



A Q&A with Todd Grossman, CEO Americas

Thank you and Talkwalker for sponsoring UN BIAS, a four-part learning program designed to tackle critical biases that exist in our agencies and impede our ability to be best places to work for BIPOC talent. We know this is a topic that is near and dear to your heart personally and professionally.

In your 2021 Social Media Trends to Watch report, you provide a section of data on the significant impact of socially conscious audiences like GenZers (and the future Generation Alpha) on brands, politics, and society. They are not afraid to cry foul when and where they see bias.

As an example, Lin-Manuel Miranda faced backlash for a lack of Black Latinx actors and dancers in his new movie, *In the Heights*. The producer went into crisis control, earnestly and publicly apologizing to his fan base and the public.

Q: What does the strong and swift public outcry tell us about how brands, even beloved ones like Miranda, must anticipate and then be responsive to criticism for perceived bias? How are brands using tools like Talkwalker to stay on top of sentiment and determine the appropriate response?

A: Consumers are paying close attention to brands and supporting the ones that best align with their values. They are looking at everything from the causes they support to how they treat their employees and the planet. The most successful brands in today's climate use insights from consumer intelligence platforms like Talkwalker to monitor and understand the voice of the customer.

Insights from consumer conversations give brands a true understanding of what's happening and how it affects the bigger picture. Monitoring sentiment and consumer conversations in relation to your brand is like tending your garden. You water it and tackle a few weeds from the root when they pop up. If done consistently and right, your garden will flourish. If you let it go, you'll be left with a lot of unpleasant surprises and issues to solve.

Q: Since the racial justice movement began, are brands employing more social listening to ensure they're tracking perceptions of bias or discrimination?

A: It's safe to say more brands are currently using social listening to track perceptions of bias. Talkwalker's open platform also allows them to analyze first-party data the same way they look at conversations on social media. For example, a company can analyze product reviews, and surveys from employees and customers, to look for trends or mentions of perceptions of bias or discrimination.

With brand responsibility taking center stage, it's important that companies understand the wider impact of their messaging, advertising, and overall branding. The Black Lives Matter movement prompted many brands in the US to listen to consumers and reinvent their product branding to combat racial stereotypes.

Aunt Jemima is a great example of a brand that wasn't linked to social media conversations around Black Lives Matter. Nonetheless, the company announced they would change the outdated imagery used on their products in response to the movement. The decision wasn't a response to an immediate crisis on social media, but one based on listening to the broader conversation happening across the US -- and the world -- and contemplating the cost of long-term criticism.

Q: We've heard quite a bit about how tech platforms are taking steps to avoid bias in their tools. What are some of the things Talkwalker has done?

A: Talkwalker's open platform is based on AI and machine learning that helps users quickly spot trends across social media conversations, podcasts, and first-party data. The AI will pick up on popular themes and hashtags and detect brand logos in video and pictures based on the number of instances in which they appear. Users can even train Talkwalker's AI to detect things such as sarcasm in posts and spot hard-to-find logo usage. We recently worked to implement results from bias research and strengthening processes to [mitigate bias](#) within our AI Engine, which resulted in cleaner training datasets, free from conscious and unconscious assumptions of race, gender or ideological concepts.

Q: Anything you would care to share about your efforts to eliminate bias within the Talkwalker team?

A: Talkwalker values diversity and believes that every voice brings value to our global organization. Our DE&I Committee is focused on strengthening diversity, equity, representation and inclusion. Most recently, the Committee hosted an event that featured diverse voices on allyship. During Asian American Heritage Month, PR maven Patrice Tanaka spoke to Talkwalker employees about her life experiences, ways to combat "anti-Asian" hate, and finding one's life purpose. We also held a workshop that helped employees understand how to approach the correct pronunciation of someone's name and how to use personal pronouns. Talkwalker is a member of the Diversity Action Alliance (DAA) and we share in their commitment. These are just a few of the many ways in which we strive to cultivate a culture of respect and belonging.



About Todd Grossman: Todd Grossman is CEO Americas at Talkwalker. He is a senior executive with proven expertise in measurement, analytics, public relations, communications, sales, and marketing from his past experiences at Precise, a Kantar Media company, and PR Newswire's broadcast and multimedia division, Multivu. Todd completed his B.A. in Political Science from the University of Connecticut and executive education programs at Cranfield University's School of Management in the United

Kingdom. Todd has also completed the Miller Heiman Solution Selling program. He has served as a graduate assistant instructor for Dale Carnegie.