whole family. Another way we financially assist sufferers is through providing direct financial support, so there is a sum of money that we put towards people who can't access or don't have the funds or ability to access special care.

It's so important and it's what you have to do. I suppose that's the beautiful part of being able to help and be in a role and in a business that is so successful and can really help at a community level.

The Butterfly Foundation has often said to us that they were virtually unheard of before our partnership with them. They'd go to schools and talk about eating disorders, but they were never known. Now, they go into schools and they ask the kids if they've heard of The Butterfly Foundation and around 95 per cent say they have because they've seen it in our stores. I think it's really important that we're getting such a critical health issue out there in the community. It's now starting to affect men, so the more we can help the better.

We've implemented body-shape training and language training to help our staff deal with negative language instore and to try and help people and our own staff look at themselves differently. This work led to our achievements at the 2013 Positive Body Image

Awards where we were successful in winning the award in both the overall and fashion categories. It is an accomplishment we are so incredibly proud of.

What does the future hold for Sportsgirl?

To just be the best we can possibly be. We want our customers to come in and be delighted by what we have on offer, what we stand for, and what we provide.

She, the customer, loves us; she loves what we do for her; she loves that we get her; and she loves that we live things with her and follow trends with her. We're there with her. I think that would be the vision: that she's really happy with us and we're enabling her to

access Sportsgirl whenever, wherever, and however she wants to.

We want our staff to be happy, fulfilled, and feel like they have autonomy. We want to be a great place to work. They are the two critical things that are really important. Additionally, we want the people who work with us, whether they're suppliers or partners, to really enjoy the relationships they have with us. If you have people who are enjoying the work and feel like they can make a difference, then they are successful and it's a great place to be. •

Publisher's note:
Elle Roseby has since left Sportsgirl.

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