

# Top of the Shop

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A  
conversation  
about  
shopper  
marketing’s  
future with  
Stephanie  
Robertson  
of Procter  
& Gamble.  
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Procter & Gamble is widely acknowledged as a pioneer of shopper marketing. Indeed, the birth of shopper marketing is often credited to P&G CEO A.G. Lafley, who in 2003 first articulated the concept of the ‘first moment of truth’ — at the retail shelf — highlighting the critical importance of the retail experience in building strong brands. • Not coincidentally, Procter & Gamble has also ranked number-one in *The Hub Top 20* for four of the past eight years — a feat unmatched by any other shopper-marketing organization. • We recently spent a few moments with P&G’s head of shopper marketing, **Stephanie Robertson**, to learn more about how the company built and sustained a world-class shopper-marketing organization, as well as its view of the future of shopper marketing. Following are excerpts of Stephanie’s comments.

## What does shopper marketing mean to you?

Shopper marketing is the work of converting shoppers into buyers. At Procter & Gamble, we are focused on brand building, and as a shopper-marketing community we are now responsible for brand building at retail.

We want to be good stewards of our brands. We are making sure that we are reinforcing the equity of our brands, but doing so in a way that allows retailers to have unique solutions and grow their categories. This is really the sweet spot for shopper marketing.

What that means is that we are focused on leveraging our brands, our insights and our marketing capabilities to make sure that we are creating solutions that delight our shoppers, but also create value for our retailers. But, with all of that, in its simplest form it’s about converting shoppers into buyers.

## What are your top priorities for shopper marketing right now?

My top priority right this minute is to ensure that our shopper marketers across the country have the right capabilities and resources to build outstanding work for our brands, shoppers and retailers.

We have a talented group of marketing and operations managers across the country. It’s

important that these assignments help people accelerate their careers. We want to make sure that we are constantly putting in front of them best-in-class examples of how to reach shoppers in a more digitally focused world.

We have also invested in making sure we have the right partners to enable us to win digitally with shoppers. We’re testing new and different ways to reach shoppers with our brand messages. We are investing in those partnerships — testing, learning and leveraging their capabilities to raise the total digital IQ of our shopper-marketing community.

## Were you surprised that digital came up as a weak spot in the Hub Top 20 survey?

I’m not sure “weak” is the right word. I would say we are “learning.” We know in the shopper-marketing community, broadly, how to make the best displays, for example. There is a lot of industry knowledge in that space, whereas “digital” is still relatively new.

## How do you see shopper marketing evolving?

The market is full of rich opportunities to reach shoppers in more places than ever before. As marketing and merchandising spaces become more integrated, it’s our new challenge to think about how to navigate that. That has implications



for the skills that we look for in shopper marketers, the way we fund activation, and the way we partner with retailers. This is a rich space that is really inspiring to me.

There are new areas for P&G to partner with retailers, as well. As retailers are trying to reinvigorate their business models, it creates opportunities for P&G to partner with them in new and different ways.

However, regardless of all the change that's happening with shoppers and retailers, what remains true is that P&G has the brands that shoppers prefer and the capabilities that retailers value. So, we want to stay true to that core of who we are, but also be very much in touch with what's happening in the marketplace.

### **Do you have a favorite example of a great shopper-marketing program?**

It's hard for me to pick just one because I get to see programs across a variety of teams and there are so many inspiring initiatives. For example, in our club business, we have unlocked the 'membership' model to understand what inspires a club-store member to choose our brands more often.

Costco, Sam's and BJ's all have had significant leadership thinking at the retail level. Of course, the club model is a bit different than some of our other retailers. So, club-store marketing managers have to be particularly in touch because they don't necessarily have all of the tools that our other channels have. They have found a way and a model to be truly successful, however.

I also hold up the Walgreens' *People's Choice* partnership. That has been a fantastic partnership that leverages P&G's media properties, and does so in a way that affirms our brand equities and drives more trips and traffic back to the retailer.

Lastly, Dollar General has launched a brand-new campaign that talks about them as a convenience and value retailer, and does so with the P&G brands that their shoppers prefer. What's universally true is that the best shopper marketing is always shopper-insight led. It creates a platform for our brands to deliver their

messages to shoppers. It's done in partnership with retailers and really creates long-term value.

### **Why do you think P&G ranked #1 in the Hub Top 20?**

The *Hub Top 20* is a wonderful recognition of all the hard work that's happening. The credit goes to the people who are in the field every day, who are working hard to make sure our brands are top-of-mind. It really takes a village to get this work done. These are some of the best jobs in the company.

Our agency partners are also invaluable. We have a select few, long-standing partners that enable our shopper-marketing capabilities.

### **Why do you have five different shopper agencies?**

We want to be strategic about who we partner with. We make sure we have a very select group of agency partners where the relationships go deep and we are able to invest, versus spreading ourselves too thinly.

Each one of our agency partners has core competencies including digital, and retailer understanding. It's about having the right partners that can help us deliver the results.

They understand our business, and our business model. They understand how to get work done well. Without their support there is no way that we could deliver good results.

### **What is the secret to success in shopper marketing?**

The secret to success is that we have to be externally focused. Being part of a large company like P&G, there are so many things that our marketing managers can focus on.

The one thing that we try to reiterate is how important it is to remain externally focused on a shopper and her needs, because ultimately she is the boss.

Shoppers are voting with their feet, with their clicks, and with their purchases. It's important that we're in touch with that and that our brands are top-of-mind for them. ■