



iLLUminate Blog Transcript: Stu Seltzer on Brand Licensing

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STEPHANIE VETO: 00:17 Welcome to iLLUminate, the podcast for Lehigh University's College of Business. I'm your host, Stephanie Veto. Today is August 15th, 2025, and we're talking with Stu Seltzer of Seltzer Licensing Group about brand licensing. Mr. Seltzer graduated from Lehigh in 1987 with a Bachelor of Science in accounting. He continues to be an active alum and has been to over 20 Lehigh-Lafayette rivalry games. He also adjunct-teaches an MBA course at Lehigh and an undergraduate course at New York University. Mr. Seltzer was inducted into the Licensing International Hall of Fame in 2024, and he recently co-authored the book Brand Licensing for Dummies. Stu, welcome to the show.

STU SELTZER: 01:00 Great to be here.

VETO: 01:02 When researching you, I came across words like guru and renowned to describe your expertise in the licensing world. You were recently inducted into the Licensing International Hall of Fame. Congratulations.

SELTZER: 01:16 Oh, thank you. Thank you.

VETO: 01:18 So for how long are you allowed to bring that up to your family and friends?

SELTZER: 01:24 I think it lasted at least a day, maybe two. [laughter] Yeah.

VETO: 01:32 So the time limit was a day?

SELTZER: 01:34 I don't know. It's nice for you to mention it. I haven't heard that intro in a while, but thank you.

VETO: 01:42 All right. So you graduated from Lehigh in 1987, and I know you love your alma mater. Why stay so involved with the institution?

SELTZER: 01:51 Well, Lehigh also is almost a family affair because my wife, Danielle, class of '87, also went to Lehigh. My brother, class of '91, went to Lehigh. My father, which is where I really grew up going to football games with him and early on Lehigh-Lafayette, is class of '58. So there's a lot of Lehigh-- a nephew, Shane, class of 2017. So a lot of Lehigh in our family and a lot of love for Lehigh. I mean, my father has been very outspoken about how much he loved Lehigh and kept in touch with the Lehigh friends, and still does. So it's been a great impact on all of our lives.

VETO: 02:33 Do you often run into fellow Lehigh alums in the business world?

SELTZER: 02:37 All the time. All the time. I wear my Lehigh hat. My wife jokes, because she doesn't wear it as much as I do, but I wear it when we travel, on the plane, and in business



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meetings and at trade shows I go to. And I always enjoy running into fellow alum. And there's a number of alum in my industry as well that I enjoy connecting with.

VETO: 02:59

So let's talk a little bit about your path while at Lehigh. What was your major?

SELTZER: 03:05

I was an accounting major in the business school. And I remember, one of my favorite professors, Professor Sinclair, who I enjoyed-- and I know he's retired now, but I think he told me this, or maybe one of the other accounting professors, that like 35% of the accounting majors choose accounting because somebody else in their family is an accountant. And sure enough, my dad was an accounting major and was a tax accountant for years, and my brother was an accounting major. So what do I know? I became an accounting major.

VETO: 03:38

So Lehigh is a family affair, we've learned. But how did your time at Lehigh help shape your career?

SELTZER: 03:46

At Lehigh, I had a great experience. I was president of SAC at the time - I think it's now called the Student Senate - and really enjoyed my friends and the fraternity life. And you learned the business world during the classroom, but then there's so many other great experiences and leadership opportunities and other things going on at the school, and really get to try a lot and kind of try to find out where your passion lies and meet a lot of great people at Lehigh that you stay in touch with.

VETO: 04:22

Can you talk a little about your first job out of college?

SELTZER: 04:26

My first job out of Lehigh was at Arthur Andersen, at the good old accounting firm. And it was fun because it was a popular destination for Lehigh alum, popular destination, so there were a lot of alum that worked there. And I worked actually for-- his name was Stew Kahn, who might've been class of '60. But he was the department head, and interviewed with him. And a great guy, a great leader and teacher, and great experience to work at a big company. Great place to go and get trained on how the business world works and so forth. The ending wasn't as nice as the start there, and if you want me to elaborate--

VETO: 05:09

I think I do.

SELTZER: 05:10

--I think I'd share that article. But I got a bit antsy and actually teamed up with my wife and another friend to sell pieces of the Berlin Wall. When the Berlin Wall came down, which was a big phenomenal worldwide event, we were the first in America to actually get pieces. We had a friend who was a journalist who was able to get pieces of the wall and bring it to us in America. We staged a little press event. But we were selling pieces of the Berlin Wall - it became a big deal - as our side little job, and at night we were packaging and selling these pieces of the Berlin Wall to big accounts, like Macy's and Bloomingdale's and Belk's and all that. And before you know it-- it was a nice business going on, but it was just a side business. We had our day jobs. Mine didn't last because one day the head of Arthur Andersen called me in and told me I have to cease and desist, and decided not to and ended up getting let go from my job at Arthur Andersen. And had a nice going away party with my friends there, but it was written up in the front page of the Wall Street Journal with a title, on that middle



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column that was always kind of a tongue-in-cheek column, called-- the title was There's No Accounting for People Who Take Chances, all about how Arthur Andersen pushed me out. But it kind of pushed me and forced me to kind of follow my passion and more into marketing, more into sales, more into other things. So at the end of the day, it all worked out well.

VETO: 06:40

I'd say so. So how did you find your way into brand licensing specifically?

SELTZER: 06:48

So played with the Berlin Wall venture for a couple of months-- for half a year or so and then went back to business school. And my first job out of business school was at Yves Saint Laurent, which is a fashion company. At the time, Yves was alive and well, and he was focused on making dresses that sold for five to 10 thousand dollars each. And I was focused on really helping expand the brand and worked on licensing deals. One of the first deals I worked on was Yves Saint Laurent's first-ever eyewear deal with Luxottica. This is an eyewear deal. It was fascinating because, by licensing this company and the name, they made eyewear and eye frames and sunglasses that sold around the world in 60-plus countries. And that was the first deal I worked on, but Yves Saint Laurent had a tremendous business of licensing for their brand. They had about 15 partners, everything from shoes and handbags to men's suits and so forth. And really, that's where I learned how this whole business of licensing works, a real revenue driver, and enjoyed my time there. And then from there, I ended up-- the company Yves Saint Laurent was eventually sold. It's now part of Kering, with the Gucci company and many other luxury brands. And ended up looking around and got recruited to work at Warner Brothers, and worked at Warner Brothers for a number of years on the Batman brand. And at Warner Brothers, instead of working with 15 licensing partners, which is what Yves Saint Laurent had, Batman had 450 different licensing partners, every type of toy and video game and lunchbox and trading card, you name it. And really enjoyed that experience working on two of their big Batman blockbuster movies and so forth.

VETO: 08:38

Nice. And you then started your own company over 20 years ago, right? About 25?

SELTZER: 08:44

Yeah, 26 years ago now. Yeah.

VETO: 08:46

26 years ago. So it's called Seltzer Licensing Group, and it works with many major clients. What was your initial goal when you started your own business?

SELTZER: 08:56

The initial goal was to survive. No, the initial goal was really-- I was working in the licensing area, and I had seen a few of these licensing agencies pop up and thought that I could really create a new agency and add value and do things a little more different, a little more strategic and set ourselves apart and really add value to a lot of these big companies that didn't have the 100-person licensing department that Warner Brothers had or the big brand and the big support that Yves Saint Laurent had. There were a lot of companies that we worked with that didn't have any licensing people, so we were operating almost as the outsourced licensing department. And that's what I did. And one of my first early clients was Chef Boyardee, a company that I got-- I had gotten to know the company while working at Warner Brothers, had done some deals with them, and then turned around and became their consultant and helped them acquire other licenses. And then we started



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doing both licensing in and licensing out and been very fortunate to work on big brands, everything from Scotts Miracle-Gro to Unilever's ice cream brands, including Popsicle and Good Humor and Breyers, and working with some nonprofits today, including the American Red Cross and the National Park Foundation representing all the national parks in America, and so forth.

VETO: 10:25

If you could travel back 25, 26 years, what's one piece of advice that you would give yourself or one thing that maybe you wish you knew when you first started out?

SELTZER: 10:37

Good question. I mean, maybe that I should buy more Apple stock. I'm not sure. But I've been very fortunate and feel blessed to have a great partner in life, my wife Danielle, and great family around, and made a decision, which was that-- when I was working at Warner Brothers, they had offered me a promotion. The next job was to move from New York to LA, was the next job, and decided not to make that move but to stay in New York and try my-- that's where I started my own agency. Very happy I made that decision to stick around the wife and the family and the-- stay around the family and so forth.

VETO: 11:21

Maybe you'd go back and be like, "You did the right thing. You're doing the right thing."

SELTZER: 11:24

Yeah. I'm sure there's plenty of-- if you ask my wife, I'm sure she'll come up with plenty of things I could've done better 20 years ago or 25 years ago.

VETO: 11:33

All right. Well, it's time for my brand licensing class. I've got my notebook. I'm going to take some notes. Well, what is it, and why should companies use brand licensing?

SELTZER: 11:45

So brand licensing is really unlocking the power of those brands, throughout some of the clients we're working with today, a client like Dove soap or Good Humor ice cream, and taking those brands and matching them with another product to really help spike sales. There's really two goals in licensing. If you're the licensee-- if you're the manufacturer, you're looking to take a brand that will really spike your sales. It's really one goal, to be honest. There's some other parts of it. You want the credibility and things like that. So in the case of Breyers, we'll say, Breyers ice cream, they will license in Reese's, and they will be the exclusive maker of Reese's ice cream. And they do that because they know they can sell more ice cream. There's a whole area of people that want Reese's ice cream, and they will make it and sell it and spike their sales and add revenue and grow their business. So the whole point of licensing, we believe that licensing is a growth strategy. This is a way to really help companies grow. So we are in the business of helping companies grow using licensing as the strategy, whether that's licensing in a brand that I just described, or maybe it's somebody like our client Scotts. Scotts is the leader in lawn and garden, and we license out their brand. We take their brand, and we put it on other-- we license it to other companies that make a Scotts lawnmower, a Scotts garden glove, a Scotts garden hose, garden tools, and so forth. And Scotts loves it because they are creating more consumer touchpoints with their brand and they're generating royalty revenue for their company.



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- VETO: 13:29 Okay. That was one of my big questions. So it works both ways, right? So Chef Boyardee will go to Batman and say, "We want to make Batman noodles," and then you'll license that out. Or Batman's looking to grow, getting out there in their marketing, so they could go somewhere and be like, "Do you want a Batman," I don't know, "baseball?" Right?
- SELTZER: 13:52 Yeah.
- VETO: 13:53 Okay. And you do both at your company.
- SELTZER: 13:55 Yeah, we do both. And we do both for the same companies. We'll take Breyers. As I explained, we will license in the Reese's to make that product, but we'll also take Breyers and license it out to a company that-- we've done a deal in the past taking Breyers into hot fudge and ice cream toppings with a company that will make that product. And this company, called the Hero Group at the time, they need a brand. They didn't have a brand. They were making private-label products, and they needed a brand to break through that would help them get the retailers to buy their products. And they needed a brand to get those consumers to buy their products. By licensing that Breyers brand, they were able to get that instant recognition and instant-- when people are walking in the supermarket, they look at a product, they have anywhere from three to five seconds to see your product. And if they see a product with a brand they see and know and trust, they're more likely to buy it than-- this company, Hero Group, they had some no-name brands, and they were not getting the attraction. But by adding Breyers, Number One Vanilla and Number One Tub Ice Cream in America, they-- by adding that brand to a hot fudge product, they were able to get that sales and get that sales spike right away.
- VETO: 15:16 I don't want to get too much in the weeds, but I do think it's worth taking a minute to explain the difference between brand licensing, patent licensing, and copyright. Can you just touch on that a little bit?
- SELTZER: 15:27 Yes. Good question. So our focus is on trademark licensing. When you talk about licensing, there's a slew of things. And I found that out when I first opened our business, when there were yellow pages, and we advertised and put in, "Oh, we're in the business of licensing services," and then we'd get people calling up, "Wait, can you help me on my driver's license?" and this and that. So we know that it can mean a lot of things. Our focus and the book that we'll talk about later is focused on trademark licensing. And there's a lot of types of licensing that fall under license. There's patent licensing, which is focused on inventions, and there's a whole slew of rules around that. There's copyright, which is really about the written works. There are public works of art or public domain things. But our focus is really on the trademark law business. And there's a website run by the government called uspto.gov, which is the United States Patent and Trademark Office. And that's where you file to own a trademark, and you file it in 1 of 30 classifications. Apparel can be one, and beverage can be one, and so forth. But they are the keeper-- the US government is the keeper of all these trademarks, and we're in the business of taking these trademarks and helping expand them to other products. And our company does not really get-- we're not in the business of working so much with patents. It's maybe



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5% of our work. We're really focused on the trademark area, which is the mark. Think of the logos of Coca-Cola and Breyers or Mack Trucks, who's a client that's near you, or others. It's not the actual recipe for Coke, but the logo for Coke is what we're in the business of working on.

VETO: 17:20

What's one of your biggest takeaways from doing this line of work?

SELTZER: 17:24

One of the biggest takeaways, I would say, is, this business is still very much relationship-driven because you're in the business of trusting somebody else with your company jewels, with your brand. And I've learned that very early on at Yves Saint Laurent. Where we're licensing out the brand, we're trusting another company is going to make eyewear with Yves Saint Laurent and they will treat the brand right. They will make the products. They say that they're going to get all those products approved, they're going to follow the directions that we set for them, that they will not go rogue and do something bad with the products. When we work with Chef Boyardee or Breyers, these relationships are really based on a lot of trust, and you have to build this trust in partners because-- again, imagine Reese's, which is owned by Hershey, and Unilever Breyers working together. These are food products. You have to make sure they are maintaining the utmost highest quality standards and nothing ever goes wrong, because God forbid there is a recall on these products. That can really damage a brand, and not just damage your own Reese's ice cream, but it could affect your core candy business. So the key aspect is really knowing these people and partners and understanding their values because you really have to trust them.

VETO: 18:51

I feel like that takeaway could also be a challenge when it comes to--

SELTZER: 18:55

Oh, yeah. Yes, especially when you have so many partners, thinking back to the days at Warner Brothers with 450 partners. You know you're going to have a few that might not follow all the rules.

VETO: 19:08

So like you said, you have to know the brands on both ends inside and out. How do you and your team prepare for working with brands?

SELTZER: 19:17

We like to get to meet these people and talk to the people. We do a lot of our work, as far as finding new partners, at trade shows. As a company, we go to about 18 trade shows a year. This week, I was just at a shoe show in Atlanta. Last week we were at a food show in New York. We're at a toy fair and Expo West and a licensing expo. We're going to a lot-- and just as a sidebar, whenever we go now, we do a little video recap. And we started doing these for our clients. Now we do them for everybody. We put them up on YouTube. So whoever didn't go to the Atlanta shoe show this week, they can go and watch our two-minute video and see all the licensing action that we saw at that show. But we go to these shows, also, to meet the people in person. We find that meeting people in person is a really important part of this, to be able to break bread with them or sit across from them in a meeting, look at them eye to eye, and really understand who they are, what they're all about, and, "Is this a person you will trust with your brand?" And it's a bit old-fashioned, because I know you can really develop



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some nice relationships on Zoom these days. Maybe we're old-fashioned, but we find really getting to be with people in person is an important part of this.

VETO: 20:38

I agree. I think that there's something to it. You have to see the person and meet the person to get a sense of what they represent and what the company's going to represent. I really, really believe that. I love looking at your website and seeing some of the collaborations on there, and I feel like-- and I know there's a lot of marketing that goes into it as well, but it enhances the story. I feel like it adds to these-- some of these companies have been around so long, but the way that it's even presented on your website, it's telling a story in a way, and it's just adding to it. I don't know why. I just really enjoyed browsing your clients.

SELTZER: 21:15

The goal is really to sell. All our clients are in the business of selling product to consumers. And what better way to sell than to tell a story, to get these consumers excited? It's not the same old bar of plain old Ivory soap or whatever. It's going to be a new, enhanced bottle of soap, collab with Crumbl Cookie, that smells like that new Crumbl Cookie. And we're like, "Wow, that's fun. I'm going to try that. Instead of just buying my plain old boring bar of white soap, I'll at least try that," and, "Oh, it's only on sale for a month? Yeah, I'd better try it now. It's either now or never." So it is telling the story. It is trying to bring some excitement to various categories on the retailer's store shelves.

VETO: 22:04

Have there been any brand collaborations, or even collaboration requests, that have surprised you over the years?

SELTZER: 22:12

There have been a number that don't seem so strange anymore, like in the Batman days or what I see in the market. I remember somebody was doing prosthetics, and they wanted the Batman brand. Well, yeah, that's a bit strange, but it was great to see the end output and to see the happiness it brought people who needed it. It was great. Along the same lines, there's now a whole business of licensing funeral caskets. So people can get buried in a casket with the brands of Star Wars or Kiss band or things like that. And it's another area that-- we never thought of that. To me, it sounds a bit strange, but, hey, a lot of this is bringing happiness to the end consumers. And that's what these brands do. People are such loyal fans, and they really feel part of the whole story and the brands, and they want to be with them from beginning to end.

VETO: 23:13

You've been teaching at New York University for over 20 years, and you also teach at Lehigh. I saw a recap video of the Lehigh class that you did, and I absolutely love how you bring in other Lehigh alums to guest-speak about the business industry. Can you talk about why hearing directly from professionals is so important to the students, but especially in the business college?

SELTZER: 23:38

For NYU, it's been a great honor to be teaching there for-- this year, it'll be 22 years. And at NYU, it's an undergrad class. And the way that we structure that class, the first-- it's 15 weeks long. It's three hours a week. And the first seven weeks or so is all theory. We go through the theory of how licensing works. And we'll go visit a trade show. I'll go visit the toy fair and things like that. And in the second half, I bring in all the experts. And we do a day at the NFL. We do a day at Nickelodeon or at Major



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League Baseball or Fanatics. And it's great because, being in New York, you can go and visit these offices and a lot of executives around, and so forth. When I did the Lehigh class, which was a lot of fun, it was different because it was MBA students. So because it's MBA students, we didn't need to go through all the theory of how marketing works and the basics and retail works and all that. So it was at a different level. Really enjoyed that. It was almost being, almost, in like client meetings. And I really enjoyed bringing back some Lehigh alum. Not just Lehigh alum that I knew or that are in the industry that were happy to make the trip, but there's a bunch from Lehigh. I mean, the company Just Born, which makes Peeps. They are based right in Bethlehem, and they do tons of licensing. They do tons of licensing in, where you can see-- every Easter, there's another flavor of Peeps. There was a Breyers cookies and cream flavor. They've done an Oreo flavor and things like that. They've also licensed out. They've taken their brand Peeps and licensed it out to slippers and bathrobes and t-shirts and all that fun stuff.

SELTZER: 25:31

When the professionals are there, I have seen them really connect with the students. They enjoy being there, and more importantly, the students really enjoy hearing how they did it, what they do and how they go about their business. I mean, one of the best pleasures I get is-- at the beginning of the class, we do a little survey at NYU, because most people never heard of licensing and they have to take-- what's happened now after all these years is there's a major at NYU. There's a sports management major, or you can be a sports marketing major. But those two majors have my class as a required class. So a lot of these students are taking the class, "I don't know much about this. Never heard of this, but I got to take it as part of my major," and then, by the end of the class, a lot of them will tell me, "Oh, I love this. I'm looking for a job in licensing. I now understand the whole merchandise world and want to learn more and want to perhaps make it my career." And a number of them have, which is always fun. But a lot of that happens, I believe, because they interact with these professionals. They see, "Oh my gosh, here's a guy I read about from the NFL doing licensing every day," and, "Oh, he went to the same school I did. My gosh, that's a great path. Maybe I should follow that path." Bringing alumni back is the added bonus, also, because they're happy to be there, and the students seem to connect. They say, "Oh, that guy was sitting in this chair not too long ago."

VETO: 27:01

Not only are you sharing your expertise with future professionals, but you also have a new book out that you co-wrote with Steven Ekstract. It's called Brand Licensing for Dummies. What was it like putting all of your knowledge into a book?

SELTZER: 27:18

Well, it was harder than I thought, to be honest, because the book is like 300 pages, and I'm not a big writer having-- longest book I've ever written, for sure, but it was great end product. I'm really happy with the way it turned out, and I know Steven is too. Steven is the founder and the editor-in-chief/publisher of the most important magazine in the licensing industry, called License Global Magazine, that has grown-- he recently left the company, but it has grown to become the most important trade shows in the industry. They run the Licensing International Expo in Las Vegas. They run the Brand Licensing Europe show in London. So it was great working with him. But he's a journalist and hasn't done many, if any, licensing deals, so it was great teaming



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up with him. So he's the journalist angle, and I'm more on the deal side angle, and the end product has been great. We're really happy with it, and the people who have read it have given us some great feedback. And we just heard that there's an audiobook version coming out shortly. They're translating it into a couple of languages. So we're really happy with it.

VETO: 28:32

Why share your secrets?

SELTZER: 28:34

We'll have to come up with new secrets as things evolve. And people might know our secrets anyways. We might as well tell them the right way and explain how this really should be done. But part of the book, also, is that I've been in this industry for a number of years, and it's a way to somewhat give back, because the goal of this book is not just to share how to do it. It's to share how to do it with a wider audience, to make this secret of brand licensing even more accessible, even more relatable and understandable so that people in many other industries can embrace it, because it is a great way to grow your business and to grow your brand. And so we're happy to be the ones to do that, kind of share it with the world.

VETO: 29:23

We're running low on time, but I have to ask. You've got three kids. You have a wife. You wrote a book. You adjunct-teach at two major universities. You run a global licensing company. What keeps you motivated?

SELTZER: 29:38

I have some bad role models. My dad Lehigh grad is '88, and he's still working, so. I think he's taking half-day Fridays now. And my wife is working away, and she's running her own business. Yes, we are busy, but we enjoy it all, and we enjoy our work, enjoy the people we work with also. So it is a lot to juggle, and we do other things too. And we still have enough time to hang out with our Lehigh friends and other friends and all that.

VETO: 30:12

Stu, thank you so much for being on the show. It was great getting to know you.

SELTZER: 30:16

Yeah, you too. Can I plug? The book, of course, is on Amazon or Barnes & Noble, and if you want to learn more about us or licensing or see any of those videos, you can go to our YouTube channel, which is just Seltzer Licensing. And if you type in Seltzer Licensing Lehigh MBA, you'll see that video that Stephanie was referencing about the MBA class at Lehigh, which is a fun one, especially the ending of that video.

VETO: 30:45

Thank you.

SELTZER: 30:45

Thank you.

VETO: 30:47

That was Stu Seltzer speaking with us about his Lehigh experience and brand licensing expertise. His new book, *Brand Licensing for Dummies*, is available now. If you're out shopping and you happen to see Crumbl Cookie scented Dove soap, Stu and his team at Seltzer Licensing Group recently worked on the collaboration. This podcast is brought to you by iLLUminate, the Lehigh Business blog. To hear more podcasts featuring Lehigh Business thought leaders or to follow us on social media, please visit business.lehigh.edu/news. This is Stephanie Veto, host of the iLLUminate Podcast. Thanks for listening.