

Aviation Gin Sr. Brand Manager Talks Ryan Reynolds, Social Media, and Influencer Marketing

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Business
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Coronavirus



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Full transcript

Gene Marks:

Hey, everybody. I'm your host, Gene Marks, and this is season two of the Paychex Business Series Podcast. I am a Certified Public Accountant, a regular business columnist for a bunch of publications you probably know like *The Hill* and *The Guardian* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur*, and a few others. But most importantly, I'm a small business owner myself of a financial and technology management services company. We've got about 10 people and we're based outside of Philadelphia.

I've teamed up with Paychex, the leading provider of human resources, payroll, benefits, and insurance services to bring you real-life stories and advice from real-life business owners and experts. Last season, we talked about the challenges associated with COVID-19, but this season, we're going to focus on moving forward and innovating and navigating the road to recovery. My guest for this episode is Adrian Molina. Adrian is the Senior Brand Manager of Aviation American Gin.

Adrian Molina:

Hello, hello, hello.

Gene Marks:

Hello, hello. Adrian is based in New York and is a native New Yorker, and you are the Senior Brand Manager. Adrian, our audience are small business owners like myself. What is a Senior Brand Manager?

Adrian Molina:

As working for a company in a portfolio that's also a small business that's growing but always having a small business mentality, a Senior Brand Manager, I feel in my world, is wearing lots of hats. It's everything that's pertaining to the brand, both consumer-facing marketing to trade marketing to merchandise to partnerships to events. It's everything from helping script a piece of content down to what does a poster in our liquor store look like. That type of thing, and executing it.

Gene Marks:

Aviation American Gin, obviously it's a gin company. If you were working as a Senior Brand Manager ... I mean, this is marketing we're talking about, correct?

Adrian Molina:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gene Marks:

You're not necessarily implementing yourself email campaigns or yourself active on social media. You have people that are driving that, but your job is messaging?

Adrian Molina:

Actually no, I am executing the social media.

Gene Marks:

Are you really? No kidding.

Adrian Molina:

Yeah.

Gene Marks:

I know you have a background in social media-

Adrian Molina:

Correct.

Gene Marks:

... but when you say you're executing it, what are you doing?

Adrian Molina:

Basically for the brand itself, having TweetDeck open, for example, just in terms of social listening. We have a celebrity co-owner in Ryan Reynolds, who played Deadpool, pretty famous guy.

Gene Marks:

Yeah, we've heard of him. We're going to get to him.

Adrian Molina:

Heard of him once or twice. It's as simple as social listening with the TweetDeck open. Just searching for keywords that might not mention the brand but say "Reynolds gin" as a Boolean search on Twitter. If they're talking about Ryan Reynolds and gin, I'm pretty sure that's Aviation 99% of the time. Everything from that social listening, which I think for me with my background, is something that's been hard to give up as I've grown in the company in taking on more roles. Just in the sense that it satiates my certain type of ADD and just seeing what consumers are saying about the brand, which in turn could help even the sales channel.

For example, someone will tweet "Where can I find Aviation Gin in Wyoming?" And it's as easy as me replying to the tweet with a store finder or helping them find the product, so it's almost customer service also at that point, on top of executing social campaigns, creating the content. Yeah, I've dabbled in digital in terms of SEO. We've done a couple of email campaigns back in the day.

Gene Marks:

When I hear what your expertise is, and again, you've been doing this for a while, right? How many years have you been with Aviation?

Adrian Molina:

I've been with the portfolio Davos Brands, which owns Aviation and along with some other brands, since 2010, so I'm about a decade under the influence. A very young veteran in the spirits industry.

Gene Marks:

Obviously you mentioned Ryan Reynolds is a part owner of the company, and putting aside that he is an owner of the company, he's an enormous influencer. How long ago did he join up with Aviation?

Adrian Molina:

That kind of ties into the Davos element of it. Davos Brands, we became the sales arm of Aviation Gin back in 2015 I want to say. Then we just loved the brand so much, we just bought it from the owners, House Spirits Distillery, in late 2016. Then in late 2017, Ryan found his way to us and wanted to invest. He felt passionate about the product, he tried it on the set of Deadpool 2. He used to go to this restaurant when they'd wrap for the day and get a Negroni. Negronis are his favorite.

He just kept going back and thought that Negroni was the best Negroni. One day he just asked the bartender, "Hey, what's in this Negroni that makes it special? Is it the vermouth you're using?" The bartender said, "I use Aviation Gin and your standard ingredients, vermouth and Campari." That's when it clicked in his head that wow, let me do some research on that, and found out there's this small company, Davos Brands, that owned it. His people reached out to our people, our C-levels. Yeah, he felt passionate about the product and invested.

Gene Marks:

He joins up with the company in 2017, so this is really only three years ago, and you've already been at the company already and your job is branding the product as well as getting out the messaging about the product. Then you have this enormous influencer jump on board, right, and let's put aside the fact that he's buying into the company. He's an influencer. How do you get your arms around managing an influencer like that?

I ask you that, Adrian, because there are a lot of small businesses out there that are working with influencers. I mean, not Ryan Reynolds level of celebrity, but still celebrity in their own rights. There's a lot of tricks to doing it, and there's a lot of pitfalls to avoid. How did you figure out how to use Ryan in your branding, and what did you learn, and what mistakes did you make?

Adrian Molina:

I think it's not so much managing an influencer, it's knowing how many layers are between say a brand lead and the influencer. Sometimes there is legal, agents, managers, all that in between. We've been fortunate enough that Ryan's very hands on, especially as an owner. My day-to-day with Ryan is his creative partner, a guy by the name of George Dewey, who is the president of Ryan's production company, Maximum Effort.

I think instead of going through talking with his agents and things like that, George became our liaison and day-to-day on things, and so that helps tremendously. Ryan and George have the same creative mind as creative partners, so if there's an idea that pops up from our end, it goes to George and George would be able to tell right away if it's a yay or nay or if it needs work or to tweak it. Then it goes up to Ryan, and then him, George, and we'll collaborate.

Gene Marks:

Did you find that most of the ideas came from Ryan and his group or from your side? I mean, there's some very funny online commercials, some really funny videos. I mean, it's right up his alley. Is that something that was driven by you and the branding team, or was he the guy that said, "I'd like to be doing this."? What happens if he comes up with something like that and it's just not good?

Adrian Molina:

There's been a lot of times that ideas have come about from Ryan and George's world, and me obviously being on the brand side and knowing the spirits industry as a whole, it's like, "Eh, we can't do that. That's illegal," or that's logistically impossible with this timeline.

Gene Marks:

Right.

Adrian Molina:

But definitely him and George are always having the wheels turning, and I'd say it's definitely collaborative. Their high level thinking in terms of that, there'll be some ideas from our side of the world, whether it's by the CEO, myself, or just a random idea that pops up via texts that I text to George. And then we'll take a step back, look at the opportunity, let Ryan add his creative flair and George's creative flair to it and see what's possible.

I'd say it's definitely back and forth kind of flow, especially with me being so into the weeds knowing when say a peak sales period would be, it's almost like, "Hey, George, Ryan. This is going to be a big selling in period, we want to get bottles on shelves. Let's think of some content. This is a timely place." But things like the Peloton ad that we did last December, that was totally their minds doing this work, and obviously me loving the idea and maximizing it from a sales standpoint.

I think the ebb and flow is you got two creative geniuses on one end and I want to distill that down to how can this impact sales any which way. Because awareness is great and so are PR impressions, but at the end of the day, they don't equate to sales all the time. It's almost like okay, cool, how can we leverage this opportunity? How can we leverage this idea to maximize it for sales uptick.

Gene Marks:

How do you do that? How do you measure? When people are buying, sales are going up where people are buying Aviation American Gin, but is that because of Ryan Reynolds? Is that because of the Peloton ad? And the Peloton ad was hilarious as well. For those of you guys listening, it was a take off on the original Peloton commercial with the woman who was on it saying how thrilled she was that her husband bought her a Peloton, implying that she needed to work out more. You guys jumped all over it and hired the same actress, I believe, right?

Adrian Molina:

Yeah.

Gene Marks:

Which is genius.

Adrian Molina:

Monica Ruiz.

Gene Marks:

Yeah, it's hilarious. But, how do you know if an influencer campaign like that or an ad campaign like that is generating the sales, if it's coming from that? What do you do to measure that?

Adrian Molina:

On the alcohol industry side, it's a little regulated in terms of we don't get sales data, there's distribution processes to get into stores. We're not going to get the data overnight, so it is gut feelings and seeing the results months later. For example, we launched the Peloton ad I want to say early December of last year, and December historically is a fantastic month for the spirits industry with all the holiday buying.

Once the smoke cleared and the month was over, it turned out to be our biggest month ever for the history of the brand in terms of sales volume. When you look back at it, I dig back into okay, what are the analytics behind it, especially to our website. Which we could discern which people from what states are looking for the brand, and how they get to that conversion funnel. Since unfortunately, we can't sell directly to a consumer, so we have to figure it out from other areas.

Say a DTC brand that has an influencer, it's a little easier to track that. It's like okay, cool, this is the conversion funnel from this tweet with this specific link, and this is how many people put into cart, this is how many people people bought. With us, it's a little more okay, we're not selling bottles directly to people online, we can't do that. It's definitely a little delayed, but there is a correlation between high traffic months on the website and high volumes in terms of sales.

Gene Marks:

It's interesting, you're right, with a B2C brand, you can have tracking links, you can have people that click on specific invitations, you can track who's buying directly from you. You've got that distributorship model, which by the way, is not uncommon for a lot of B2B companies. What you're saying is really that you would run the Peloton ad or you would see once Ryan Reynolds is involved more, you're seeing sales track up. You could intuitively say one is probably causing the other, but it's like you don't have hard data to do that. Did you guys do any surveys or anything like that, or was that deemed to be not necessary?

Adrian Molina:

I feel not necessary at this brand point, but I think, and Ryan said this before in interviews too. He could create awareness of the brand, so he could get people to walk into the store. We have so much faith in our quality of products that once people try it, they'll buy it again. We are privy to the data of stores restocking during certain periods.

Gene Marks:

Right.

Adrian Molina:

Say they bought X amount this month, but they bought at this frequency. This is the store itself, so we can't even tell the consumer that walked into that store and was like, "Oh my God, I remember seeing this," and then buys a bottle. Which makes it a little difficult, but that's why I like the social listening aspect myself-

Gene Marks:

Right.

Adrian Molina:

... just because I can see that in real time, as a qualitative almost focus group within itself, like happening in real time. You're just like okay, we are mentioned, we're pretty up there, this many views.

Gene Marks:

Right.

Adrian Molina:

It's almost going in your gut a little more when you're not privy to that direct to consumer model.

Gene Marks:

Let's talk about that for just a moment here. You once said in an interview that brands who fail to leverage their social media followers seal their own fates, right? You say that transparency is the key to increasing your engagement and trust. You've got the influencer in Ryan Reynolds, you've got a sort of B2B model, like a distribution model, so you can't really track actual sales off your website. But social like you just said, is a good place to at least monitor how things are going.

What advice would you have for a business owner or a marketing person at a small business to track what's going on about their products on social? Did you just focus on Twitter or Facebook? Where did you focus on and what were you looking for?

Adrian Molina:

Definitely Twitter as it's more conversational. Instagram, of course, seeing who's tagging you, who's hashtagging the brand, just different ways of doing that. Surprisingly, I like dipping into Reddit every now and then and just doing a little search term for that.

Gene Marks:

What does that mean, dipping into Reddit? How did you leverage Reddit?

Adrian Molina:

Definitely as a listening tool, especially to see traction of the advertisements that we put out. The Peloton ad was on the front page of Reddit, which is kind of a big deal, so you dig a little deeper typing a Boolean search for Aviation Gin. You see the conversations on Reddit whether that's on a cocktail subreddit, maybe it's on a gin subreddit. From there, I feel people on Reddit are a little more vocal also, but also a little more ... They're not just shooting off their hip on Twitter. They're like, "Oh, yeah, what's a good thing to mix this gin with."

You do see consumer sentiment there for your brand, and even the category itself. People might prefer lemon dries and this guy on Reddit has a whole bunch of up votes on this gin thing, so kind of seeing what those people are talking about as well and distilling that.

Gene Marks:

Did you have a team working with you, or is this just you, Adrian? You have absolutely no life whatsoever, and you're sitting there trolling Reddit all day seeing what people are saying about Aviation?

Adrian Molina:

I'd say in that aspect of just digital, it's so native to me, and I don't have a team for it. I just like to know what's being said about the brand, but I do have an Associate Brand Manager who helps with a bunch of other things in terms of partnerships, events, some Excel spreadsheets I never like to do.

Gene Marks:

Right.

Adrian Molina:

But I think yeah, in that digital sense, I'm the one peeking in and peeking out and all that. I think it saves the need for reporting and ... I could create a deck for myself, but I could analyze everything that's happening just internally and type up what should be the next move or the proper response. I feel when the senior person of the brand who should embody that brand is relying on third party reporting and documents, A, there's a delay, and B, it could be a little distilled improperly from that.

Gene Marks:

We'll wrap things up, but you've had such great success with a great influencer who just also happened to be the owner of your company. But going forward, do you think that influencer marketing should be a part of any brand's outreach to their community regardless of the products that they sell? Where do you think influencer marketing is going, Adrian?

Adrian Molina:

It's always a tricky question and tricky area with influencer marketing. I consider Ryan an owner, but obviously he's a celebrity also. I think with the ownership state, it definitely keeps him motivated to do things for the brand. Obviously, you want ROI on that investment that you're doing, so you feel more ownership of it. The alcohol industry is not a stranger to celebrity-driven brands and celebrities as influencers. There are success stories, but there's also a lot of forgotten brands. For example, did you know that Pharrell had a woman-focused liquor?

Gene Marks:

No. Okay.

Adrian Molina:

It was called Qream, Q-R-E-A-M. When it first launched I think in 2002 or something, it was like, "Oh my God, this is the next biggest thing." But Pharrell doesn't drink, so where is the authenticity there? That's how he manages to look so young. That brand didn't really go anywhere, and I think Pharrell [inaudible 00:20:15] also.

Gene Marks:

Right.

Adrian Molina:

But I always look back to Qream as one of those things that had so much potential, and same thing for Drake's Virginia Black whiskey. That could have been the biggest brand ever, but I feel the influencer or whatever didn't fully have ownership of it, so I think it's trusting them and not just cutting a check of, "Hey, can you tweet about this? Hey, could you do this?" It's like what could you work with them that keeps them motivated and excited about the brands because there are a lot of influencers who will just collect the check, do the tweet. It's almost less than an influencer pay, I think it's like who's a famous partner I could have or an influential partnership I can make?

Gene Marks:

It really does speak to the power of having equity in your brand as well. If you have an influencer who's willing to take a little ownership and if you're willing to give up a little in return for their efforts, it really gives everybody a lot of motivation.

Gene Marks:

Adrian Molina is the Senior Brand Manager of Aviation American Gin. Adrian, great conversation. Thank you so much for your advice and inputs on branding and using influencers in your business. Everyone, for more great podcast episodes from the Paychex Business Series Podcast and other information to help you run your business, please visit paychex.com/worx. Adrian again, I thank you, and hopefully-

Adrian Molina:

Thank you, Gene. Thank you everybody at Paychex and Western New York in general, where you guys are headquartered. I love that area.

Gene Marks:

Yeah, you keep the faith there in New York City for sure.

Adrian Molina:

I know. Yeah, I'm a former Geneseo student, so all too familiar with that area, and I'm pretty sure a lot of friends are at Paychex right now, so maybe they'll hear this.

Gene Marks:

I'm sure the people at Paychex will be happy to send you a garbage plate sometime in the future.

Adrian Molina:

Oh yes, oh my God.

Gene Marks:

I don't know why in the world you'd want to eat that, but that's entirely up to you.

Adrian Molina:

I mean, in the alcohol business, there are hangover mornings, and a garbage plate cures that 100%.

Gene Marks:

It's the perfect complement. Well Adrian, thanks so much. Love to have you back some time, and my best to you and the company, and best wishes in the future. Take care.

Adrian Molina:

Awesome, Gene, thank you.

Gene Marks:

Thank you.