

Stanley: The Power of Listening to Your Customers

Luíza Silva ^a

^a Faculty of Advertising, Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, luizasilva1@ufpr.br.

Abstract. This study analyzes the impact customers had in Stanley's success. Stanley is a insulated water bottle brand that has gone viral after shifting their communication strategies and redefinition of their target market from workmen and outdoorsmen to everyday feminine fit lifestyle. This change is highlighted as it was pivotal for Stanley and the insulated water bottle market. This case study showed through articles, social media posts and a commercial, the importance of listening to one's customers and changing communication strategies in order to welcome a new audience.

Keywords. Stanley, Brand, Quencher, Customers

1. Introduction

According to Cambridge Dictionary [1], a relationship is the way in which two things are connected. The relationship that will be analyzed in this article is the one between consumer and brand. More specifically, the brand Stanley.

In "Principles of Marketing" (1980) [2], Kotler and Armstrong mention how important it is for a brand to define a "target market", this way you can greatly satisfy the right customers and consequently build a relationship with them. "A brand is worthless if it doesn't connect with the right audience the right way" (Cory Torrella). When Stanley was founded in 1913 by William Stanley Jr. [3], their target market consisted of workmen and outdoorsmen that needed to hydrate throughout the day. They could count on Stanley to keep their liquid cold or hot for hours on end.

However, it was only in 2020 that Stanley started to compete in the United States of America against other popular water bottle brands, such as YETI and Hydro Flask, with the unmistakable 40- ounce Quencher. This was the item that helped them achieve 750 million dollars in annual sales in 2023, a drastic change from their comfortable 70 million dollars a year for most of their existence [4]. So, how did this over 100 years old brand get there and why only now? How did they build such a loyal community?

2. Methodology

The methodology used for this study consisted of research of Stanley's presence online, in no specific

order. Eleven articles, two Instagram posts, two TikTok videos and one commercial were chosen because that is where you will find most of Stanley's customers, on-line, since they are so passionate about it to post. It was also found that this was the best way to show the transition from being a brand advertised for men to mainly being for women.

The only research trouble was finding specifics about the first decades of Stanley, net worth and other information as such.

3. Results

3.1 Commercial

Since the beginning, Stanley has shown and proved the high quality of their products, not only do they keep your "colds cold and your warms warm" [3], but also that the bottle is not fragile. That is evident by this 1978 commercial [5],



Fig. 1- Aladdin's Stanley Thermos, 1978

The video showcases a water bottle falling and hitting many things in a construction site along with a narration that mentions the characteristics of the bottle, as well as the fact that it is “completely defendable”. At the end of the commercial, a workman is shown drinking, supposedly, still hot liquid from the bottle. The item in this commercial was specifically The Aladdin’s Stanley Thermos, the all-steel, double-wall vacuum bottle creation of William Stanley Jr. [6]. The “Aladdin” came from the label with that name from when it was still a combined brand with Stanley [7].

3.2 The Quencher

Over the years, they also advertised their products for camping and outdoor activities (and still do, just not as much). Fast forward to 2016, Stanley launched the Stanley Quencher [8] (now named The Quencher H2.O FlowState™ Tumbler) and advertised it just like every other product, with pictures of it in the wild presenting as a camping item [9].



Fig. 2- Stanley’s Instagram, 2017

3.3 “The Buy Guide”

It was in 2017 that three women Ashley LeSueur, Tina Cannon and Linley Hutchinson discovered and fell in love with the Stanley Quencher. Once they created a blog called “The Buy Guide”, it was one of the first things they ever published and sold on it [10]. They saw the cup as an everyday item, not just for camping. It was a success and each time the cup would be in stock, shortly after it would be sold out. However, it was getting harder and harder to find the Quencher until it was officially discontinued.

They tried to reach Stanley’s team for a long time to convince them of the potential this product had, but were only able to get to them once they sent the cup to Emily Maynard, famous for appearances in *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* [11]. She posted a story on Instagram talking about the Quencher and the girls from the blog. After that, Stanley and the creators of *The Buy Guide* got in contact and came to agreement that the girls would have to buy 5,000 cups on their own and try to sell them. They sold out

in five days. Stanley still had their doubts so the girls did it again and the cups sold out again.

Consequently, *The Buy Guide* kept investing in the Quencher, getting in contact with influencers and showing “what women selling to women looks like” [12]. All of this was happening while Stanley was looking for new leadership, one of them being Terence Reilly, former president of Crocs and responsible for turning the so-called “ugly” shoe into a high fashion item [13].

Advancing to June 2020, the period of the pandemic when people were online more than ever and implementing behavior changes [14], Stanley launched the cup once again and the sales were beyond what they expected. It was a success and has been since then.

3.4 Social media

On their social media, there’s an obvious transition from camping and adventures to everyday life content in their publications. Specifically on Instagram (with the handle @stanley_brand and 806 thousand followers), the change happens around May of 2023, with a post about the Teacher and Nurses Appreciation Week. The post shows many women using the Quencher during work hours [15]. Up until then, their posts were still mainly about camping and adventures.

Now, when you access their page on Instagram, the first 10 posts to appear on the page have a different Quencher in the picture since they have been releasing the cup in many colors, patterns and themes. For example, the Valentine’s Day themed Quencher that had people camping outside of Target for [16]. They even have Reels showing how to properly wash your cup and pictures of women doing yoga etc. The hashtag Stanley was used on 1.7 million posts on Instagram.

The same hashtag has 3.5 billion views and over 241.7k videos on another very active platform of theirs: TikTok. With the handle @stanleybrand and 1 million followers, the thirteenth video ever posted on their page, in June of 2021, was already showcasing the product for fitness women. All of their Instagram Reels are also on TikTok, but TikTok has even more videos posted.

The most viewed video on their TikTok page is about the car that caught on fire with a cup inside. Danielle Turner posted on her profile on November 15th, 2023 a video showing inside her car, that had caught on fire the day before, and how the Quencher, that stayed in the cupholder, was intact and still had ice in it. The caption was: “Thirsty after you catch on fire? @Stanley is like no problem i gotchu.”[17]



Fig. 3- Danielle Turner, 2023

The video reached 96.5 million views, 9.2 million likes and 446 thousand shares. Stanley's response video, with the caption "Stanley has your back" and a heart emoji, had 56.6 million views, 7 million likes and 192.5 thousand shares. In the video, posted on the next day, the president of the brand, Terence Reilly, is the one responding to her. Reilly thanks her and promises to send her new Stanleys and to replace her vehicle, because "It [the video] really shows how our Stanley's are built for life." [18]

When it comes to sales, Stanley really hit it out of the park, as mentioned in the beginning, where they more than decupled in 2023 their previous sales.

4. Discussion

Throughout the paper, Stanley's communication strategies and approach to the public were analyzed. It was found that they became a well known brand because of three things: high quality products, target market redefinition and constant contact with consumers.

Firstly, the high quality of Stanley's products is undeniable and crucial to their success. The double steel keeps hot liquids hot for 7 hours, cold liquids cold for 11 hours, and iced liquids iced for 2 days [19], the cup also fits perfectly in cup holders, it is dishwasher proof and, as shown in the TikTok video, maybe fireproof? The point is, if the Quencher wasn't a good product by itself, the women from "The Buy Guide" would have never even mentioned it on their blog, proving that "The best advertising is done by satisfied customers" (Philip Koller).

Secondly, redefining their target market was pivotal. If they had still kept their focus on camping even after the blog, chances are they would not have increased their sales as much as they did. The customers needed to connect with Stanley. That is proven by the fact that they only skyrocketed in 2021, when Stanley finally understood that they were missing the mark and decided to approach women and refer to the Quencher as an everyday item.

And lastly, their relationship with customers is also helping the brand grow. Referencing back to the

viral TikTok video [17], the choices they made for that response were very smart. It could have been any other employee responding, but the fact that it was the president of Stanley showed how impactful the occurrence was and how important their customers are to them. After all, the video did reinforce Stanley's slogan "built for life".

5. Conclusion

In the beginning of this article, the question was how did Stanley only become so well known in recent years and how they built such a strong community of consumers. Through online research about the brand, articles and social media publications, it is evident Stanley discovered a problem they didn't even know existed and solved it. With the help of three customers and the internet, the brand was able to achieve the unthinkable.

Now, everything Stanley releases is a success, being an example of something Steve Jobs once said, "Get closer than ever to your customers. So close, in fact, that you tell them what they need well before they realize it themselves". It is predictable that Stanley will keep investing in this new target market, women.

What happened with Stanley is a lesson for any other brand. It is important for a company to always be on the lookout for what their consumers want and if that means changing the way they present themselves to the world, then so be it.

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