



Yellowberry

JOHN BESSANT
Managing Innovation

From the bunny hill to the Tetons - A Case Study on Yellowberry

Okay Innovation Management enthusiasts, prepare yourselves. There's going to be some red faces and awkward giggles ahead; we're about to do some girl talk. Some of you might have been a teenage girl, some of you might even know one, a few of you just might have gone through the experience of buying a first bra. Those lucky people will know that for a market that is by definition open to half of the population, there is often a surprising lack of choice. Filter this down to bras specifically designed for girls that are still developing, and there is even less so. The Venn diagram of female underwear has fewer categories yearly. The Agent Provocateurs, the sports bras and the t-shirt bras dominate; women are expected to push up or flatten down. Clearly, neither are particularly appropriate for a teenage girl.

Enter Megan Grassell, founder of Yellowberry, a bra company for 'all girls who love and enjoy their youthful, yellow stages of life' (the name refers to a berry's colour before it has fully ripened, but we can set aside the creepiness of that for now). Comfortable, colourful, un-sexed bras for a market that has been little tapped; a manifestly sensible idea. But Megan's enterprise has touched a social nerve that has seen it catapulted into a level of growth that will require considered management. The 'message' of the brand, the concentrated significance of social media and a viral campaign, the particular marketing and partnerships; every part of Yellowberry's success capitalizes on new territories, making it a company worth consideration as we study how innovation can be managed into the twenty-first century.

Take a look at Grassell's Kickstarter campaign here:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/2126584956/yellowberry-changing-the-bra-industry-for-young-girls>

The video demonstrates what the Yellowberry bras look like, but the overarching content relates to what the brand means. Grassell introduces her mantras for the company, 'Water the flowers every day, Watch quietly and observe, Go barefoot, Love the outdoors and nature, Seek and find a hug when you need one, and Campfires are rare; eat as many marshmallows as you can.' Whilst there is a saccharine taste to these taglines that is difficult to shake off, they offer an overdue alternative to the narratives most frequently available to teenage girls. Take a look at this year's Victoria's Secret Super Bowl ad here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RumQykvJd0>

It is this kind of easy comparison that has caused many commentators to hold up Yellowberry bra's as as much a part of a movement as they are a product. Grassell is clearly aware that the value of her

product lies as much in what it means as what it is. In an interview with Ana Homayoun (<http://anahomayoun.com/yellowberry-draft/>) she describes her understanding of the social context into which she has launched Yellowberry.

'It is actually the crux of my senior project at my school, which is a research project on the early sexualization of young women in advertising and media. As I continue working on that, it's fascinating to me. And although I don't have all the right answers, what I can say is that this idea of oversexualizing pre-teens, tweens, and teens shouldn't come as a shock to anyone because it's around us everywhere. I hope my bras can help change that though.'

Not since the bra-burning trope was (falsely) attached to the women's liberation movement of the sixties have undergarments been connected so publicly to social context. Sex sells, but so too, apparently, does feminism. A huge amount of Yellowberry's success can be attributed to the 'message' contained in the Kickstarter video, Grassell can even be seen on the Today show (<http://www.today.com/style/18-year-old-launches-bra-line-help-teens-feel-comfortable-2D79601510>) talking about her product as part of a feature on teen body image. She describes the Yellowberry bras as part of a 'social movement'. That consumers buy into a brand when they buy a product is nothing new. What Yellowberry's success shows us is that a brand's connection to a larger concern, one which will have its own expansive online following, is a key factor in its ability to go viral.

Grassell was just seventeen when she launched Yellowberry, as she describes, 'I was not taken seriously nor was the fact that I have yet to graduate high school and was/am attempting to make the world a better place with my business'. Grassell's inexperience was understandably disconcerting to practised industry figures. With Yellowberry, Grassell would be making all of the failures inherent with experience for the first time. Conversely, it was Grassell's age that put her in a position of privilege when it came to marketing her company. Dinah Wisenberg Brin describes how members of Generation Z have an intuitiveness towards technology, as it has always been a part of their lives. To a seventeen year old the adoption of Kickstarter, an understanding of social media collectives and a level of aptitude regarding video and photography are innate, merely a part of their day to day experience. To a company founded even a decade earlier they might be the result of extensive R&D and departmental growth. Generation Z'ers operate lean start-ups as a matter of course (more on this here <http://www.cnbc.com/id/101839205>). Jamie Gutfreund, chief marketing officer of Noise, suggests that a level of professionalism can be obtained by these teen entrepreneurs online that would be otherwise unavailable to them physically, 'That old joke, 'On the Web nobody knows you're a dog.' ... Nobody knows that you're 10 or 12 if you take a good photo'. Through her Kickstarter campaign initially, and now a well designed website, Grassell is able to neatly package and manage Yellowberry's brand.

It's easy to spend time on the Yellowberry website; colourful design, regular content, straightforward links to social media pages, high quality images and a well stocked shop. Yellowberry's narrative is central to the brand, and runs through all aspects of its presence clearly. Copy for each of the products is unique and playful, with product names like 'Tweetheart', 'Ladybug' and 'Tiny Teton'. In a marketing

tool not dissimilar to that adopted by cosmetics brands such as Benefit Cosmetics and Lush, each of the products are imbued with their own character, reinforcing the customer's sense that they are buying into a way of life rather than a product. This technique allows these companies to position their products themselves as unique, allowing them to retail at more than the market average (Yellowberry bras cost between \$29.95 to \$42.95).

True to their message, Yellowberry also offer starter packs for growing girls. Most significantly, the Introduction to Yellowberry starter packs in collaboration with HelloFlo. Now, for those who found a ripening berry a slightly queezy metaphor for developing girls, HelloFlo might just be the straw that breaks the metaphorical camel's back. HelloFlo is a subscription service for your period. Aside from being a truly inspired example of user innovation (if there's one thing that you can rely on 50% of consumers needing once a month, it's tampons), HelloFlo is a straightforward brand that operates a playful and wholesome marketing strategy similar to that of Yellowberry (you can view their current ad here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEcZmT0fiNM>). The partnership between these two brands positions their products as an all encompassing service. Yellowberry don't just sell bras, they sell packages that supply you and your daughter with everything necessary to prepare you both for her puberty (even pamphlets and sweets). Yellowberry/HelloFlo starter kits range from \$109.95 to \$149.95, the alleviation of a predictably tense and awkward time in both of your lives; priceless. By associating themselves with HelloFlo, Yellowberry show their commitment to providing sensible solutions for teenage girls and their families.

Megan Grassell has been startlingly open about her inexperience at what she is doing. She mentions her studies frequently in interviews, is honest about her mistakes (her first few prototypes were accidentally made out of sailing fabric), and tweets about pizza. That her youthfulness is less a hindrance than a selling point demonstrates how increasingly significant young entrepreneurs are to e-commerce. There is a spirit of DIY and an eagerness to test things out that is encouraged by online spaces such as Kickstarter and Facebook. In an interview with iamthatgirl.com, Grassell described her best piece of advice as, 'If the worst they can say is no, go ask the question.' Certainly, there are hurdles to come for Yellowberry. Implementing systems and maintaining brand integrity will be integral to the company's stable growth. But Grassell's refreshing openness regarding the management of her company stands her in good stead for a straightforward progression.