



# channel mastery

## Channel Mastery Podcast, 136: Jennifer Tetrick, Decathlon

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Kristin: Welcome back everybody to another episode of the Channel Mastery Podcast. I'm so excited to introduce Jennifer Tetrick today, who is the Director of Communications and PR at Decathlon. Welcome to the show.

Jennifer: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Kristin: It's great to have you back. You were on about a year ago, which we'll get into in a moment. We have so many great things to talk about today but before we start all of that, would you mind giving a little bit about your background, when you joined Decathlon and we'll go from there.

Jennifer: Yeah, so I've been with ... I think we talked about this last time as well, but I've been with Decathlon since 2017. Prior to Decathlon, I was racing as a professional cyclist. I raced for Team TIBCO, Silicon Valley Bank and some other teams. Anyways, I discovered Decathlon, which is the world's largest sporting goods retailer and I was struck by two things. One, that I had never heard of Decathlon before and two, that the prices at Decathlon are just really truly incredible for sports that range from cycling, which is my passion sport, all the way to hiking, camping, outdoors, even fishing and other sports that are in ... just a huge range of categories of sports that we have at Decathlon. I started while I was still racing actually, at Decathlon, and moved that into a full-time role once I retired from racing.

Kristin: And Decathlon is literally the biggest retailer in the world with sporting goods, correct?

Jennifer: Yeah, I mean we are a massive sporting goods retailer with over 1600 stores worldwide. We're soon to be, if not already, in 70 countries in the world, and founded in France. But we at Decathlon like to think of ourselves as a global company but one that's really rooted locally, so we always like to think of ourselves as being a local and a smaller company, but we do have, obviously, a huge presence around the world.

Kristin: And we will ... I'll be putting the links to the show in the show notes from our episode that we did in April 2019, and anybody who listens to that will definitely hear that through the entire interview, like they're very, very focused on serving the community, connecting with the community. But you're also doing a lot of innovative things in terms of, I think, technology and personalization and just really doing a great job with

corporate social responsibility, and so all of these things are kind of wrapped into why I was really excited to have you back on the show today.

Thank you again for making a second appearance. I reached out to you after I had read that Decathlon had actually opened a few stores, I believe it was just a couple weeks ago. And just so everybody knows, we're recording this right about at the middle of May and I actually asked Jennifer to come back and talk about what that process was like, and we're going to hit on a couple of different topics too, but let's talk a little bit about that locally-driven approach to your European counterparts opening up some stores and maybe share a little bit of the experience there, because that's ultimately what I think the audience is going to love to hear about today.

Jennifer: And you're talking about opening in this post-COVID world?

Kristin: Yes.

Jennifer: Yeah, so this week, actually this Monday, France starting opening doors for the first time in quite some time, and obviously we are in China, we're in France, we're in Italy and Spain and we're in, like I said, 70 countries around the world, so there's been ... We've seen these countries and those stores in those countries closing much earlier than we were experiencing here in the US.

In the US, we didn't close our stores until March 17th, and we're actually still closed. So, we have the benefit of this foresight, I guess, by way of our counterparts the countries around the world. So, really just globally, our priority is safety of our teammates and also our communities. So that's something that's been of utmost importance to all companies, whether it's in whatever country we're in. So that said, we had a safety committee that was launched right away in China when this first came about. Then, we've been able to have planning around with safety protocols that we've distributed, of course, with best practices for all of the different store locations and communities. So, that's been really helpful for sure.

Kristin: Oh, I'm sure. That's exactly why I was hoping to have you on, was I know it's not like some magical formula or model will come out of this show, everybody. But what we can gain is just a little bit of what was it like in the trenches. So, what are some of the successes and challenges? Again, no judgment at all, but just sharing experiences, so that other retailers and brands listening to this can maybe avoid some of the things that you're learning.

Jennifer: Right. Right away, like I said, we had a website, an internal website for our United team network. Even before the coronavirus became a pandemic, we had how tos, how to access supplies, the importance of accessing supplies as soon as possible because they quickly saw that the supply was getting depleted and their masks are getting harder and harder to find, hand sanitizer was getting harder and harder to find.

So our international community stepped up in letting us know that that was important was to secure these supplies. Also, helped us actually secure some supplies because we

do have that global network. They created the graphics and all the communication channels that we needed. So we're able to have that, which was, I think, incredibly helpful and made sure that now when they do reopen, we have masks and hand sanitizer for our customers should they need it, whenever they are allowed to come into our stores. So, that's been really good.

What we did see is some challenges in some countries that they started to open up would be like requiring masks in the stores, but then not offering the masks. So that, of course, was not well received by our community there. So, we learned that lesson as well. The other is we saw that once the country started to open up, people were very eager to come back. They're very eager to line up outside the store. So, making sure that people maintain social distance, even while standing in the queue. So, having spaced out parameters that help people stay less crowded was also important. So, that's something that some of our global companies were able to execute and do well.

Kristin: That's great. So, this United Team network of communications, obviously, that is just an absolute blessing, as I'm sure. Obviously, it's helped with a lot of the execution. I'm imagining it's going to help because you'll have signage and almost a little bit of a rollout. I would imagine that you're going to be deploying in your physical retail when the time is right.

I think that some examples of that have emerged. For example, I saw one from Trek that showed up through Bicycle Retailer. I know some other larger companies are putting those out to help everybody. Everybody seems to be dropping the, "Hey, that's a competitor." Nobody's really looking at that as they usually do right now, which I'm super grateful for. When someone's like, "We're putting together our own network when we don't have a big network like you do." Your network is so helpful because ultimately, you're tied to these local communities. Everybody is probably conveying what they're learning from the front lines. That probably is the only network available in the whole world like that in sporting goods. If you think about that, if you're the largest retailer, that is just so incredibly powerful.

So, one of the things that I have around that is how are you incorporating feedback or understanding consumer sentiment around that because, ultimately, you have this network, you're all communicating within the business of decathlon, but how are you incorporating consumer feedback into that?

Jennifer: Yeah. Well, one of the things in the immediate aftermath, and again, this is driven very locally, we felt the impact of the coronavirus later than our colleagues in China, for example, and then our colleagues in Italy. So, one of the things they learned and they helped us learn right away is in the immediate aftermath of this, people weren't interested in being sold. They're not interested in big marketing campaigns to buy the next thing. They wanted community, they wanted support.

So, Decathlon, we basically changed all of our communications channels to adapt to that need. You can also adopt based on just user behavior on our website. One of the things that's also been a great litmus test for how people are engaging with our brand is how

they interact with our content online on social media, et cetera. So that's been a great opportunity to just connect with people and understand what it is that they want from us.

One of the things we learned in Europe was the concept of doing sports at home. People still needed to move. People still have this deep desire to play sports, to be active, to exercise, but they now can't. In France, they were even worse than they were here in the US where they couldn't leave their houses. It wasn't even an option to go ride your bike. Whereas in most communities around the US, people still felt very okay to go out and ride their bike. That's not something that was even permitted in France.

So, we started what we call the workout from home initiative, where we started offering free fitness classes and events online for people to connect with the community. That was pretty awesome in that we could have morning classes and have some of our colleagues from Europe on the line taking the classes. Also, our customers here in the US. So, we really do have, I would say, a global network and team of people that are just working out together online with some of our network of fitness instructors and yoga teachers. So, that's been really great as well.

Kristin: So before you go on, I have to ask, because you have this incredible athletic background yourself. One of the things you fell in love with Decathlon was just the inclusivity of it. What was that like for you to watch that? It must've been pretty special.

Jennifer: You know what's really special and really cool is I got to bring in one of my favorite yoga instructors from when I lived in Santa Monica, and now I live up in the Bay Area, where we're based in the US at least. I was able to introduce him to Decathlon. Also, be able to connect online, interact during the classes, and then also see hundreds of people from around the world joining in and taking the same class. For me, that's just the essence of what sports should be about. It transcends country lines, even language boundaries sometimes because it's something that we all just have this deep desire to do. It's neat to be able to see it being done together like that.

Kristin: I love it. I honestly applaud that you're able to bring the positioning and just the openness of discover these sports and do it on your level. The way that you're providing this is probably something that people don't feel intimidated to join because they know your brand. There have been a few things, I've been curious about and people I follow online, but I've been like, "I'm not sure I could do that because I see them at such a high level," but this is the type of thing that I think I would feel completely great jumping into because just the feel of your brand creates that trust. I love that.

Not very many companies I think have that. I think that we almost go the other way and commit to the core as they say too much. But guess what? As you say, sport is universal. That's honestly, the true core in a lot of ways. So, that's fantastic.

Jennifer: Yeah. You know what? It really is a universal need, a universal desire to exercise, to play sports, to just move people were really craving that. One of the things that's actually really interesting is that sports products have actually had a direct, from a medical

perspective, benefit in this pandemic as well. We saw, for example, like our rain ponchos turn into being a useful and permeable hospital gown. So that was something that we saw.

We also have this easy breath snorkeling mask, which Decathlon was the original designer of this full face snorkel that is great for swimming underwater, having a 360 degree or whatever that is nice view, when you're in there. Being able to breathe normally while you're there because it is a full-face snorkel. So you don't have to have your nose and your nose doctor or whatnot.

But it turns out that that mask was helpful as a PPE and also a breathing assistance. So, our team has donated tens of thousands of these masks around the world and made them available for hospital workers for medical professionals. We're working currently with some groups here in the US with to make it a N95 mask. So that's been extremely helpful in the medical setting as well. So, you have a sports product that was never designed, never intended to be in any way, a medical device that has been transformed by some incredible inventors around the world that are outside of Decathlon. They just use our products to do that.

Kristin: That's fantastic. What's so interesting is we've actually covered quite a bit of brands pivoting to create protective PPE. And this is the first time I've been able to speak with somebody who literally is the brand, the retailer, and ultimately kind of is creating a conduit for this give back and this pivot with those two together. So it brings reach of your brand and it brings the reach of your physical storefronts, et cetera, and your 70 country location. How are you getting the word out on this? How are you having people discover that facet of your give back and we're going to get into other facets of your corporate social responsibility here shortly.

Jennifer: Right now we're really just focused on, our team is just really focused on helping the researchers and the medical professionals. They are making sure that the product is distributed in the best way in the community. So we're really just being a resource and helping them and providing resources to the people that are the experts in the medical field. By no means is Decathlon, do we consider ourselves medical professionals. We don't know how to properly distribute medical products. So we're just being here to provide patent information to the researchers in a way that will help them to make the adapter that they need, for the purposes that they need it, on helping them get the quantities that they need, and then they're distributing it to their channels.

Kristin: That's awesome. And just to remind the audience, can you talk about your kind of supply chain and your approach to brand in terms of your assortment at retail? And what I mean by that is the fact that you sell Decathlon branded products and create them.

Jennifer: So we have over 80 different sports at Decathlon. We started out as a retailer where we sold a number of different brands, as well as our own, and eventually we sold their own products, but we started out as only a retailer in 1986, we started making all of our own products or started making our own products. The very first product that we made was

a bicycle. We were wanting the price to be a lower price point for entry into the sport of cycling. The supplier at the time was giving us a price that was, we felt too high and we decided, or Decathlon decided as a company that we could make the product better and also at a more affordable price. And so they went around and they did that. So now we have a number of different brands that are all under the Decathlon overall family products.

Kristin: That's awesome. And I wanted to identify that to the audience just because that's different than the PPE pivot and just COVID pivots that people have been doing with their brands and with their manufacturing capabilities. So I wanted to just make sure we clarified that. So let's talk a little bit, I'm sure that's boosted employee morale around the world, the give back that you're doing there, but let's also talk about how you're planning on bringing your employees back in. Obviously you're doing this in waves around the world. Can you talk a little bit about like any concerns that you've heard that have popped up from the employees that are almost universal in how you're addressing their safety and comfort?

Jennifer: Yeah, well, I would say 95, 90, 95% of our stores have been closed around the world since this crisis started. However, our online store has remained open. And so with that, we have shifted all of the teams that are working to support e-commerce and e-commerce supply have shifted to work from home. So in essence, we still have a lot of employees who are working around the clock around the world. So we're not going from full stop to getting back to work, we don't feel like we've actually taken any time off at all during this. But of course, as you said, phasing into physically rejoining the workforce to physically coming into the stores is a different thing. We have this benefit of having a united network around the world where we have the resources available for our teams.

One thing that I'd like to say that we also have in our stores, at least in the US, we have a very low touch approach to retail as well. We have a robot that handles our in store inventory. We have on mobile checkout options in our stores as well, which is less contact than maybe a traditional retailer. We have mobile checkout stations around the stores, which then helps with just spacing people out in the stores. As I mentioned in the beginning of the call, the safety of our teammates and our community is just our highest priority. So of course, making sure they have all of the regular resources that they need in the store, whether that's masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, face shields, on what they need to feel comfortable, nobody's really being required to come into the office if they don't feel like is right for them.

anybody That is important to us as well. We have a very good sick leave policy. So should need that as well, Decathlon is very supportive of our teammates for that. We've been communicating to our teammates regularly with safety protocols and standards. Like I mentioned I think earlier as well, part of keeping our team safe is ensuring that people entering the store are doing so in a responsible manner. We ask that they're wearing a face covering on when they enter the store. And if they don't have one, we'll provide one for them. We're providing the hand sanitizer. Limiting the number of staff and also

customers eventually in our stores. One thing that I will say is our bike shop is open. So bike shops have been identified as an essential business. So we do have a bike shop in both our Emeryville and Portrero store that is open in the Bay Area. So they are practicing this right now in a very safe and I think effective manner. Again, the lines queuing up, not keeping people gathered in too tight of spaces is also important to keeping our teammates safe.

Kristin: Right. That's great. Thank you so much. That's super thorough. And I guess the next question I have that I know a lot of people are excited to hear your take on is curbside. So even with the fact that you have your shops operating in your two stores in California, tell us about just the curbside opportunity. What is that like for Decathlon? How do you view that in light of the crisis that we're going through? And then I have a few more questions after that.

Jennifer: Yeah. So, we've been able to start curbside pickup programs and it's been good so far. Our focus has really been on our online shop and our online sales. Curbside is a great option for people looking to purchase a bigger item, like a bike, that they want to have tuned up or fit or get some extra help. But in general, we're starting to shift to promoting, I would say curbside pickup a little bit more, but initially we really were encouraging customers to shop only online and continue to shelter in place. This shift now to the curbside program was something that we had already been talking about. We already had a click and collect program that we activated right away. We have our technical partner, which is called New Store. And we were able to actually even fulfill online orders with store inventory.

So there's been a relatively seamless channel between or seamless approach to our online and in store systems as well. So the shift to curbside pickup is really something that we were already working on. And now that we can just roll it out in a bigger way. And we hope to eventually be able to have like a one hour pickup option, right now it's 24 hours, but we're looking at ways to expand and improve on this program as well, to be a fast delivery option for those customers that need it even outside of this current situation.

Kristin: Isn't it crazy how consumer behavior has changed in that regard in terms of they truly do want it immediately, there's like very little tolerance for any kind of wait or friction. And I really don't anticipate that's going to go away unfortunately.

Jennifer: No, I don't think so.

Kristin: Yeah. So, well, that's great. And what kind of channel mix have you been using to effectively communicate with your shoppers on this?

Jennifer: We have been using a mix of channels that we have, and again, because in the aftermath of this, we saw user behavior change pretty significantly. We greatly reduced any paid channels to all organic channels and ways to connect with our community. So that's

included everything from our email database, for our customers that already are existing, our social media channels, our social media channels, in addition to just our network of athletes and partners around the US and around the world to communicate that to their followers as well.

Kristin: That's great. And I have to ask too, and this may or may not be relevant, frankly, because

I know you and I have talked about this in the past. The consumer is not the same globally. Obviously you talked a lot about your regional high touch approach with your stores, but I just can't help but ask, have your colleagues in Europe been able to identify some consumer behavior trends that they're going through that you experience a few weeks later, has that happened?

Jennifer: In general, I would say this is not necessarily answering your question, but I would say in general, in Europe online sales hasn't been as much of a focus as their in store sales. Whereas here in the US we're very used to shopping online and online sales is obviously incredibly important to us. Our European team has seen online sales increase exponentially compared to where they have in the past. So I think that's just moving that trend along relatively quickly. I would say, I'm trying to think in terms of behavior, we did see right away that bikes were becoming incredibly popular in Europe and in China and around the world. And that obviously has really taken off here in the US as well. So, and that's obvious from the user behaviors on our channels as well. We definitely saw that.

We saw the desire for fitness gear and equipment, and we knew this was going to be a big challenge for us because right away we saw all of the stock being just wiped off the shelves from the online sales in Europe. That was before we had even gone into shelter in place here in the US. We basically got all of the fitness products out of the stores and to the warehouse to get ready for online shipping. And sure enough, we sold out as soon as the shelter in place went into effect here in the US. We sold out on a lot of those products and they continue to be a challenge to keep in stock, but that's a good thing.

Kristin: What she just said is literally gold. And I have to ask this, what are they seeing today? Because I'm like, everybody prepare for two weeks from now. No, I'm just kidding. But seriously, are you seeing anything in maybe your most recent call that maybe tuned your antenna? Like, "Uh-oh, I better queue up for this."

Jennifer: Not that I can specifically point to. I do know that one of the things that's really important to Decathlon as a company is our being a responsible actor in the world and for our community. I think we saw around the world just the environment healing itself from people basically giving it a break and we saw dolphins in Venice. We see just the world being cleaner, the air being cleaner. One of the things that our team is doing in Europe that I think we'll be seeing here is really focusing on this importance of taking care of our planet. We're excited to get back out there when this all is over, but let's do our best to respect that playground that we want to be in.

Kristin: Oh, that is just awesome. Thank you so much for bringing that up. And it's really, really



great to hear that we have a united front globally on that level, seriously. So I really, really value that you brought that up so much. We've talked about literally we've hit on all of my questions here, but I just wanted to make sure before we sign off, is there anything I'm forgetting because you have done so much, I think from a genuine effort standpoint, too. For example, when you were on the show last year, you talked so much about how you were trying to understand your consumer in the market you were in and align yourselves with supporting the community in a number of ways to really embed yourself with your clientele, frankly.

And I was wondering as you're looking at what you're doing to be a great corporate citizen and knowing the research, I'm sure you're reading as I am too, as brand communications professionals, for example, that Edelman Trust Barometer that came out in late March talking about how ethics are so, so important to consumers. How do you plan on potentially bridging forward, in a humble way, the work that you're doing to give back through this pandemic into potentially your corporate social responsibility globally?

Jennifer: I mean, I think that this is just the beginning and we're continuing to see where our products are a good fit. We don't know how long this is going to last. We don't know how long there's going to be a need for this whether it's a PPE support, obviously this isn't the ideal situation where you're using a snorkeling mask and adapting it, but it's born out of necessity. I think where we're going with this, we will see. I mean, we continue to tell our story on our social media channels, on email and on our blog. We'll continue to document that as best we can and share that with our community, but for us what's most important is taking the action. I mean, for example, one of the things that we've done is committing to having 100% of our products be eco designed by 2026. We've taken some stronger measures through this situation to expand on the efforts that we had already started and in some cases accelerate them. I think that consumers will see that difference, taking place on the product level and also in the way that we're communicating about those initiatives too.

Kristin: That's awesome. And then the last question I have is, you obviously sell across so many categories and as we've discussed today, you're seeing, I think a lot of newcomers raise their hands and want to reconnect with being active and moving and being in nature. You must be thinking the same thing I am like, "How do we catch and keep these new consumers? How do we keep them excited about this?" Do you have any parting words for us in that regard?

Jennifer: I think one of the things that the Decathlon has done really well is making this concept of making sports accessible to everyone and accessibility isn't just about the price point. It's also about being a safe place for people to come to ask questions, being a safe place for people to not know how to do things. I think that sometimes in bike shops in general and in the past have been places where it's only for the elitist and that's something that Decathlon has never been about. I think that's really important to moving forward, whatever story you are is recognizing that people who are starting something new don't want to go into a clique and feel out of place. That idea of acceptance and inclusivity is

really important.

One of the other things that we've done well is the innovation around our products to be easier to use, to be more functional. For example, our two second tent, which is designed to make camping easier with no poles to set up, no pieces to keep track of. You just basically pull up to your campsite and two seconds later your tent is ready to go. Having products like that that make things easier for people I think is also important. And then of course having the how tos and the instructional content behind those products to make sure that people have information that they need when they need it.

Kristin: That's fantastic. I would be remiss not to bring this up, but your approach obviously has been proven globally. I think that there's a commonality between all of the consumers that you serve, even though we are all different in our locations and what we love to do, but just that feeling of belonging is super important. I think that seeing the announcement just this week from Walmart in Moose Jaw and some of the tenants that they're trying to touch on in terms of thinking, hey our consumers are already coming in Walmart. They're comfortable here. We're going to offer it here is fantastic. And what great timing. One of the goals I have in showcasing you and Decathlon at this time is to show your approach and how relevant it is right now. And really you're doing something fantastic I think in terms of being able to grow the participant base and give them a place to come and get the new product and the information that they need in the environment they're comfortable in. I just want to say that's probably more important than it ever has been. So very, very grateful that you have that approach.

Jennifer: Well, thanks. Yeah.

Kristin: Yeah. So good on ya and thank you so much for your time. And literally this was just a fantastic opportunity for us to peek around the corners. What we've learned here may or may not be relevant to our consumer events here, but every little bit of information helps us I think be our best to our end consumer today and understand the messaging and the channels that are working in that regard. And thank you so much for helping us see things through a much bigger lens today.

Jennifer: Well, thank you. Thanks for having me.

Kristin: Yep. And hopefully we'll be able to check back when things are in a different place that might feel a little bit more recognizable soon.

Jennifer: Yeah. Hopefully.

Kristin: All right. Thanks so much. Talk to you soon.

Jennifer: Thank you. Okay. Thank you.