

Alumna Helps Top Companies Unlock Growth



Ever wonder why some companies struggle while others unleash incredible innovation and growth? Ask College of Arts & Letters alumna Michelle Hayward – she’s been learning first-hand what makes companies successful since she could see over the counter at her parents’ Upper Peninsula grocery store.

Today, Hayward and her business consultancy firm, Bluedog Design, help Fortune 500 companies find clarity and a path forward amidst the complexity of market and organizational change. By applying design-thinking methodologies to complex problems, Bluedog Design illuminates solutions to unlock growth and helps companies remove the barriers to launching new products and services.

Recently, the Chicago firm helped the Blissful Baking Company launch a “new to the world” brand created with the German biscuit company, Bahlsen. Bluedog’s work for the launch, Hayward said, is an example of “holistically positioning and defining a brand’s assets – its story, the personality, the brand identity, and its packaging assets.”

As Bluedog’s Founder and CEO, Hayward drives the culture and talent, and guides the external commitments of the firm.

“We hire talent that jumps out of bed each day with the drive it takes to solve big, ‘hard-pile’ problems,” Hayward

said. “It’s the talent that we curate that brings our clients in and that’s the same reason those teams continue to work with Bluedog. I also work on various early stage development strategies and enjoy speaking at universities and business events.”

Hayward earned BA degrees from Michigan State University in German and Political Science.

“I do continue to use my German language as we work closely with multinational companies located in Europe,” she said. “Language also helps me navigate as I shop markets to identify trends in products, packaging, marketing, and branding.”

Hayward completed the Kellogg School of Management’s Chief Marketing Officer program in 2014 and was honored by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) as 2012 Illinois Small Business Person of the Year.



The SBA noted: “Michelle began her business as an innovation, brand strategy, and creative marketing agency. By using unique concepts of ‘viewing things sideways,’ she provides exceptional services solving some of the most difficult brand problems for clients such as Nestlé, General Mills, and 3M, to name a few.”

Hayward recently became re-engaged with MSU, including participating in the MSU Alumni Association’s Spartan Women programs in Chicago. She also is serving a three-year term with MSU’s Marketing Advisory Council and joined MSU’s Conquer Accelerator in 2016, in which she currently mentors MSU student entrepreneurs and Conecter mobile app co-founders Zoe Zappitell and Brittney Ulrich. (See Conecter story page 24.)

“It’s a joy to work with Zoe and Brittney as they look to dial in their business model and commercialize the Conecter concept,” Hayward said. “I admire their ability to keep their eyes and ears open and flex on the fly.”

Hayward resides in Chicago with her husband, Jeremy Anderson, also an entrepreneur. In recent years, the couple lovingly transformed a turn-of-the-century municipal bathhouse into one of Chicago’s most sought-after ideation and meeting spaces.

College of Arts & Letters alumna Michelle Hayward (top) is Founder and CEO of Chicago’s Bluedog Design.