



The Most Human Company Wins with Mark Schaefer

Episode #20

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Lisa Larter (00:01):

Welcome to, She Talks Business. If you're an entrepreneur, business owner or aspiring mogul, chances are you want to learn more about marketing and mastering and monetizing your business. She Talks Business is where you'll learn all of that and more. My name is Lisa Larter and I'm an entrepreneur, high school dropout, wiener dog enthusiast and your host. Let's get started.

Lisa Larter (00:24):

Welcome to the big 2-0, episode 20 with Mark Schaefer for in our season called A Summer of Reading. This book is fantastic. *Marketing Rebellion*. Mark Schaefer believes that the most human company wins and he just tells some incredible stories in this book that really illustrate why the most human company wins. And why we need to stop relying on automation and technology and get back to the basics, caring about people. And I got to tell you, Mark really enjoyed this conversation. He was expecting it to be a boring, typical conversation about his book. And by the end of our conversation, he was just asking when he could come back to do another show with me. So I hope you enjoy this conversation with the ever so engaging, ever so smart Mark Schaefer.

Lisa Larter (01:28):

And Thought Readers was born of an idea that came from a client of mine, who said she had a business idea for me. And if I would ship her a book every month that I was reading that she would love to read along with me. And so that was I think almost five years ago. And we've held a business book club for the last five years. And your book is the book that we're reading this month. So I have a list of questions-



Mark Schaefer (01:59):

Awesome.

Lisa Larter (01:59):

That I would love to ask you, and I loved your book.

Mark Schaefer (02:03):

Thank you.

Lisa Larter (02:04):

I love the most human company wins because I've built my own company on relationships and interactions with people. And the vast majority of my business comes from referrals, from people that have done business with me. And so the timing of reading your book was really interesting. And so I have a whole bunch of questions if you don't mind me asking.

Mark Schaefer (02:29):

No. Let's go. Let's go have fun.

Lisa Larter (02:30):

Okay. Okay. Awesome. So I started reading on Kindle too, and the reason I like reading on Kindle is I can print my notes, which is great. It makes it easier than floating through the books. So one of the questions I have for you, which is kind of a tactical question, because you talk a lot in the book about how much people hate ads and all of this stuff, you gave away your free download without an email address.

Mark Schaefer (03:06):

Right.

Lisa Larter (03:06):

Why? So I am like, oh, that's interesting. Why is he doing this? Why is he not collecting email addresses here?

Mark Schaefer (03:18):

Well I think there's a philosophical reason and there's a mathematical reason. So the philosophical reason is that today the economic value of content is zero, unless it's seen and shared. And if there's an inherent mistrust of sites

that ask you for your email, your phone number. I gave the example of the book of Salesforce, which is a company I liked by the way, and how I just got into this loop. I entered my information and I was getting calls from salespeople in the middle of birthday parties. It was really on borderline harassment and that today when consumers opt into something and they want to see your content, that doesn't mean they're saying I'm a lead. We need to treat people with respect. So that's sort of the philosophical version.

Mark Schaefer (04:26):

The mathematical version is that the research shows that something like 95% of the people who want your content, but have to give an email address, don't do it. They don't trust you. They go away. So 95% of the people who could be reading your content and more importantly, sharing your content, don't do it. So there's like this, why would you push 95% of these potential new connections away? Why don't we treat people with respect and connect with them as fellow human beings and friends instead of sales leads and see what happens.

Mark Schaefer (05:12):

And I've written a big blog post about this, by the way, that has all these examples. And there've been many people who said, all right, Mark, I took your advice. I just could not believe what happened. It turned my business around.

Lisa Larter (05:26):

Really?

Mark Schaefer (05:29):

I just started giving my content away and people were so appreciative. They wanted to know more. So that's the reason behind that. I think my book, the central theme is to move toward a more human centric version of marketing. And the book is a vast book. There are ideas on every page, but the simplest first step is to look at what you're doing in your company. And if you're doing things that people hate, stop it, don't do things that people hate. It's easy to know what people hate. Because we hate it too.

Mark Schaefer (06:11):

We hate spam. We hate this thing called lead nurturing, which is just a fancy word of saying, I'm going to keep spamming you until you block me. We hate robocalls. We hate when people abuse us because we give them an email address because there was a white paper we wanted to see. So you just stop it, treat people with respect.

Lisa Larter (06:36):

So on page 26, you say companies and brands must be built through an accumulation of human impressions. And that's a little bit of a tricky word, human impressions because over the last decade we have been taught to gather internet impressions. Get as many eyeballs, as many clicks, as many tricks, as many followers, as much traffic as you possibly can. So what advice would you give people based on humanizing their marketing when it comes. How do I get a human impression without being in front of a human? This COVID has changed things a lot. Right?

Mark Schaefer (07:24):

Yup. But I mean, you and I are having a human impression right now. Right? So there's lots of ways that we can use technology to tear down barriers between us and other people. And the main idea is that many companies have been built especially CPG companies and retail companies have been built on advertising impressions. And the fact of the matter is a lot of that is going away or it's moving into digital. And that kind of opens up its own can of worms and controversies these days. There's lots of research out there. One that is very well known is the Edelman Trust Barometer. And for the last 13 years now, it shows that trust in businesses, brands and advertising has declined because we've just abused them. It's just that simple.

Mark Schaefer (08:19):

Now, who do people trust? They trust each other. They trust their friends, their neighbors, they trust experts. They trust company founders. They trust these people we call influencers because influencers are really in their mind sort of trusted friends. They trust reviews and testimonies from strangers probably more than they trust your advertising. So the idea here is two-thirds of our marketing is occurring without us.

Mark Schaefer (08:55):

And so the new mindset required for marketing is really not about advertising impressions, which is what we've sort of held on for the last hundred years. And it's more about how do we enter that two thirds? How do we enter those conversations? How do we create ideas and content and events that are so interesting, so unmissable, so compelling that people just can't help but talk about us? And by the way, customer service is in that category too. I mean, there's a lot of lip service, I think, around customer service, but this is also a great opportunity for word of mouth marketing that is completely underutilized. And that is a human impression.

Mark Schaefer (09:50):

It's people talking to people, not just, oh, you're mad about something, how do I get this off of Twitter, but really engaging in conversations that can inform the marketing strategy, huge opportunity. So that's what I mean. The marketing is occurring between people. The customers are the marketers today and that's who's in control.

Lisa Larter (10:15):

So what do you think is more important for somebody who's marketing their business today? The frequency of content that they create for people or the quality of content that they create?

Mark Schaefer (10:28):

It has to be a little bit of both. Consistency is very, very important. I have a blog and I blog for 650 weeks in a row. And it's easy to say, oh, I'm going to take this week off. And it starts to become this slippery slope, but I'll tell you a story. A woman wrote me one time and she said, I start my day with you. I get a cup of coffee. I open up my email and I know I'm going to have an email from you that day. And you're going to teach me something.

Mark Schaefer (11:10):

Now, I've earned a place in her life. I'm a habit. I'm part of the fabric of her life. That can't happen if I blog twice a year or I create a YouTube video once every six months or I create a podcast once a quarter. Can't happen. So consistency, a rhythm, a consistent rhythm is important.

Mark Schaefer (11:38):

Now it also has to be great. Whenever I create any content, a book, a podcast, a blog post, there's only one thing in my mind. And I have this image of this person in my mind who starts my day, her date with me, I will not let you down. If you're spending your time with me, I'm going to be relevant and interesting and timely and entertaining. And I am fighting hard to be the best marketing blogger in this space. I will not let you down with anything that I do. And so you have to be good. You have to be superior or people will change. So it's not a trade-off, you have to do both.

Lisa Larter (12:26):

And so what do you do to avoid distractions or shiny objects? Because there's different flavors of the day. All right? Clubhouse is the flavor of the day today. So we've got written blogs, we've got blogs, we've got podcasts, we've got Clubhouse, we've got live streaming. How have you narrowed down how you show up and provide that value so that you don't let people down? How have you decided what to focus on?

Mark Schaefer (12:58):

Well, I think that's a very timely question because certainly there's a lot of FOMO out there about Clubhouse and other, TikTok and other new channels. And there's also a lot of, I think, bad advice out there saying that you need to plant your flag in the ground on every one of these channels. Now if you're a big company like Nike or Disney or Coca-Cola, you can do anything you want, you can be everywhere. You can be excellent everywhere because you've got big ad agencies creating all this stuff for you. That's not me. Probably not you.

Mark Schaefer (13:39):

And so this is a real issue because it's kind of intoxicating to think, oh my gosh, Clubhouse is free. TikTok is free. I could build my business there, but every time you make one of these decisions, it does cost something. I mean, you've got, like I said, you've got to be consistent and you've got to be excellent. And there's no human being that can be consistent and excellent everywhere. So for an individual person or a small business, this is a very important decision. You need to pick basically one place and you need to build your audience there over a period of time before you even think about diversifying.

Lisa Larter (14:30):

So what did you pick? Where did you pick?

Mark Schaefer (14:32):

I started with blogging and there were really two reasons. Number one is I studied journalism and I like writing. And the other one was when I started all those years ago, it was hard to make a video. You needed equipment. That was before smartphones. Nobody was making podcasts. Instagram didn't exist and there was no Pinterest or Clubhouse or anything like that. So blogging is what I liked and it fits my personality. It's sort of a little longer form, a little cerebral. I can set it down and think about it and come back to it and decide when I'm ready to publish it. But I blogged for five years before I decided to start a podcast. Because again, I could not make any decision that would deteriorate the quality of my blog. I had to find a way to create this podcast in a way that both of them would be excellent and superior.

Mark Schaefer (15:40):

And so look, I like Clubhouse. I've been spending some time on Clubhouse, but number one, it takes an enormous amount of time and the content is synchronous. It's not asynchronous. A blog post is asynchronous. You can read a blog post I wrote in 2014. You can read it at 2:00 in the morning. To participate in Clubhouse, You have to be there in that moment. And as a marketer and a business professional, I honestly can't spend time creating content that's never going to be found again. That's just not effective or efficient. I love it from a personal standpoint because it's quirky and it's fun and it's provocative. And so when I'm in the car, I'll listen to it. I've led some rooms. I'm going to participate in it. But I'm not putting my stake in the ground there and saying, this is my major thing.

Mark Schaefer (16:41):

And It's hard for anybody to do that. I have a lot of friends who said Google+ is it. I'm staking my whole career on Google+. Whoops. I'm staking my whole career on Meerkat. Whoops. I could put it on LinkedIn, Twitter. I could put it on Medium. I could put it on Substack. So the content is what builds the brand. Social media is just the distribution channel. So your core idea is that you got to focus on the one type of content that you're going to do consistent and be great. Do it for at least 18 months and then assess it. Am I

in the right place? Is this having any impact? And then maybe think about pivoting or diversifying.

Lisa Larter (17:34):

So you do your blog and you do a podcast? Now you do both?

Mark Schaefer (17:39):

I do, but I only do the podcast every other week because if I did it every week, it would be too much. It wouldn't be a joy. And if it's not joyful my audience would know. If I'm stressed about it and I can't put enough quality thinking into it, I'm going to deliver a substandard product. And that's when I lose people. So I mean, I can only do it well every other week. Lots of people want me to be weekly. I can have more advertisers if I did it weekly. But I'm not going to let people down or once you start losing people, you'll never get them back.

Lisa Larter (18:21):

So where did you develop this, I'm not going to let people down? I never heard anyone say that about content creation before. I've never heard anyone take it so seriously and have that mindset about what you're creating because most people are creating because we're trying to attract leads. And that is the primary reason they're trying to get something. They're not trying to give something. They're not trying to be of service. They're trying to sell.

Mark Schaefer (18:51):

Right. And they're going to lose and they're going to become obsolete because... And I think marketers, we have a real opportunity here that we can be something better than tricking somebody into clicking a link. And you can always trick someone into clicking a link but you can't trick them into reading it and you can't trick them into sharing it. And that's what makes digital marketing work. It's the only thing that really makes digital marketing work. If you can't do something to earn their attention then you're going to lose them and to earn their attention, it's got to be about them. It's not about you.

What is the problem you're solving for them today? And how do you do that in some interesting and unique way?

Lisa Larter (19:47):

So where do you get your ideas for blogs every week? I'm fascinated by this because I feel like my path is the same. I've been blogging for over 10 years. I logged into the backend of WordPress the other day and there were 600 and some posts and my cadence has been weekly as well. And the last time I redid my website, we eliminated a couple of years from the very beginning because the content just wasn't relevant anymore. And I got to tell you, I have blog fatigue. I feel like I've said it all. And I don't know what to say. And I don't know where to start. So where do you get your energy and enthusiasm for all that and your commitment to not letting people down?

Mark Schaefer (20:32):

Well that's another great question. So really, I don't think it has anything as much to do with energy or creativity as it is discipline. So you and I are bombarded with ideas all the time. So there's probably some things I've said today that could make a blog post. I will never let you down, seems to have an impact on you. Here's what I do. When I hear something like that, that inspires me. It could be a chart. It could be a quote. It could be the other day I was on Clubhouse. Barbara Corcoran from Shark Tank was on there. She said something profound. Here's what you do. You write it down right away. I just go into WordPress and make a headline just to record the idea. That's all.

Mark Schaefer (21:24):

So number one, just be aware of all the ideas that are coming at you every day. Number two, write it down. If you don't write it down right away, you lose it. Number three, set aside sacred time every week to do it. An hour, maybe two hours. Just like you'd make time to work out, have a date, whatever, have a customer meeting. If this is a priority and you really want to do this and move ahead, you've got to be consistent. So for me, it's a joy because I collect these ideas all week. And I think about maybe something that Barbara Corcoran said, and it was just like, wow, she really nailed it there. And I'll sit down, Usually it's, I get up at maybe 6:00 AM on a Sunday morning, put on a pot of coffee and I'll write for two hours. And it's a joy because I've collected these ideas and I'll pick the most fun one.

Mark Schaefer (22:30):

I can't wait to write about what Barbara said. I can't wait for people to read this because this was so smart. It's not all my ideas. It's hardly ever my ideas.

But I'm just connecting the dots in some way. I read this story. I've got content coming out next week about we just had this terrible crisis in Texas. And my brother lives in Houston and he lost power and water for 40 hours. And there was a furniture store in Houston that said, if you're cold and you don't have any heat come to our store, we have power and come be warm. He had thousands of people come to the furniture store just to sit in chairs and be warm. He had 500 people a night sleeping overnight on his mattresses. He brought in food. He created a play area for children. And here's how I heard about this. It was on the front page of the New York Times.

Mark Schaefer (23:36):

Now this is a person. The subtitle of the *Marketing Rebellion* book is the most human company wins. What did this man do? Today, As I say in the book marketing, isn't about being in a community, it's being of a community. So when your community is suffering and freezing, what do you do? If your friends are freezing, you say, come to my house. It seems weird to think that doing something like that is marketing, but marketing and branding is about creating emotional connection between what you do and your customers. I want to tell you something, that man didn't just create marketing. He's become a legend. There is nobody in Houston that will ever buy furniture from anybody other than him.

Mark Schaefer (24:29):

Now that's not my story, but I'm writing a blog post about next week because it inspired me. And I also talked about it on my podcast because it connects the dots between my philosophy about marketing and what's happening in the world. It's happening. Human centered marketing wins. That's what we want. We don't want to be interrupted and intercepted and spammed and abused. We don't want people taking advantage of our email addresses. We want people to be our friends. We want to trust them. We need kindness. We need community. We're desperate or we're lonely, we're isolated.

Mark Schaefer (25:13):

And so we need to figure out how do we apply what we're best at to the human needs today. That's really what marketing is today. Rolling up your sleeves. Just saying "what could I do to help that creates the emotional

connection?”. Not saying “we're with you in these unprecedented times.”. That's laughable. Right? That's going to become a meme. It's meaningless.

Lisa Larter (25:42):

Yeah. Absolutely. So on page 11, you talk about localism. My question... Sorry. Page 111. My question for you is, how do you think this trend will change in a post-COVID economy? Because there's been a whole lot of... There's been a whole lot of shop local, support small businesses through this whole COVID year. And I'm wondering, do you think that that is something that is going to continue to be an upswing or do you think people have short memories and they're going to go back to their normal habits post-COVID? What do you predict?

Mark Schaefer (26:28):

I actually think that that's a really good question. And I'm not sure anybody knows. This is a time for people marketing to be really humble. And any assumptions you have, your business and your customers, you need to be open to ideas that this could change and let's face it, some people love Amazon, some people hate Amazon. Amazon saved us. I mean, I had COVID, my wife had COVID and we went through a period of 60 or 70 days when we could not leave our house. We couldn't go to the grocery store. We didn't have anybody to take care of us. And so we depended on HelloFresh. Now this was a service we didn't even know existed until last February. And we decided we like it. It's inexpensive. It teaches us new recipes. It's convenient.

Mark Schaefer (27:34):

Now think about that. Who would have predicted that I'm spending a portion of my grocery budget to a food channel that I didn't even know existed a year ago. There's going to be a lot of stuff like that, that we don't understand. There's going to be a lot. And I depended on Amazon. I haven't been going out the stores and I don't think we can underestimate how these behaviors will be transforming into habits.

Mark Schaefer (28:13):

We are using e-commerce in new and unprecedented ways. So I don't know the answer to that question. There's a lot of answers that we don't know right now. Certainly this local trend, it's a powerful trend. It's an emotional

trend. We love artisanal types of products, but I don't know. I think I would be really arrogant if I tried to answer that question.

Lisa Larter (28:41):

Yeah. I think it will be interesting. I think that some small businesses have definitely earned loyalty through this period. And I think that some small businesses have failed to adapt and have tried to stand on a soap box in terms of you should support me because I'm a small business versus having earned the business of their customers in terms of how they show up. So you're writing that down. Did I just give you a blog idea?

Mark Schaefer (29:11):

Yes, you did. You're going to be a blog post.

Lisa Larter (29:16):

There you go.

Mark Schaefer (29:16):

See it. It wasn't my idea at all. But you asked a good question and that question is probably on a lot of people's minds right now.

Lisa Larter (29:26):

Yeah, it's an interesting one. So here's another one that's on my mind on page 121, in the heart of the fake news era, we need to rethink how we tell our story, where we tell it what we tell and most importantly, who tells it?

Mark Schaefer (29:40):

Right.

Lisa Larter (29:41):

So I agree. And I'm curious what you think about some of the, it depends on your view, censorship or violation of service agreements that we've seen on social channels and forget about the political landscape. I'm more interested in your opinion on these big tech companies being able to decide what content they believe is fake or relevant and their ability to take things down. Do you think that we're going to see a change and regulation? Because it's funny before I read your book, I said to my girlfriend, there's a technology

revolution coming, and we are going to see big change in terms of how content is shared on technology and regulated.

Mark Schaefer (30:42):

Well, there has to be, there has to be. So let me answer your question two ways. first of all, just with my background, I mean, I think on the one hand that starting to block people, it could be a slippery slope and it could be very, very complicated. Now point two, I have a lot of... I mean, I'm not a huge Facebook fan. Let me be honest about that. I'm not a Zuckerberg fan at all. I think ethically they're a rudderless company who only does the right thing when they get caught. Now, having said that I have sympathy for them because there's never been a Facebook before. We are in uncharted territory.

Mark Schaefer (31:41):

And so we have to think about this is something that is cosmically complex and unprecedented in human history. So let's just get off our soap box for a minute and have a little reality check here that sometimes there are not good answers. Sometimes you have to pick the best bad choice to get by. And so I think part of this is the government's fault. I mean, these issues have been brewing for decades and our government, the people in our government, they don't even know the right questions to ask, let alone create regulation.

Mark Schaefer (32:29):

Now, the last point I'll make is that the famous explanation about free speech and I believe this came from Thurgood Marshall said, "not all speech is protected". You can't yell fire in a crowded theater. That is not protected speech. So there's a difference between opinions and lies. Everybody is entitled to their opinion. Not everybody is entitled to knowingly spread lies or spread conspiracy theories that could endanger people. I don't know how to solve that. I don't know how to judge that. I don't know how to be fair about that. As I said, it's cosmically complex.

Lisa Larter (33:23):

There was an article, I think it was in the New York Times, and they were questioning how these tech companies were behaving like a Supreme court.

Mark Schaefer (33:34):

Right. That was in the New York Times. Yeah. Yeah. Very, very long article. And again, is that right? Is it going to work? Zuckerberg's trying something, he realizes it can't be him. It really can't be Facebook. They need to bring in outside experts and outside views. How do you scale that? It's not, but what they're trying to do is use this quote unquote Supreme court model to at least establish the guidelines. So they know how to point their algorithms in the right direction. There aren't easy answers, there really aren't.

Mark Schaefer (34:15):

And I think the one thing I would encourage people to think about is just have a little bit of patience and also some empathy realizing that we've never had to deal with this before and we're in a historical time. So I have faith that things will be figured out just like democracy. It can be really messy sometimes. It usually is, but hopefully truth and fairness and goodness will win out. That's my hope.

Lisa Larter (34:52):

So that is a perfect segue into my next question which comes from page 134, and you say, 67% of consumers will try a brand for the first time solely because they agree with its position on a controversial topic. And 65% said they will not buy a brand when it stays silent on an issue they consider important. So I grew up in the era where you're not supposed to talk about politics.

Mark Schaefer (35:24):

Right.

Lisa Larter (35:24):

And poli-

Mark Schaefer (35:26):

I think we're back there too.

Lisa Larter (35:29):

And your country has been pretty, I'm going to say, pretty evenly divided over the last four years politically. And in terms of left-right. And someone actually told me, they posted on Facebook, our both least favorite network

that they lost respect for me for being silent about politics. And so my question for you, it's not a political question, it's more of a philosophical question is, when your customers are politically divided, how do you avoid a win/lose situation? Are values and actions as important as taking a stand and drawing a line in the sand? Because I look at my business and it doesn't really matter in the work that I do. It's not politically related. So can you help me understand what your political thinker, what your philosophical, not political thinking is on that?

Mark Schaefer (36:34):

Well, I think your situation is the business truth for 99.9% of businesses. And I do this little exercise when I teach classes or I do workshops. And I ask people to think about all the products they bought in the last two weeks. It could be a sweater. Maybe it was workout equipment, maybe you had lunch, maybe you bought an insurance policy. And then think about, of all these products you bought in the last two weeks, how many of those products do you know where they stand politically? And the answer is zero and you don't care. You want a sandwich because you're hungry. You want a carwash because your car is dirty and you don't care. You really don't.

Mark Schaefer (37:31):

So I think the first idea here is that what I have in the book, and I think I have a very comprehensive view of this in the book is that, look, there is an opportunity here. It doesn't have to be divisive by the way. I gave this example of Heineken in the book, how they created this movement about unity and tolerance and understanding.

Mark Schaefer (37:54):

So it can be something inspirational too, but there is an opportunity, but there's a big risk that comes with this. And I had someone that reads my blog that wrote me a note, and he was this big Trump supporter. And he was in a business like you and me, who cares, but he wanted to fly his flag. And he did it in a very aggressive and provocative way. And there was backlash. So he said to me, "see, this is what this cancel culture is all about.". And I said, "no, you're wrong.". I said, "you made a bad business decision. Now that's your business. That's your decision. There's no reason anybody, you need to provoke people and have them take a side.".

Mark Schaefer (38:49):

So you've got to live with a bad business decision. Maybe if you fly your flag, you found the right audience. They're going to love you, gather around you and support you. That might work. But if you go out in a provocative and aggressive way, almost in a taunting kind of way, that's a bad business decision.

Lisa Larter (39:13):

I agree.

Mark Schaefer (39:14):

You're mindfully removing some of your customers. So you got to live with that. It's not about them. It's about you. You made a bad decision. And by the way, that doesn't mean you're inauthentic. It means you're, people who put themselves above their customers ultimately are going to be doomed.

Lisa Larter (39:39):

Yeah. It's definitely an interesting time. I was surprised when someone said that to me because I... And when you wrote is 65% say they will not buy a brand when it stays silent on an issue they consider important. And so that is what made me think about what this individual had said to me. And interestingly enough that individual had never bought anything from my brand. So they weren't an actual customer, but-

Mark Schaefer (40:10):

There you go.

Lisa Larter (40:13):

On page 126, you talk about don't be in a city be of a city, give up control, make the customer, the hero. My question for you is... Find your customers deepest self-interest and connect at the street level. How does this translate to smaller service businesses? How do you translate it to consulting work for example?

Mark Schaefer (40:41):

Well, when the pandemic hit, I became irrelevant in 24 hours. I was a keynote speaker without an audience. I was a teacher without a classroom. I was a consultant without customers because my customers said our supply

chain is in chaos and we just lost half our customers. We love you Mark, but not now, which is the right decision to make. And so I went through a period of disorientation to think about, well, where do I belong right now? And it took me a few days to think things through and realize that I am a teacher in my heart. I'm a teacher in everything that I do, whether I speak or blog, or actually teach in a classroom, but the world needed me to teach something else right now.

Mark Schaefer (41:32):

And so I pivoted, I stopped the marketing content, and I started writing about dealing with anxiety, dealing with uncertainty, choosing what your narrative is going to be in this war. We're in a war. And this is the story we're going to tell our children and our grandchildren. We can choose our story right now. And that's important I think. An important perspective. I started Facebook lives every day, just listening to people and kind of talking them down. And then when I got COVID, I made a decision that I was going to sort of give updates on this disease. I was for most people, I was the first person they knew who had this disease.

Mark Schaefer (42:24):

And so I wanted to sort of de-stigmatize it and tell people about my experience. Most recently there's still a lot of people who are suffering. And so what I'm trying to do is just coach them, counsel them, help them. What I'm telling people is we've gotta just make it through the next year. We have to land on the other side. That's the most heroic thing we can do. We have to do it. We have to keep our relationships intact. We have to keep our brain intact. We have to keep our family intact. We have to keep our business intact. That's heroic.

Mark Schaefer (43:07):

A lot of people said, "oh, you know the pandemic, I'm going to have all this extra time. I'm going to get that beach body, or I'm going to start writing poetry.". The most heroic thing we can do right now is land on the other side. So that's what I'm trying to do. That's something I'm good at. I've got a master's degree in applied behavioral sciences. I'm a good listener. I'm good at helping people, coaching them through individual problems. When I see somebody suffering on social media, I just reach out to them. And I said, do you need somebody to talk to? So it's my way of being that furniture

business. I don't have a big showroom where I can invite everybody in but I have certain skills that I can use to send a little ripple through the world and maybe help somebody make it through.

Lisa Larter (43:55):

That's awesome. What do you think the future of your speaking business will be like, do you think in a year's time, things will start to go back to normal?

Mark Schaefer (44:06):

Well, my speaking business has actually been fine. I had a big drop off last spring. By summer, I had a really record business in the summer and I'm having a pretty good 2021. And-

Lisa Larter (44:21):

So it's adapted all virtually or?

Mark Schaefer (44:22):

Yeah. It's all virtual. And I've got one live event coming up in April. I'm going to be doing a keynote for the National Speakers Association in front of a controlled studio audience this Saturday, which will be the first time I've been on a stage in a year. So that'll be wild. But, yeah, I've been doing a lot of virtual, a lot of virtual work and it's been fine.

Lisa Larter (44:53):

Do you miss the travel?

Mark Schaefer (44:55):

In some ways, I miss seeing friends. I miss seeing friends, but the thing that I've sort of learned is I'm getting so much more work done now.

Lisa Larter (45:09):

That's funny. So what are your thoughts on what Apple is doing with their iOS 14 in terms of Facebook, remarketing, for people to be able to basically tell their phone no, don't let this company track me. What are your thoughts on that?

Mark Schaefer (45:33):

Well, it's exactly what I write about in my book. This is the rebellion. Stop doing what people hate. Apple's just getting ahead of the curve. Be good to people. The reason Apple's doing it is because marketers are ruining it.

Lisa Larter (45:51):

Right.

Mark Schaefer (45:52):

So Apple's not being mean. They're not being aggressive against Facebook. They're just responding to their customers. And that's exactly what I say in this book. If you're doing things that people hate, you're going to lose, you're going to lose. Every time customers have rebelled against marketing and advertising, the customers win. And that's why when you open up my book, it's the only book you'll ever open up that doesn't have a blank page at the beginning. When you open up, there's a picture of a woman holding up a sign, you can hold it up and show everybody. It says?

Lisa Larter (46:34):

Respect me.

Mark Schaefer (46:35):

Yeah, because someone asked me, "what's the point of this rebellion?". I said "in my mind there's this, our customers are banging on our door saying, stop abusing me, respect my time, respect my family, respect my privacy.". You'll treat me like a human being and they're going to win. Get ahead of it. You can wait until everybody blocks all the ads and everything, but get ahead of it. There are a lot better ways to do things.

Lisa Larter (47:12):

So let's talk about ads because I'm curious as to... I look at myself as a consumer and I click on and I buy from ads.

Mark Schaefer (47:28):

Sure.

Lisa Larter (47:29):

So what is your thinking on the right way to utilize ads? I know my phone's listening to me because I'll say something and then I see an ad for what I was talking about. I remember thinking that people were crazy when they started talking about that years ago, but now it's a no-brainer. So, what are your thoughts on that?

Mark Schaefer (47:57):

Well, again, I mean, in your example, I can tell you're a little creeped out by that and so that's something you don't want. So eventually I think that's going to end. I mean, it just is. So you can spend money doing that stuff today but eventually it's going to go away. I mean, just look at television today. I watch more TV than I've ever watched but I never see ads unless maybe it's a sporting event. I watch Netflix, I watch Amazon Prime. I watch the Mandalorian. I listen to Spotify. I listen to Audiobooks. I'm not exposed to ads like I used to. I have the story in the book about the lady telling me about the soap. Right? She said, my advertising consumption is down by 95%. That's the future right there. That's the future.

Mark Schaefer (49:01):

Now there's going to be some ads. I think the real role of ads will be to remind you of something you love about that company. So the work is going to be build the emotion, build the connection, build the engagement, build these human connections. And then when people see an ad, they'll have this warm feeling to remind them I haven't been to that store in a while. So I think there will always be a place for ads of some kind. A lot of our world sort of depends on ads for funding. But as I say in the book two thirds of our marketing is occurring without us. I could project maybe by 2030, 90% of our marketing is going to be occurring without us.

Mark Schaefer (49:54):

So we really don't have a choice. Advertising is kind of lazy in a way. Marketing today is hard. It is hard. It requires a new mindset, new surges of creativity. It's easy to take on an ad and wait for something to happen and maybe it'll work but that's not the marketing that's going to work long-term.

Lisa Larter (50:21):

What do you think is the most important thing that people can do in marketing today if you're a small business owner? So I'm not talking Coca-Cola, I'm talking businesses that are, let's say up to 10 million. And because you've got content marketing, you've got social media marketing, you've got SEO optimization, you've got email marketing, there's so many different levers that people can use. If people have to take one thing that they were going to commit to and really do well, what would the one thing be that you would suggest they do?

Mark Schaefer (50:58):

Well, I would look at everything that you do. First of all, we already talked about if you're doing things that people hate, stop it. And then I will look at everything you do and think, okay, Mark says the most human company wins. The most human university will win. The most human insurance company will win. The most human whatever will win. And so we have to think about every touch point. Our website, phone calls, emails, text messages, meetings, complaints. How can be more human? Take out the stock photos of the ethnically diverse people, holding hands, jumping through a cornfield. Put people on there. Put your people, put your customers on there. Make them the hero. Put a video on your site, show your face, show your smile, show your passion, tell them why you love what you do and you live it and you breathe it and you can't wait to serve them.

Mark Schaefer (52:10):

Your competitors aren't doing that. And a lot of businesses, especially service business, it's a personal decision. They want to trust the people behind it. That's where everything is today. We want to know who is this. Show your face. Show your heart. Show your passion, and just think about every single way you can be more human and that will get you started in the right direction.

Lisa Larter (52:40):

Awesome. Thank you. My final question, I want to be respectful of your time. I really appreciate you spending this time with us, it has been great. I could talk to you all day. So you talk about how can your company establish psychological ownership by bringing customers into your inner circle? So my question is what is one way that you think service based companies can do

this without high labor intensity? Because what I'm hearing from people right now, especially in this COVID era with parents of businesses, being at home with their kids and not having people, people don't have a lot of bandwidth right now. And so what is something that people can do to be that most human company but also manage all of the other human needs that are going on right now?

Mark Schaefer (53:41):

Well, that's a great question. And it's really based in our COVID reality. My book was written before the COVID reality but just like anything, it has to be a priority and everybody's doing marketing and all I'm asking people is to think about... I wrote a blog post this week. I thought it was going to be controversial, but it wasn't everybody said, "yeah, yeah, yeah, that's right. We need to hear this.". And it just talks about that SEO is massively overrated for most companies. I mean, that's going to be a shock for a lot of people to hear, but I mean, there's a lot of reasons behind why I say that, but just the simplest one is, is that nothing really matters unless you're number one or number two, or maybe number three in the search results and the people who are number one, number two and number three are the mean junkyard dogs with the most money.

Mark Schaefer (54:42):

If you're a mean junkyard dog with a lot of money then SEO is important. But if you're not, you got to find something else. And most businesses are, someone comes in and says, "we've got an SEO package for you. Every business should do SEO.". And you're afraid not to because SEO is important and you have no idea what it is. And it's nine times out of 10 is way overstated and a massive waste of money. All I'm saying is let's think about how everybody's doing marketing. How do we redeploy in a way that makes a difference? Think about the furniture company in Houston. They just secured legend status, no SEO, no flyers, no Facebook ads. They're on the front page of the New York Times. It's not hard to do. It's just being a nice business.

Lisa Larter (55:39):

It's about giving a damn.

Mark Schaefer (55:41):

You got to give a damn. You got to be of the community, not in the community. That's the big difference.

Lisa Larter (55:53):

There's a woman that I know whose business was challenged incredibly because of COVID. She owned a restaurant and it was more... It's called a Freshii Franchise. And when COVID happened as a lot of restaurants were shut down and impacted. And this is an example of, I think a woman who was really smart, her name is Karla Briones. And she put up on her mobile app. She put out the option to buy a health care worker a lunch. And her restaurant was inundated with sales from people in the community who wanted to be of the community and they delivered boxes upon boxes, upon boxes of healthy, fresh food lunches for healthcare workers through some of the early trying times of COVID to the point that the franchisor took her idea and deployed it across the country. And so I share that with you because that's a story that is pretty sure you would love. It's exactly.

Mark Schaefer (57:10):

It's perfect. I go to a local restaurant. Their food isn't even that good but whenever you check out, they've got this little thing on the table and it said if you're hungry and you don't have any money, it's okay. Here are some meals that you can choose and we'll bring you this meal and you can just say I want this meal and that's a signal to us that you can't pay and you can be dignified about it. We don't have to talk about it.

Mark Schaefer (57:47):

And then for everybody who goes there, you can add \$5 and that \$5 pays for someone else's meal. And so why not? Of course. Well, this was an awesome interview, by the way, I am so impressed at the keen questions and insights. You just moved my brain upside down with my own book today. You gave me three or four new blog post ideas. So you are awesome. And this was an awesome interview. And now what we need to do is I have a new book out called *Cumulative Advantage* and you got to read that one and you need to let that one sit a little bit and come back and then ask me about specific pages in that book.

Lisa Larter (58:38):

Okay. Okay. Deal. If you come back, I'll read that book.

Mark Schaefer (58:42):

All right.

Lisa Larter (58:43):

I'm starting a podcast. So I may use this on the podcast as well, use the recording and maybe I can have you on the podcast and I can interview you about the next book too.

Mark Schaefer (58:55):

All right.

Lisa Larter (58:56):

All right. Thank you very much, Mark Schaefer, you are so generous. We really appreciate your time.

Mark Schaefer (59:02):

All right.

Lisa Larter (59:03):

Thank you.

Mark Schaefer (59:03):

Thank you.

Lisa Larter (59:03):

All right. Bye-bye.

Lisa Larter (59:05):

Thank you for joining me for this episode of She Talks Business. If you enjoyed the show, you know the drill, leave us a review, tell someone about it and join the conversation on social media. Thanks for listening and until next time remember, done is always better than perfect.



Lisa Larter is a Business Strategist, Digital Marketing Expert, Author and Speaker.

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