

Q&A: Thinx's brand director on disrupting the status quo and encouraging ecommerce brands to tackle taboo topics

Article

Sara Plotkin

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Insider Intelligence spoke with **Sara Plotkin**, senior director of brand and content at **Thinx**, which revolutionized the direct-to-consumer (D2C) space in menstrual hygiene products. Plotkin runs paid advertising, social media, packaging, and more—overseeing any space where a consumer could encounter Thinx. The New York City-based brand gained traction a few years ago as the leading period underwear provider after its launch of NYC subway ads that sparked public conversations around menstrual care products.

In the past year, Plotkin has helped Thinx launch campaigns like “Thinx for All,” a period underwear line sold at Target, and expanded the brand’s plus-size collection. Its most recent campaign #absorbworries included a digital billboard in Brooklyn featuring social media posts about period worries.

Plotkin shares insight into how ecommerce brands can expand their missions to better serve socially conscious consumers.

Insider Intelligence: How have you marketed to destigmatize menstrual hygiene?

Sara Plotkin: The first step is opening the conversation. For so long, periods were something that half the population [dealt with], but none of us were really allowed to talk about. If we did, it was those commercials where a period was blue liquid, which is not relatable. So much of Thinx’s success is a result of us talking directly about this experience. We ran a TV ad earlier this year depicting a woman rolling over in bed. There was blood on the sheets and that is a polarizing image, but it's real.

We hear from consumers that they are so happy to finally have a brand that talks about periods openly, and that translates to every digital touchpoint. On Instagram, we're talking about the symptoms associated with your period, these relatable memes, and recipes for when you have period cravings. We're trying to be as relatable as possible, and that's part of the reason so many people have chosen to adopt our product and come to our brand.

II: What advice would you give to an ecommerce brand that is trying to fill a market gap, specifically targeting female or traditionally underrepresented consumers?

SP: It is about having a product and brand that is inclusive and accessible. It extends to things like who we cast in our advertising and making sure that we're representing every body, including launching our plus-size line and Thinx for All, our lower entry price point line, to make sure that as many people as possible can experience the brand.

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Secondly, it's OK to talk about things that other people aren't comfortable with. That is what we set out to do, and it's allowed us to receive great brand awareness in a short amount of time. Any ecommerce company trying to fill a gap should feel confident that it can have a point of view that it can stand behind, and if that doesn't follow the status quo, it allows you to stand out as a brand.

II: What changes would you like to see within the ecommerce retail industry?

SP: Standing for something and raising awareness of whatever issue it is that each brand either is connected to or can have an impact on. For us, it's not just making more sustainable choices in your everyday life, but talking more openly about periods, bladder leaks, and female health.

It would be great to see other ecommerce brands outside of period care lead some of these conversations and take bigger bets and drive awareness. I think so many ecommerce brands have their heads down in the lower funnel trying to get conversions on Facebook. We have benefited from stepping outside those digital channels and doing things like out-of-home events to help people understand who we are and build awareness. Brands should consider some of those less traditional, more upper-funnel tactics.

II: How does Thinx define sustainability?

SP: Traditional disposable products like tampons and pads that most people have used for the majority of their life create a ton of plastic waste. Adopting Thinx, even if someone's using it as a backup or mixing it in with more traditional period products, allows each individual to produce less waste. That's a huge part of our message and mission, and we try to be subtle with that—we're not here to shame anybody about how they manage their period.

II: What are some brand partnerships Thinx has taken part in that have been successful?

SP: We find there are so many brands that are adjacent to Thinx that people use in their daily lives, not just to manage their period, but self-care or skincare. We've done some partnerships with fitness brands, and in the future, as our brand expands and reaches a broader audience, it presents a lot of opportunities to find new brand partners that can open us to an audience who may not be familiar with Thinx or the period underwear category.

II: What is your vision for the future?

SP: The expansion into mass retail, the launch of plus size, and getting more customer access to our brand. We know a lot of people want to make sustainable switches in their everyday life. Our focus is allowing the brand to show up in more places in a way that's either more affordable or accessible.

You'll see a lot more of that from us in 2022—making the conversation around periods a part of everyday life.