

It Starts With the First "P"

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This episode is sponsored by EOP Media. In the marketing world, the first 'P' is Product — and product design is where the discipline either begins well or goes wrong at the root. Angelia McFarland and Gina Rosenthal welcome Alley Lyles-Jenkins, a product design leader and consultant at Slalom Consulting whose work spans the City of New York, Budweiser's Super Bowl campaign, Amazon's Echo Dot launch, USAA, Dell Technologies, and Columbia University.

SPEAKERS

Angelia McFarland

Co-host; tech marketing veteran and founder, EOP Media

Gina Rosenthal

Co-host; technologist, product marketer, and founder, Digital Sunshine Solutions

Alley Lyles-Jenkins

Guest; product design leader and consultant, Slalom Consulting. Find her on LinkedIn at Alley Lyles-Jenkins.

TRANSCRIPT

ANGELIA MCFARLAND

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ANGELIA MCFARLAND

Welcome to the Tech Aunties podcast, where we're bringing you industry context and vision from myself, Angelia McFarland, and Gina Rosenthal. On each podcast, we will share our marketing and technology industry experiences along with the team. Listen to us as we explain the past so you can have context to understand and create your own version of the future. So let's get into it.

ANGELIA MCFARLAND

Today's episode is called 'It Starts With the First P,' and this episode is about the product side of marketing. Our guest today is Alley Lyles-Jenkins. Alley describes herself as a product nerd focused on widgets that change how people interact, experience technology, and discover information. Her product design philosophy is: our job is not to design products — it is to help the organization win by creating a competitive advantage with design as a principle. At Slalom Consulting, Alley collaborates with talented people to increase product value by leveraging human-centered design. Her award-winning efforts have created competitive advantage for many forward-thinking organizations, including the City of New York under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Budweiser at Super Bowl 52, Amazon's Echo Dot launch, USAA's Chief Design Office, Dell Technologies, Columbia University's 1000 Journeys VR Project, and advising Femtech startups at Femtech Focus. Welcome, Alley.

ALLEY LYLES-JENKINS

Hello. Thank you for having me.

ANGELIA MCFARLAND

Talk a little bit about what you mean when you say 'our job is not to design products.'

ALLEY LYLES-JENKINS

The stakeholders involved are huge — it's really not only the people purchasing and buying the widgets, but also the company. I was trained in architecture. Buildings are my background. Now products are small buildings to me. Some of the best products I've ever created with companies started with a napkin, a pencil, and a piece of paper. Everyone can do design — and everyone should be involved — because everyone is a stakeholder. When I was working on the Echo Dot launch, the procurement person was not in the room — she was wandering the halls. I grabbed her. She said, 'I don't really know what I'm doing here.' And I said, 'You're the one who's going to be acquiring the hardware to make this product — you should be here.' Design can be widgets. It can be what we can see and touch. But it can also be how something functions. I invite all to play in the play space.

ANGELIA MCFARLAND

Give us your definition of product.

ALLEY LYLES-JENKINS

A product really refers to something tangible that is created, designed, or manufactured for sale or consumption. And it's important to underline that word 'consumption' — because it satisfies a particular need in the market, and products are largely responsive to the people who are consuming them. Any product that exists in a vacuum without any input is usually not going to stand the test of time. A service is something you experience — not something you can touch. Uber is an example of a service that has the Uber app as a product. You can have both in tandem.

ANGELIA MCFARLAND

What's your advice to your younger self — and to someone interested in a career in product design?

ALLEY LYLES-JENKINS

I think the advice for both four-year-old Alley and 37-year-old Alley would be the same: don't be afraid to play. One of the things I don't like about design culture is pretentiousness — making things for an imagined user that doesn't match actual people. I hold phones I can't even hold comfortably because they weren't made for my hand — they were made for a man's hand. The more people can be dissuaded from that pretension, the more people can play and feel invited to have a seat at the table. And we'll start to see more interesting products made by more kinds of people. My professor at Columbia always said: 'The hardest thing to teach is thought.' You can have \$5,000 worth of cookware in a kitchen — it doesn't mean you cook like Gordon Ramsay. Play incites thought. Whatever new tool exists, you'll learn it — but thought is hard to teach without play.

ANGELIA MCFARLAND

If you're constantly being distracted, you can't play.

ALLEY LYLES-JENKINS

Exactly. No, no, no, no.

ANGELIA MCFARLAND

Thank you so much, Alley. If you want to follow her, she is on LinkedIn at Alley Lyles-Jenkins and is a consultant at Slalom Consulting. Thank you for joining us today on the Tech Aunties podcast. Until next time.