

a branded world

PODCAST

with
Luiza Campos



004 | HOW ATB FINANCIAL IS BUILDING A
CULT BRAND WITH CAROL SHMYGOL,
HEAD OF MARKETING AND BRAND AT ATB
FINANCIAL

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

marca strategy

A BRANDED WORLD PODCAST - 004 | HOW ATB FINANCIAL IS BUILDING A CULT BRAND WITH CAROL SHMYGOL, HEAD OF MARKETING AND BRAND AT ATB FINANCIAL

Show Notes: http://marcastrategy.com/podcast_episode/004-how-atb-financial-is-building-a-cult-brand/

Luiza Campos: You're listening to A Branded World podcast, episode number four.

Announcer: Welcome to A Branded World podcast, where we explore great brands and give you tips, tools, hacks, and guides to create brands that captivate clients and drive growth and revenue. And now, your host, Luiza Campos.

Luiza Campos: Hello everyone, I am very excited for today's episode. Today, I'm interviewing Carol Shmygol, she's the head of marketing and brand for ATB Financial. She has over 30 years of experience in the world of marketing, and has worked with many great brands like Saturn and Saab and Scotia Bank and Bell, and many others. She has experience also in both the agency side and the client side, which really brings a great perspective to the world of marketing and branding. Now, I'm interviewing Carol about the journey that ATB Financial has taken for the past few years in really reinventing or really analyzing their brand, who they are, and how they can bring that to life.

Now, as you'll hear in the interview, this was a long process, but it's been an amazing process, and I'm really a big fan of what ATB has done, not only because of the brand that they have defined for themselves, but how they're actually bringing that brand to life. This is not an easy task for anyone, but given the fact that ATB is a large company with offices in many different locations, and have thousands of employees, you can imagine how difficult it is to bring everyone onboard and to make every staff member understand the important role they have to play in bringing this brand to life. ATB is doing a beautiful job at it, it's a great example for everyone.

Regardless of the size of your organization, this is a great episode where you can really learn what it takes from the leaders of the company or the organization to find that why, to find their purpose, to really align everything in terms of processes and services and products, to align that with their brand and to bring all staff onboard and make that brand come to life, make them understand the role they play and the significance they have into doing this job. Regardless if you are a for profit or a nonprofit, the size of your organization and where you are in your brand journey, you will get a lot from this episode. Carol shares great tips and insights on how to define that brand, how to find it, and how to bring everyone

along and align all your processes and your services to be consistent with your brand, and help strengthen that brand.

Don't forget to go back to abrandedworldpodcast.com to find the show notes and all the links that Carol mentions in this episode. You will also find a free downloadable pdf that talks about the key steps for you to implement your brand successfully, and to ensure your brand stays top of mind and it's a living, breathing part of your organization. Here we are, with Carol Shmygol from ATB Financial. Hi Carol, how are you?

Carol Shmygol: I'm great, Luiza, how are you?

Luiza Campos: I am great, I am so excited to have you in the show today, because I am a huge fan, as you know, of ATB and of the work that you've done and the brand that you've built at ATB, not only for what you stand for, but it's actually a brand that it seems like every employee and that every experience that we have, you really reflect that, it seems like every ATB-er ... Do you call yourselves ATB-ers?

Carol Shmygol: I guess we do. Well yeah, we call each other team members, but yes, we are absolutely ATB-ers.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, and it just seems like everybody really understands the brand and what role they play to bring that to life, so I'm super excited to talk to you today, and see how you and ATB managed to do this, which is not an easy task, to make sure people understand the brand and knows exactly what are the actions and behaviors that they need to take to bring it to life, to support it. I would love for you to talk to us, I'll just start by asking, you know when did ATB decide to do this rebrand, how long ago was that, and what was the impetus of it?

Carol Shmygol: Sure, I'd love to take you on the journey, which started about four years ago. We had a purpose statement, we'd been very successful, we have incredible people and leaders at ATB, but about four years ago, it was Dave Mullet, our president and CEO, Peggy Garrity, our executive vice president, chief of reputation and brand, the CMC, our senior people I think we're talking about how do we get more impetus and more alignment around what we are? I know, Luiza, you're a big fan of Simon Sinek and the Golden Circle-

Luiza Campos: Yes, yes.

Carol Shmygol: But for the listeners, if you watch that, it's one of the most viewed TED talks ever, and if you watch it, Simon Sinek, S-I-N-E-K, and the golden circle, that tells you a lot about why ATB did what we did. The golden circle talks about, in any given company, there's three circles. The outer circle is absolutely everybody in the company. Everybody in the company knows what you do, so if you're General Motors, everybody

knows we make and sell cars. There's a smaller inner circle, those are the people that know how you actually do it, they understand we build clay models and we do testing and we build the distribution and parts and network, we do after self-service, like how you do it. Everybody knows what you do, some people know how you do it, but very few people in a company, and actually very few companies understand the smallest inner circle, and that's why, why do you do what you do, what gets you out of bed in the morning, what is your purpose?

It's a really powerful TED talk and there's some beautiful examples in there. Our journey that started four years ago was really to define our why, what gets us out of bed in the morning. We are a small regional financial institution, if we don't have an incredibly powerful ethos and a why, we are never going to compete against not only the big players, the big five, but against all of the thin techs that are aggressively disrupting this marketplace. It took us a year to define our why, and we went broad and deep across the organization and to Albertans to understand, where have we come from, what are we today, and where do we need to go in order to be successful?

That's not just where do we need to go to make a buck. If your why is about revenue, then you will never succeed, but where do we need to go to really be ... I'm going to talk about cult brands a lot, so that was a year in the making. What we developed from that, and again, I'm going to give a big hats-off to Dave Mullet, Peggy Garritty, Lorne Rubis, our head of people and culture, who really championed this, it was a 94-word story, it was not a vision, mission and values that gets put on a wall, it's a story, and go to atb.com and you can find it. It starts with, "We can transform banking, reimagine it, make banking work for people," and it ends with, "That's why we will always be more than a bank."

It's an incredibly powerful story that 5,300 team members could understand and get behind, because they could see themselves in it. At the same time as we developed our story, we developed 10 ATBs. These are what other companies might call values, these are attitudes that describe how we have to behave, and these are attitudes that we hire to, and more importantly, that we fire to. They are things like deliver a love to customers and each other every chance you get, be personally and fiercely accountable, find a way to yes, have fun every day. There's 10 of them, and they become a recruitment tool, and when we sit down and we have our annual and biannual reviews, they are held up as, "This is how we need you to behave."

The story and the ATBs, and that was developed in about a year. What most companies might do, and I spent 26 years working at Cosette, a pretty phenomenal ad agency, worked with some really great brands and some really smart people, but what companies often do when they have their story, their version of their story, is they have a huge launch

internally, everybody gets a drink and a t-shirt, and there's streamers and there's a really slick, expensive marketing campaign, but nothing changes within the company. There's a great example of an insurance company from several years ago, and the insight around that, and we can all probably nod our head, is insurance from a customer's perspective is very complicated. There is nothing easy, whether it's understanding the form, making a claim, adjudicating a claim, nothing is simple in that business.

This really smart company had a great insight, which is if we could just simplify this for people, that is going to be our competitive edge. They did exactly what I said, they created a vision statement, they put it on the wall, they had a great advertising campaign, which I don't know how I can still remember it when I don't necessarily remember what I did on Monday, but what they didn't do is change any of the processes. Everything within the company stayed the same, and what ATB did is a year to develop our story and the ATBs, and then we spent a year and a half, almost two years infusing it across 5,300 team members in a really deliberate way.

Rob Bennett, who is the executive vice president of our retail bank, spent, I don't know how many infusions he ran, but every single person in his division sat there, he created stories to make people understand. To take that long to infuse something in a company, to me, I've never seen in my years of experience a company that did that so deliberately, understanding that it all means nothing if when you call us or you walk into a branch, we don't live what we're talking about. I'll be the first-

Luiza Campos: That's phenomenal. I mean, sorry-

Carol Shmygol: No, please, I get on a rant

Luiza Campos: No no no, because like yourself, I've never seen a company do that either, and that's exactly, you know we talked about this earlier, this is exactly where I see a lot of companies, any size, any industry, fail. They built this strong brand, and sometimes it can be a really strong brand platform, but then they fail to actually be able to deliver it. This is one of the reasons I admire what you guys have done so much. I have here, as you know, a book, The ATBs, which you actually have your 10 ATBs, your 10 ... As you said, most companies would refer to them as values, but these are actual sort of behaviors, these are actual guides for people so they know what to do or what is expected. I mean, this book is amazing because it's full of specific examples, it's full of expectations from clients, but also how ATB-ers can really deliver on those expectations, right?

Carol Shmygol: Absolutely, absolutely.

Luiza Campos: That's amazing, a year to develop the story. This really gives people, I don't think a lot of people would expect that it would take you that long, but it really represents how dedicated you were to this, how important this was for the organization. You used the word "deliberate", I mean this is exactly what people need to understand, that this has to be a deliberate ongoing effort. Talk to me a little bit more about that, I mean how did you ... You mentioned some of the leaders at ATB, that they're amazing leaders that have the vision and understood the importance of this, but how did that come about? I mean, how did you decide or understand how important this exercise was for ATB?

Carol Shmygol: You know what, I think, Luiza, you said it yourself, they're amazing leaders. You can't create a culture like this from the bottom up, it absolutely has to start from the top. It started with Dave Mullet and his most senior team that all were aligned and believed in the need for it. When you're aligned and you believe in the need ... There's a reason it took a year to develop 94 words, people were heavily emotionally invested in this exercise. Every one of those 94 words comes with a story behind all of them, because that's how passionate people were, but I think it's having that alignment at the most senior levels, and recognizing this isn't a people and culture initiative, this is absolutely not just a brand initiative, this is a company-wide initiative.

Like the time and effort that was invested in infusing this across 5,300 team members, like we're a bank, we get numbers, we're a financial institution, we get numbers, we get return on investment, and we have some of the smartest people I've ever worked with here. I think people either understand or don't understand the importance of this, and I'm blessed to work for a company that gets it from the top.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, that is amazing. You developed this, it took you a year and a half, you say, to actually infuse it internally. Tell me how that process was, what did you guys do to do that?

Carol Shmygol: Sure, so each of the areas within the bank, so whether it was the retail bank, or whether it was corporate financial services, or our investment bank, like all of the areas within ATB, their leaders were basically in charge with infusing it the best way for their people. Infusing it means full day sessions, it means sharing stories, it means talking about behaviors, it means we've realigned ... We have everyday heroes, like an internal recognition program, we've realigned all of that, our recruitment process, when you sit down and have your annual reviews, we've realigned everything to line up for the story and the ATBs. It wasn't only the individual touchpoints that 5,300 team members had with each other and with their leaders about it, it was all of those other really important processes and systems within the company that aligned beneath the story.

It's not like you go to this part of the intranet and you find the story, it's everywhere. That's why it takes, with a company our size, and mind you, like we're small compared to some of them, but we have 5,300 team members, the depth and breadth of infusing this from process to systems to understanding to behavior to recognition, that's why it took a year and a half. You know what, I would say that we still don't have this. We went public last September with our public face of that story, which is ATB Listens. The insight is that people do not feel listened to by their banks, they do not feel they have an ally with their banks. If you could boil down the 94 words in the story, the 10 ATBs into a single relevant consumer insight, it's that ATB listens.

We went public with that, but again, that's not a marketing campaign, it's actually a promise. That was a year ago, so that might be, Luiza, what you're mentioning when you saw it, like the rebrand, that's what we took public a year ago.

Luiza Campos: It's incredible, because that's exactly what I always tell my clients, your brand doesn't sit in a marketing department, your brand is not just about, as you mentioned, people and culture, it really has to be reflected everywhere and in everything. Everything has to go through that filter, does it reflect our brand, is it in sync with our brand, as you were mentioning? Realigning every process, realigning from internal documents to hiring processes to what your voice message sounds like and what does it say when people are put on hold, all of those details need to be aligned with that. It sounds like that's what you did in this year and a half, is that right?

Carol Shmygol: That's absolutely right, and it's really interesting, because as a financial institution, we're not just held up against the service or products that other financial institutions provide. We're held up against the experience that, the last great experience a customer has had. Every company, every listener, your customers are experiencing the same thing, and you've got the Airbnb's, you've got the Apples, you've got the Amazons, you've got the Googles of the world that are creating these unparalleled customer experiences, so we don't just have to be better than another financial institution. Let's be honest, people don't necessarily love financial institutions. When we infuse this story and these ATBs across the company and we talk about ATB Listens, it's not ATB Listens better than other banks, it's ATB listens better than anybody.

The bar is extremely high end. I'm a big fan of Amazon, and Jeff Bezos says, "Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room."

Luiza Campos: That's right.

- Carol Shmygol: Like there's only so much that you can control, such as what your story is and your ATBs, and how deliberate you are with your people understanding that, but then you kind of have to throw it out into this really messy world of social media, and with customer experience is when they call you or when you walk in your door, and that's when the rubber hits the road.
- Luiza Campos: Exactly, yeah, and I completely agree with Jeff Bezos. One of the best analogies I've heard is from Terry O'Reilly, who says that people build brands in their minds like birds build nests, one little twig at a time, one little experience at a time. If one of those experiences is not positive, so you can imagine what the perception or the image that they will have of your brand will be. It's really important as you guys did, to really look at every detail. You're so right when you say that you'll hold up against the last experience they had, because that little last twig may be the one that goes against your brand and takes away from it.
- Carol Shmygol: Absolutely, and so I don't want any of your listeners to sit there and think that we think we have this. We try really hard, but we are so far from perfect, and that's the exhausting part of this. Putting a promise out that ATB Listens, and living up to that story, it's not always easy, it's actually really hard. I think it's the understanding and the recognition that this is not one and done, this is a continuous journey, I think that that's really important. We're on a journey to be what we refer to as a cult brand, and that's why there aren't a lot of cult brands out there, because it's not easy.
- Luiza Campos: Yeah, and that's exactly it, you know your brand is never done, your brand is ongoing, it's what you do every day, it's what you do at every point of contact, it's really making it very purposeful, you know really putting attention to it. As you say, that is what it takes, and that's exactly why there's not as many cult brands out there, because it takes a lot of effort.
- Carol Shmygol: Yeah, absolutely.
- Luiza Campos: Can you tell us, how did you go about introducing this to staff for the first time, and then moving them into ... I guess my question is, how do you introduce it to them, and made them understand the importance that they play in this, and how this was so important for the whole organization? For any industry, there will be people, they're not marketers, they're not brand experts, they may not understand why we should now dedicate all this time to this and all this effort to this, when they already have their job descriptions, they already have a heavy workload, so how did you go about that?
- Carol Shmygol: It started from the top. Again, so this was not what a lot of companies, let's have a big gala, let's pay for everybody to come and have a big party and we'll have the president speak, that's not what we did. What we did is we actually had every single employee, 5,300 team members on March

4th, 2014, come together with their teams with a video with Dave Mullet, like live chat, I don't know what we called it at the time, because technology has changed a lot, even in a couple years. It was every single person in the company, they had lots of notice, so even if you work from home, be with your team, gather together, Dave is going to speak about what the story is, why we're doing it, what the expectations are, and then because you were already with your team, your leader of that team, it is their job to further infuse it and say, "Okay, that's what Dave is talking about. Now, what does that mean if you work in people and culture, what does it mean if you work on the front line, what does it mean if you work in the care center?"

It was really deliberate, and honestly Luiza, we talked about a lot of different ways to kickstart this in the company, and I'm really proud of the fact that we didn't invest a ton of money on bringing people together and having a party. We invested a ton of time on getting people in their circles with their teams to talk about this, and because it was delivered by Dave Mullet and you had a save your date in the book three months in advance, there was no reason for you not to be there, and if there was, there were some minor exceptions, but you knew it was important, it came from Dave, you had an opportunity to talk amongst your team with your leader, who had to prepare, "This is what it means to us," and we opened up that ongoing dialog. That's how it was kickstarted.

Luiza Campos: You had an initial session with each of the leaders?

Carol Shmygol: Yeah, well we had the kickstart from Dave on March 4th, and so let's say we had two hours in your book, half an hour would have been from Dave, the rest of the time would have been your leader talking about, "Let's talk, let's ask questions, what does it mean to us?", but it didn't stop there. Then we went through a year and a half of infusions. I work in the reputation and brand team, and my fearless leader is Peggy Garrity, Peggy pulled her entire team together a couple of weeks later to really dissect for a day, because we're already together anyhow, but for a day, let's really dissect what this means to us, let's start building a story culture.

That happened across the organization, and that's why it took a year and a half, there's 5,300 team members, and it's not just that you sit in a one day session and you think that you have it. Depending on the department, because each area within ATB had the license to make this real for their team members in the way they saw most appropriate, that's why it took a year and a half. It was never one and done, it was an ongoing discussion, an ongoing dialog, ongoing deliberate intentional infusions of the story and the ATBs.

Luiza Campos: That's amazing, so each team had the opportunity to not get it all done that day, as you say, but start that conversation that day, and they themselves come up, which is exactly what I do with my clients, because

no one else better than each team knows what it takes to do their job and what they can do to instill that brand right, to express that brand.

Carol Shmygol: Absolutely.

Luiza Campos: Once they come up with some of these ideas, what was the next step? I ask that because as I mentioned with ATB's book that I have here, you do provide some very specific examples in fact, like what do you do if you get this email, and how to handle that. Can you walk us a little bit into more detail, you know after those initial conversations from each team, what happened next?

Carol Shmygol: You know, it's just been an ongoing discussion, and each of the executive vice presidents and their teams have it to make sure that we continue to live and breathe the ATBs and the story. For example, what we did last November is we actually, from an organization perspective at ATB, we shook things up quite significantly, and we have two major teams. One of them is transformation, which is all about transformation, it's about innovation and digital and data and customer experience, and there's all of that. Then the other team is called customer obsession.

Luiza Campos: I love the title.

Carol Shmygol: Right, so it was easy for me to tell you the first couple of steps, but now it's just kind of baked into what we do. Even the name of the customer obsession team says it all, because bringing the story to life, it's the customer at the center of it. It stops being a recipe, and it just starts being stuff that has to get done in order to make the story real, and that's just ongoing.

Luiza Campos: It's awesome, because it really sounds like you guys adopted this, you know, "This is who we are, and now we really need to bring it to life, now we really need to express it." It's very genuine, that's what it sounds like, it's very genuine and everyone understands how important it is.

Carol Shmygol: The other thing that we adopted is, we have three signature moves, and I'm going to be completely transparent, I don't think that we live these as much as we should, so that's a journey that we're on as well. These signature moves, one is, you wear your name tag. Whether you work on the front line or not, you wear your name tag, because when you put that on, it actually means something, that you work for ATB. Selfishly, as somebody who has a horrible memory for names-

Luiza Campos: Yes, I was thinking about that.

Carol Shmygol: I love walking into an event with 200 people of my colleagues, who I might have met three months ago, we all, from Dave Mullet, you will see Dave Mullet in Costco wearing his name tag. We don't have to wear it off

hours, and sometimes we probably shouldn't, but you wear your name tag, you return phone calls in 24 hours, that's one of the things that service companies are notorious for. I'll be honest, you might be sitting there listening, just calling BS on this, because we are not perfect at it, we're far from perfect at it, but we are trying really hard to get better. Wear your name tag, return phone calls in 24 hours, and then be present.

What that means is, if you and I, Luiza, are sitting across the table and I'm on the phone as I'm talking to you, checking emails, that is not being present. It's a really hard thing to do, because we live in a multi-screen world, and we all think that we're brilliant multi-taskers, and I can tell you that none of us are brilliant multi-taskers. You put your technology away, unless if there is an emergency, what I'll do is I'll declare, you see my computer open and I'm typing, but I'm actually taking notes or I'm referencing something that we're talking about that I need to bring up, or my daughter's sick at home and I need to keep checking. It's not that this is you're going to get fired if you're on your technology.

Again, we don't yet have this, but it is a really great beacon and a guiding star for us. If you can put your phone away and your device away, and you can return phone calls in 24 hours, doesn't that suggest that you're actually really listening?

Luiza Campos: That's exactly, I think these actions that you mentioned, it's just a reflection of your true intentions of being approachable, of being respectful, of really making sure, ensuring that you have your customer or you have anyone who contacts you in high regard, and you want to show them respect and you want to serve them, you want to genuinely serve them, and would go out of your way to respond quickly to their inquiries. More than anything, I think these actions are a reflection of who you ... Because the way you act becomes these habits, and it becomes the culture of the organization, and again, it's a reflection of your brand, right?

Carol Shmygol: Right, you know and you used the word "habits", and I think that that's a great word. I've said a number of times we don't yet have this, because it takes a lot for it to become a habit and for it to be muscle memory. We're all really, really busy people, and that's I think the biggest challenge, is we've come so far on the journey, but the journey is not over. It's not an easy journey, if it was, there would be a lot of really great brands and companies out there, and there aren't.

Luiza Campos: Absolutely. Carol, I mean how do you keep this, you know you say that this is an ongoing open dialog and the effort is ongoing and the brand is present everywhere now, because you've realigned everything to reflect the brand, and you have these actions that also reflect it, but is there anything that you do that is ongoing, any reminders or any check-ins, or

anything like that that you do, so every new hire, for instance, that comes along, how do you keep instilling that brand?

Carol Shmygol:

Yeah, there's a couple things we do. One of them would be through our recruitment process and our hiring process, and you actually go through a cultural interview before you go any further. Through a lot of psychology, they know how to ask questions that can kind of uncover if you a person that has those 10 ATBs at the core of your DNA, so that's one of the things from when you hire. When we onboard you as quickly as we can, and sometimes it takes maybe a month or two, or maybe even three, you spend an entire day at the culture days. This is led by Lauren Rubis, and you are further infused in the story and the ATBs and what we do and why we do it, and it's really awesome.

As quickly as we can, get you into that full day very deliberate infusion around our story and the ATBs. What we also do, and we stole a page from Zappos, is very quickly after that, you're offered, if what you've seen so far for being at ATB isn't something that you can align your values with, then we will pay you to leave. Tony Hsieh at Zappos does the same thing, and actually it's a really bold move but it's a really awesome move, and we haven't had a ton of people take us up on that, but some have. If you don't want to be here and you can't buy into this, then life is far too short to be with a company that's not aligned with your values, so that's another thing that we do.

Then in our review process, the ATBs are front and center. We have a really awesome program at ATB, and it's called everyday heroes. Every one of us 5,300 people have access to this site, we're given points every month that we can recognize and reward our team members with for when they go above and beyond what their job should have been, and these points can accumulate and you can purchase really amazing things with it, but the filter by which you recognize your team member is one of those 10 ATBs. I'm probably on everyday heroes once every three or four days, I get a constant reminder when I'm on there about the 10 ATBs, because I have to say, "I'm going to recognize Luiza because she really did something exemplary, it would fit into this ATB, deliver a wow to team members and to customers and each other." There's these continuous reminders that are now baked into ATB that aren't something new, it's just there. Those are the ATBs, I totally get it.

Luiza Campos:

That's a great idea. I often tell my clients that even if they start meetings by sharing, by acknowledging, which is basically what you're doing with the everyday heroes, but a step further of course, is acknowledging when someone has lived their values or lived the ATBs, that you have demonstrated how to do that. These are great, not just to give recognition to another staff member, but also it provides great examples for other staff members, or for other members of ATB on what to do, what they could do that they may not have thought about before.

Carol Shmygol: Absolutely, absolutely. The other thing that the story does and the ATBs, is it makes it really easy to make hard decisions. If you're faced with a decision that you need to make that may not be a popular decision, if you can trace it back to the story and what that purpose, what our why is and the ATBs, it helps take some of the gray areas that we all face, because it becomes that guiding star. There's an example of Disney many years ago, there was a hurricane that had a potential of hitting the theme park, and it wasn't necessarily going to hit, and maybe there was a 20% chance it might hit. One of their most important values is not only about delivering magic, but about safety, and they closed the park.

They closed the park to a lot of criticism from people, and people save their entire lives to be able to take their children to Disney, this is a big deal. They made right by those customers, but they made a very hard decision very easily, because their value is about safety. That's an extreme example, but if you can have a guiding post that helps you make that tough decision, that you hire this person instead of this person, or you actually fire this person because of their actions.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, and you hit a really very important point, and one thing that I always want to reinforce with my clients, your brand, it's not something that you slap on at the end of a production process, it's not something that you just put out there externally. It's actually, it has to be who you are, what you live, and all your decisions have to go through that filter, you know it has to reflect that brand. It makes it a lot easier if you use that filter, it makes it a lot easier to make decisions actually. A lot of times it's, "Well, does it reflect the brand or not?", and a lot of times you're making decisions prior to that that may not even be supporting you, but it was a good opportunity or it was something that sounded interesting, but it's actually not helping your core purpose of the organization.

Carol Shmygol: Right, and Luiza, I love what you said, "A brand is not a logo that you slap on at the end of an ad," that is not, but that is absolutely the right sentiment. The marketing of a brand is, I'm not going to sell marketing short, but it's the easier part. The hard part is understanding the brand and what it means, because that's what customers are going to walk away talking about, is that experience that you delivered.

Luiza Campos: Exactly, exactly. Can you tell us what have been some of the greatest benefits that you have seen so far, both externally and internally?

Carol Shmygol: Absolutely. Internally, we measure our employee engagement levels. I'm really fortunate to be in this company, because we do some really phenomenal things, and ATB places great weight on employee engagement scores, because we believe if we are considered the place to work and if we have incredibly happy people, we are going to be loved and respected by Elle Burton's, and then the business is going to come, we will be number one in the markets that we serve. One of the things

that we've seen is engagement levels continue to go up, and I think it's because we have a purpose and people understand why they're doing what they're doing. We've seen real positivity around engagement scores, we've seen a real consistency around language within the company, so regardless of what area you work in, we're all talking the same talk.

That consistency of language, but consistency of expectations is huge. From an external perspective, we've gotten some really great traction around our messages. We get some really great feedback from when we listen, and we get some really great feedback when we don't listen. As a marketer, I have to say, one of the things that made me the most nervous of this platform, ATB Listens, so ATB Listens is the public face of our story and our brand, it's a promise, but as a marketer to go out there from an institution, like a financial institution, and promise to listen, the risk of opening ourselves up to huge criticism, because people do not love banks, people are not listening to banks, ATB is not perfect, it was really amazing.

It's what kept me up at night, but I knew that the insight was bang on. When people do email us to say, "You did not listen and I don't believe you," we actually learn from that and we respond. People were very respectful when they did email, like we got a ton of positivity, but the negative ones, they just wanted to actually be listened to. They weren't going onto social media to try to amplify their voice and create havoc, they just actually wanted to be listened to. That was pretty great, so we're seeing some really good traction, we know we've got a really great reputation in the market, and all of those metrics continue to go up. The most important one is, I think it like it starts inside, being a cult brand is being purpose-led, and it starts inside, and people understand what's expected of them.

Luiza Campos:

That's exactly it, Carol, this is so important also, to really talk about this, it starts inside. If internally you don't understand what your brand is, there's no hope that anyone outside will, because it has to be that very genuine reflection of every single person within the organization. You talk about purpose, and I think that is so important, especially now, when people have so many choices. Staff, you know they want to have a purpose, they want to have something that is bigger, that has more meaning for them to wake up every morning and to put all the effort that it takes into their work, but also customers, they want to ... I was going to say "particularly millennials", but I think this is true for everyone, they want to associate, they want to do business with someone that they share values with, that they understand their purpose and they want to be part of that, right?

Carol Shmygol:

Absolutely, I couldn't agree more. There's so much that's, CSR, corporate social responsibility, you see so many companies jumping on the CSR

bandwagon because they think it's going to bring them business, but the customers aren't stupid, and they can spot BS from a long way away. It's got to be authentic and it's got to be real and it's got to be genuine. I think that you're absolutely right, we say, "Millennials want to deal with companies that stand for something greater," but I actually think that all of us want to stand for something greater, so I couldn't agree with you more. Simon Sinek, when you watch the golden circle, he will say, "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it," and that's about purpose.

Luiza Campos: That's right.

Carol Shmygol: When you're dealing with a company, ATB is, we do so much in Alberta and from a community perspective, not because it's the cool thing to do. We've always done it, and what we get involved with in the community is completely aligned with our values. We listen to everybody, we don't listen to people like me or people like you, we listen to Albertans, and that's a very important promise that we make.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, you have your customers front and center. That's it, I mean when you put out a promise like that, we listen, then you have to really live by it, and you have to really demonstrate it. You talk about CSR or corporate social responsibility, and a lot of people do things like that, or they want to engage with things like that, and to be honest, I think it's a lot easier to do things like that than to actually build your brand and make sure that you bring that brand to life every single day at every single moment, every single interaction. What you guys are doing is a lot harder, but in the end, it is what it takes to build that cult brand, and to build a brand that people want to be with, that they want to associate with.

Carol Shmygol: Yes.

Luiza Campos: Now Carol, most of our listeners would be small businesses or nonprofits, do you have any recommendation for a small business or a nonprofit on how they can do this, or what are some of the most important factors that they need to consider?

Carol Shmygol: It starts with, watch the video. You don't have to be a big company, and you certainly don't have to have big budgets in order to understand your why. You know what, it's not easy to understand what that why is, it took us a year to develop a 94-word story and 10 ATBs. It starts with understanding who you are and who you're not, and whatever that looks like in your company, and whether your company is one person or whether it's five people or whether it's 5,300 people, it's understanding what is genuinely real to you. I mean, it has to be relevant to the marketplace, you could come up with a company, with a why that has no insight into what consumers, whatever your customer, your target is looking for.

There has to be some return on that, so that you can be successful, but what gets you out of bed in the morning? Sometimes it's really helpful to bring in, I don't want to say a consultant, because that suggests dollars, but sometimes it's really helpful to bring in somebody that's either done this before, or that knows you and your industry really well, that can call BS on you. Like you need somebody to push you off that very comfortable stool to say, "Your why isn't to make cabinets, that's not what gets you out of bed in the morning. Go deeper, what are you really delivering to your customers?" Like it really does start there, and how you infuse this in your company, there are as many ways to infuse it as there are number of companies.

It's what is going to work for you, but how do you make sure that your team members know that this is not optional, this is our business, this is who we are. I think it's putting that stake in the ground, it's recognizing, it's rewarding, it's hiring, it's firing, to all of that. You know what, the customer's got to be at the center of it, are you delivering this every day with the experience you're delivering to your customers? I think it gets complicated when biases or other work gets in the way, but it's actually very pure when you break it down to what you're trying to do.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, and you brought something that I think is really important too, that this is not optional, this is who we are, and this is what you measure it up against, and how we hire or how we let go people, how we fire.

Carol Shmygol: That's right, you know it's easy to say we hire to it. Where the rubber hits the road is when you actually fire to it, that's when you're serious, right?

Luiza Campos: Yeah, you know if you really mean it, you have to make sure you live by it.

Carol Shmygol: Right.

Luiza Campos: Perfect. I'm really curious, what is your favorite brand and why?

Carol Shmygol: I love Airbnb. I love Airbnb because, like if I zoom into Carol Shmygol, it's actually changed the way that I travel and that my family travels, and it allows me to see things that I would never have seen before, and their line "belong anywhere" is amazing. It's disrupted an industry, it's affected me personally in a really positive way, but Brian Chesky, he has a brand that puts their money where their mouth is. They have a disaster relief program where they open homes to people that have been displaced because of disasters, and so far they've responded to 90 disasters. They came into a lot of criticism a year, year and a half ago, that their people renting out their houses were being discriminatory based on your name or your sex or your ethnicity, and they made every one of their I don't know how many hundreds of thousands if not millions of subscribers to Airbnb sign a promise that they wouldn't do this.

They really put their money where their mouth is, so they've had the foresight to disrupt a very old industry in a beautiful way, they change people's lives, and they put their money where their mouth is, and that's what a great cult brand is all about.

Luiza Campos: I couldn't agree more, they're also one of my favorite brands, exactly for those same reasons. They really do live by their brand. In fact, when was it, a few months ago when there was those immigrants or people who were supposed to not to be allowed to go into the US, they opened Airbnb houses for all of them, and they did a campaign to really go against that, you know to really fight that decision that the US was going to make. It's not easy sometimes, it takes a lot of courage to live by your brand sometimes, but if that's who you are, you have to do it, right?

Carol Shmygol: Absolutely.

Luiza Campos: Excellent. Any last thoughts, Carol? This has been so awesome and so insightful in how to build a brand and how to actually bring it to life and instill it internally into an organization that has a lot of staff, which makes it a lot harder, and different locations, you know just the fact of being in different geographical locations makes it harder as well. This has been amazing, but do you have any last thoughts or any last words?

Carol Shmygol: You know what I would say, Luiza? Thank you for the opportunity to let me talk about something that I absolutely am so passionate about, so it's been great. I guess the last thought that I would put out there is, if you think about your favorite brand, think about why, and that can be really helpful in understanding what you want your own brand to be.

Luiza Campos: That's a very very good idea, because we all, consumers, we all have favorite brands, and we know why we like them or not, to sort of think about that and what makes them so appealing to us, and how can you do that, instill that in your own business.

Carol Shmygol: Absolutely.

Luiza Campos: Great. Carol, thank you so much again, this has been amazing, and I really really appreciate your time doing this.

Carol Shmygol: Okay, well my pleasure, Luiza, thank you for the opportunity.

Luiza Campos: Thank you so much.

Announcer: Thank you for listening to A Branded World podcast. Discover more at abrandedworldpodcast.com.