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Channel Mastery Podcast, Episode #94: Kristin Carpenter Interviews Kimberly Grogan, Co-founder of Dash Sports

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Channel Mastery podcast. I am so excited to introduce Kimberly Grogan to you today. She is the cofounder of Dash Sports, formerly Gear For Multisport in Central Florida. Welcome to the show Kimberly.

Kristin: Here we go. Welcome back everybody to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast. I am so excited to introduce Kimberly Grogan to you today. She is the cofounder of Dash Sports, formerly Gear For Multisport in Central Florida. Welcome to the show Kimberly.

Kimberly: Thank you.

Kristin: I'm always excited to feature independent specialty artists and retailers such as you and your husband, Kevin. You've been in business 13 years in your region in central Florida. You're about to talk about a new expansion you have planned that I think rolls together some really important trends and things that are really working well for your community there. And it's experiential retail. It's very specialized. It's high touch. And I just couldn't have a better guest on than you to talk through that today. So why don't we start by sharing with my awesome audience your background story, how you and Kevin opened Dash Sports.

Kimberly: Thirteen years ago I was a mom of a 10-month old and my husband was teaching PE in the schools, and we were approached by a couple who were ready to sell their store Gear From Multisport, which is 400 square feet inside a National Training Center, a gym here in Claremont. And they approached us to purchase their store. And I wasn't ready yet with a 10 month old, but four months later, as I thought about it, I told Kevin that this is what we needed to do. He could not be teaching anymore. We could buy the store, make it our business, and be involved in the community as we already were. And bring more to this area.

Kristin: That's awesome. So you're being very, very humble and I love that about you, but you guys literally have you opened, sorry, took over ownership of Gear for Multisport without a retail background, without all of the relationships that a sales rep or somebody in the quote industry or community might have. And basically just went for it. And I love that. And you guys grew this as a family business. You're now mom and dad have two kids. And you busted through the seams of that 400 square foot space.

Kristin: In 13 years you've served thousands of people we talked about in our rehearsal call. Let's talk about the expansion. It's June of 2019. I can't say that everybody's still got their finger in

the air and saying it's an apocalypse. I think that that's calmed down for sure. We're starting to see what's really the table stakes for specialty retail, what's really making it work today.

Kristin: But at the same time I don't see a whole heck of a lot of independent specialty multi-sport or endurance market stores expanding right now. And you are, so that's one of the reasons I wanted to feature you here today. Let's talk about the opportunity you see to move into this new location.

Kimberly: Well, our area has been growing, and we also have been growing in our reach and in our events that we've been doing with our partners. All of our brands are doing a great job at controlling their 3P, controlling online sales. It's a great time to expand and to show them the love that they've shown us now for a couple of years in controlling those things. And we feel like we need more space to be able to host a special events. And then also to have our customers have space to look around.

Kimberly: One of the things in our 400 square foot store, if you could see it, it is packed to the brim, bottom to top, back to front. We expand out into the hallway with our offerings, and we have outgrown it. Whenever a big shipment comes in, they always wait for me to find the space to put all of this stuff. Somehow I find it and it's super fun. We've had lots of people come in over the years and say, "It's like a candy store. I can find everything I need." So we know that our offerings and by being athletes ourselves, we know what we want to bring the community in order for it to grow and be sustainable.

Kristin: So 13 years, I mean, can you share a little bit about how you have such a high retention rate with your customers? I mean you've shared some stories with me that were pretty amazing.

Kimberly: So we have the basic loyalty program, which keeps some people coming back. But then we also have events in the area that we help to host and that we're a part of each week. One of them being Park Run. About six years ago a couple came to us and they had been doing Park Run over in the UK and they wanted to bring one to Claremont and weren't having any traction with asking other people to help out with it. And so my husband loves to race and I like to organize, and so it was a perfect match for both of us to be involved.

Kimberly: He goes and races it or runs it each week. It's a free 5K every week. And I've helped on the organization side. It has really brought our community to a new place of ownership of an event where it's owned by all the people who do it. Everyone gets to volunteer and is asked to volunteer. And so it's brought a whole new level of people wanting to volunteer and wanting to be involved. And so that's one of the ways that we have shown and seen people wanting to come back into the store and wanting to be a part of the things going on in the area and with us.

Kimberly: We also connect well with the people who come in from out of town, because we're able to tell them where they can go get a great meal, where they can connect with a group to go on a ride, where they can connect with a group to go on a run. And so the people who are here as snowbirds come in and they feel like home in our space because they know us, they're able to talk to us, and we share a lot of the same passions. And so they're able to connect with somebody that they might not have anybody else to connect with in the area until they

start going to the groups and all. And then it becomes that they have a community and a found... They want to come back each year to the area for that.

Kristin: Okay. So Kimberly you just hit on a key point. I would love for you to talk a little bit about your target consumer at Dash Sports, because in our rehearsal call you talked about a competitive triathlete and marathoner as well as a lifestyle fitness [inaudible 00:10:35] and I'm curious to know like how you are making room for everybody to feel like they can belong to your tribe.

Kimberly: So we have had people who are just starting out in their walking or running journey come into the store for their first pair of shoes. We also have people who are getting back into it. And so to be able to connect them with the groups that we are involved with, and to show them and tell them how awesome it is and how they can get involved...has been a great way to help people be active for their whole life. We also have people who have stepped away from their marathons or their distance training and all and we're able to help them through...

Kimberly: They might need work shoes or they might need something to help with their children as they age, so we keep them in the tribe. We keep them in the area and even inviting them to things and that keeps them connected to us. We have people who have come in, the first timers just starting on their journey and we invite them to the park run maybe. And we have one guy who started at his first park run. He got last place and his 5K time was in the mid-40s. He has now broken 19 minutes in his 5K and has done an Ironman and has done several marathons and is a devotee for life. He actually just sent me a picture today of his new house that he's moving into and the empty shoe rack that he needs to feel with [inaudible].

Kimberly: He's active in the community, he's one of the park run event directors now and he's a lawyer, so it's not like this is his calling. He just knows how it's changed his life and how us inviting him to park run really helped his journey.

Kristin: You just tee'd me up for a question I had that I wasn't going to ask just, yet, but I have to now because you gave me a great segue. You just rebranded the store, okay? It's now called Dash-Sports and just so everybody knows, the email is... Sorry, the URL is godashsports.com and it's dash hyphen sports in the name of the actual company but that's not how it is in the URL. Tell us about Dash-Sports with the hyphen in it. What is the meaning of that to you?

Kimberly: Dash, of course, means movement but it also is the span of our life from birth to death. The dash in between our years of our birth and our death and we feel it's very important to be active from birth to death. I had physical education professors in college who that was our calling, was to educate people to be active from birth to death.

That is what we incorporated into our name because we do feel it's so important for us to encourage people to be active at all times and to give them ways to make it easy for them to be active.

Kristin: That's awesome. Just so everybody knows, we are literally recording this, Kimberly is at work, so if you hear some noise in the background, she's literally at the shop right now and

they're opening the new location. Just so everybody knows, this is as close you can get to a behind-the-scenes in this podcast.

Kristin: Okay, one other thing I wanted to point out, thank you for sharing that, is back to your target consumer because to me, that's everything today. Obviously we talk a lot about that on the podcast no matter what channel you're working in. I feel like one of the things you've nailed is you figured out... And we're going to talk more about how you've built out your business to further the event cultural in your location as well, in your region. But you bring such a high touch of human to human interaction, so when you were talking about people coming back when their kids are older and getting products for them, those people can easily go to Amazon. They can easily go to Zappos. They're coming to you because they're comfortable with you, you've made an experience for them and I just want to say, after getting to know you, the reciprocity so high at your store.

I feel like that is something that is probably building your tribe more than anything is the fact that you're serving these people on such a high level, human-to-human interaction, that they're choosing to have that experience with you again and again. That's a key takeaway and I think one of the reasons why you're busting at the seams.

I also think you make it possible for everyone to belong because everybody has their own version of aspirational, right? We all have this identity. We want to be active and fit and healthy. Whether I'm racing for my PR or whether I'm just wanting to be fit and bit a good role model for my kids, I feel like you have a great quality to your culture at the location that you're building there, that you're building out of just enabling people to aspire together, right?

Let's talk about how you're going to make that something that people can do in the store before, during, and after their fitness or their event. Let's talk about the experience you're building into the new location.

Kimberly: Part of the experience is going to be getting people to build more community with each other, so bringing in the groups that are already formed and giving them a place to meet. Actually, we have a rainstorm right now going on outside so we never know when it's going to be raining in the middle of the afternoon, so we need a place indoors.

We never know when it's going to be be 100 degrees from about May until about October. So giving them a place to meet where it's air conditioned and then getting them a way to connect with others and we are planning a board where people can put which races they're training for so they can connect with other people who are also training for that race.

Some of the things that we want to also build out are seeing which races people are going to and maybe getting together a group to go on a trip to places. Everybody's training for the same thing and then goes and does it together and building more community, more memories around our active lifestyle.

Kimberly: We also have a space where we're going to have more stretching and just an open space for recovery products and all and we've already been approached by several people who are in

that space and helping people to live better lives by stretching their activations and things like that. They might want to use the space to host events and learning activities. So, it's going to be open for that as well.

Kristin: I wanted to say that before you continue, they're going from a 400 square foot to a 2,000 square foot space and Kimberly does not plan on just shoving a bunch of product in there. That's what we're talking about here. We want to make it... Your vision is to walk in and have great brands, great product, everything there but you're also making it a really well rounded environment where you're actually creating almost a theater that they get to walk into where they can see the before, during, and after of your brand of Central Florida fitness. I think it's really cool.

Kimberly: Yes, we're very excited that we have more space but we don't want it like we have it now which is a bit cramped and my husband said we need to hire very small people to work in there because it's hard to move around.

Kristin: He didn't mean your kids, I'm sure.

Kimberly: No, no, no. Our current space is quite slight and sometimes awkward for people, so we want the new space to be open and allow for the movement when people are trying on shoes and doing different things, that we can host a lot of people in there. Right now, if we have three people in the store, it's packed.

Kristin: Well, let's talk a little bit about the 501(c)(3) and Flow Dash as, I guess, supporting brands for Dash-Sports. Can you talk a little bit about that because I think that's a key, key way that you're really authenticating your brand in Central Florida?

Kimberly: We are starting to host events. I have put on an event with 800 runners in the Clermont Clay 15k and 5k through our not for profit. I put that on as a not for profit for two years and got an experience with putting on events. I've had a lot of fun with it on the back end and then of course the day of the event, if the back end is done right then the day of the event is fun for the race director, so that's been one way that we've been able to experience a different side of the racing because we've always just been athletes and volunteers or [inaudible] station or something like that.

We've gotten to see it from a different side that excites and delights our customers and our base and then beyond as we're inviting more people into it and so, we feel like it will help our community grow and thrive because of the things we're doing through the races.

So, the not for profit is putting back into the community by putting things on trails in the area to make it easier for people to use them and also last year, we bought an AED defibrillator for a local park which park run meets. That has actually spurred another group to buy an AED for another park and so we can see how the ripple effect of what we're doing and trying to enhance the community and make it a better place to train and to live is going to help our tribe and help it grow.

Kristin: That's awesome.

Kimberly: Yeah.

Kristin: The other thing I wanted to ask about because I really thought you were doing some innovative things here and getting after it is the work that you're doing with some of your key brands, right? This is the first of three podcasts. We're going to be following the Grogans through the opening of the new Dash-Sports location, that's what this first show is.

The second show will be right toward the end of the grand opening campaign which I'm about to talk about and then maybe a couple months as we get into back-to-school, I'd love to just do a quick check back in to hear how it's going so people can really see what was this like? Great. I heard from her right when they were opening, it sounded great. What is it like now? We're going to be able to follow the progress here, which I'm really excited about.

But let's talk a little bit about how you're going to involve the brands because I love your vision of trying to do an extended grand opening campaign. Can you explain why you wanted to do an extended campaign?

Kimberly: Well, we want to do an extended campaign because it's summer and people might be out of town when we open and we want to give a chance for everybody to attend, but we also don't want to crowd things. We want to give these brands each their space and to showcase themselves. Their product, the great things that they're doing for our key customers. So we think that by splitting it up, we'll be able to give our customers more of a grand opening than just doing it on one day and having it kinda harried and maybe not as impactful as doing it separated. So we've spoken to our reps who are then speaking to their brands to ask what they can do. We've really gotten a lot of good response. So I talked to my Brooks rep today and he has great ideas for us. I love that because that means I'm not coming up with them all and he's activated and excited for us. You know, Garmin-

Kristin: That is good.

Kimberly: Yeah. Garmin's going to do more for us than I expected. Just some really cool things I think are gonna come out of it. The new brands that we're carrying, we want to really highlight them because we think that it will be important for our customers to see those and to be able to experience them separately.

Kristin: Can you name a couple of which ... What some of the new brands are?

Kimberly: Yes, so New Balance, Balega, My Foxy Feet and Olukai are four of the ones that we know for sure we're bringing in. They're excited and they're excited about the new space and to be in there. Some of them are local brands that we carry and then My Foxy Feet is one of the local brands. So we know the founders of those brands and we're going to have a special night for them to come and be there to meet people. Because we have lots of fans of their brands and maybe they haven't met the founder. It might be really cool for them and cool for the brand to be in touch. Just that personal touch too it will be neat to share with-

Kristin: It's a VIP touch too, people love that. They love to feel like, "Ooh, I get to have a special relationship because I'm part of this community".

Kimberly: Yes, yes. So we're very excited in there as well. We've got Endurance Shield, it's owned locally by two pro triathletes and [inaudible] is another one that's owned locally and we work with the founder on different events at Disney as well.

Kristin: That's very cool. One of the things I want to point out because we have a ton of manufacturers who listen to this program as well, and obviously things have changed so much in terms of last mile or distribution. But, we are seeing still that 90% of all sales are still happening in brick and mortar retail. That's literally like a statistic that has not changed probably since I've been doing this podcast and right now June, 2019 is our two-year anniversary. Online research will result in somebody, 90% of the time going into a store.

Working with retailers like the Grogan's at Dash-Sports, I think, is incredibly important to consider. I mean, the way that they're authentically giving a stage to their brands to connect them with their community that they worked hard to create for 13 years. That is, to me, the example of the perfect brick and mortar relationship to finish a great brand experience. It may have started on the Brooks website or New Balance website, then they might've priced shopped and they might've looked around in some forums and seen some magazine reviews of product.

Then boom, they want to go in and actually talk to their people. The people they know have their back, to make that decision. Because gear for passionate people in triathlon, in marathon, that makes or breaks the experience and that experience is their very identity. So what I love about what you're doing is you're giving the brands the opportunity to have a local dialect, if you will, into your community. You're making it relevant for central Florida. So I just think you're doing a great job there.

Kimberly: Thank you. We're having fun with it.

Kristin: I bet. Well, cool. Do you have anything else that you'd like to point out? Again, we have a couple more shows we're going to do where we're going to be checking in. But, right now where you are with everything and you know we're still pretty early June. Give us the timeline and where we can follow along with some of your progress.

Kimberly: So on godashsports.com I have a blog and the first blog is actually up. So I'll be writing things as we progress through the month of getting the lighting and the floors and getting the product in, and how we are working on the grand opening spread. So I'll be just talking a little bit about that in each of the posts to let our people know. Then also just so you all can follow along. I think it would have been really helpful if I had this first as I was starting to think about this. But, it has been over a year that I it's been in my head, a lot of these things. So now it's super fun to be able to get them out. And so I'd like to share that a bit as we go through it.

Kristin: Right, and we're celebrating your week anniversary holding those keys to that new location. Right?

Kimberly: Yeah. Very exciting.

Kristin: I just want to point out, you guys, the Grogan's are building this out themselves. It's not like they have a huge budget and hired a team to come in and design and build it out. You're literally like spending the month of June and the beginning part of July before the holiday, making this community ready.

Kimberly: Right, and one of the things that's been super fun is that we've been able to ask our customers, two of them that we know have experience with painting and lights, and they've been our customers for 13 years. To ask them for their help and their expertise in getting it right. So they are super excited, one of them is retired and he's, "Oh, this gives me something to do".

Kristin: Other than train.

Kimberly: Right, right. So, that's been fun to be able to ask them and they're very excited to help us. As is, we've had so many people, "If you need help moving, I have a trailer. If you need help, if you need help".

Kristin: That's great.

Kimberly: So, it's really neat to-

Kristin: Again, that reciprocity Kimberly.

Kimberly: Yep. That's been super fun.

Kristin: Yeah, and I also just want to say, I love hearing the report back that your brands have stepped up and that they're excited. I mean, this is a great example of human relationship first, right? I hear about so many of us trying to gain the system on algorithms and search and you know, how do we get in front of the right people? Well Kimberly and Kevin are giving you an example to partner with them and actually give an experience to a really enthusiastic and growing community. That's to me, what specialty retail is. I just really want to commend you guys for that. I mean we're all competing with big retail and marketplaces with their algorithms, with big data, with tech infused experiences.

I just feel like what you're sharing with us here today and the growth that you have and the loyalty of your community really shows that that human relationship is still driving specialty and I love to see that. So thank you for the inspirational story. We really look forward to following you through this. If anyone has any questions, follow Kimberly and I'll put all of her handles where you can follow the story with the blog and they're going to be changing the name of their social media.

Kristin: So I'll put what it is right now, I would follow it and then you can change it over when they're ready. They're taking it steps at a time. But, I'll put great links in the show notes so you guys can follow along with the progress. So thank you so much Kimberly. I wish you the best of luck and until next time when we're on our next show.

Kimberly: Thank you.