



channel mastery

Channel Mastery Podcast, Episode #95: Kristin Carpenter Interviews Bob Rogers, Director of Marketing at Lance Camper

www.channelmastery.com/95

- Kristin: Welcome back to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast, everyone. I am super-excited to introduce Bob Rogers to you today who is the Director of Marketing at Lance Camper. Welcome to the show, Bob. It's great to have you here.
- Bob Rogers: Thanks, Kristin, and just a pleasure to be here for sure. I'm looking forward to the conversation.
- Kristin: As am I. I know that there is so much to share with my audience here about the evolution of your brand. I realize you guys are a 54-year-old company, but you have been really keeping pace and leading, I think, with how you've evolved, how you're reaching new fans and nurturing existing fans, and bringing everybody together with a varied product offering. We have so much to learn from you in this episode, but let's start with the basics. Can you share the founding story of Lance Camper and also talk about when you entered the scene on that story if you will?
- Bob Rogers: Sure. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, we're a 54-year-old brand established back in 1965. We've always been a West Coast-based RV manufacturer, which is kind of against the trend that traditional RV manufacturers come from the Midwest and Decatur, Indiana, and those kind of things. But the company was formed in '65, actually in North Hollywood, California.
- Kristin: Oh, wow.
- Bob Rogers: Of all places, yeah. Then moved later to Pacoima, California, and then finally up here to Lancaster, California, which is about an hour and a half north of LA, in 1984.
- Kristin: Okay. That's awesome. It's so interesting, North Hollywood. Believe it or not, my grandparents lived there right by the Disney lots.
- Bob Rogers: Yeah. Yeah? Yep. You wouldn't think it would be the RV mecca, but we've done pretty good since then.
- Kristin: That's great, and so is your manufacturing still in California?

Bob Rogers: Oh, yeah. We're 100% here in Lancaster, so our plant is here. Our headquarters is here. We produce all of our product out of two plants here right next to each other.

Kristin: Oh, wow, that's fantastic. Okay, well, that's great. Then when did you join the company, Bob?

Bob Rogers: Yeah. I came on board about five and half years ago now as the Director of Marketing. I've just been truly blessed in the ability to work in industries that I'm passionate about with products that I'm passionate about. Prior to Lance, I had some time with Kawasaki Motorsports ... which I love all motorsports ... as well as Fleetwood RV, which was another major RV brand and is actually owned by the REV Group, which bought Lance actually a year and a half ago January now. We're all back in the same family.

Bob Rogers: Then prior to that, I really got my marketing training and so forth with Nissan Motor Corporation. I had 11 years with Nissan. I attribute a lot of my learning and knowledge and experience from those early years in the auto industry which, as you well know, does some wonderful leading edge marketing. I was brand manager there for the Altima product.

Kristin: Wow. That is a fantastic ... I bet you've got some stories to tell on that front for sure.

Bob Rogers: I sure do. We talk about budgets and media budgets and those kind of things. The difference between automotive and RV is quite drastic, so we have fun with that.

Kristin: Well, and let's dive in on that front because obviously my audience shows up here every week to gain experience from leaders like you and insights around how you're evolving the company. Because, obviously, I think you have a fantastic evolutionary story with it, the heritage of your brand. I'd love to talk about how it was primarily distributed. I'm sure it's through a dealer network and how that is evolving. Frankly, I'm curious to see the pages from the playbook that you're taking from some of your vehicle background as a marketer as we're seeing this evolution.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, and that's what I really enjoy about the industry is we can still take so much from the automotive industry that's really common knowledge over there, and bring it into our industry and grow by leaps and bounds. There's still so much opportunity for improvement in this industry, and that's what keeps me going every day. I mean there's still so much more we can do, and we'll get into a little bit of that when it comes to all the way from how we manufacture, how we distribute, how we service all of that. We're getting better every day, but there's still so much more to be done. It's a lot of work and a lot of fun.

Bob Rogers: I think the growth of the brand, which is another thing that I was really intrigued and one of the reasons I came to Lance from Kawasaki because I thought I had my dream job at Kawasaki. But the opportunity to work with a 54-year-old brand and keep it appealing to our core, which is what I call the baby boomer. The typical what you would think of as a retiree that's looking to travel the country in an RV and that kind of thing, which is our core. Our brand is in the luxury segment from a pricing standpoint. We're 35 to \$60,000 MSRP price point. In the industry we're pretty much below Airstream and above everyone else, so it's a really niche position.

Bob Rogers: Our typical demographic and psychographic is what I refer to as kind of a blue collar engineer. Someone who has decent household income, but they're more into brands like Columbia versus Polo and that kind of thing. They're very functional, very practical. They don't really want to pay the \$80 or \$100,000 for the Airstream just to get the design. They would rather have our product for \$50,000 and get the functionality of slideouts and really good solar systems and different things like that.

Bob Rogers: Then we also have, of course, the new generation's coming on board. Of course, millennial, we're just like everybody else with that challenge of how do you appeal to both? Our two main products are travel trailers, small ultra-light travel trailers from 14 to 26-foot, and then truck campers that go onto the back of truck campers. Those two demographics are very different.

Bob Rogers: The truck camper demographic and psychographic loves to tow things like boats and horses and motorsports gear and not go to a developed camp ground. They like to go off-road. They like to boondock, things like that. Whereas the travel trailer customer is the opposite. They would rather go to an established campground where you have hook ups and all the amenities and socialize with all their fellow campers and RVers, so we have those two different demographics to appeal to.

Bob Rogers: But then from the age perspective, I always love to study the industries and the companies, the brands, that have succeeded and failed at what we're trying to do right now. The best examples I like to think about every day when I come to work and when I develop my strategies and tactics that has the same situation I'm faced with is Oakley sunglasses.

Kristin: Interesting.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, and Carhartt apparel. Those two examples, I think, have done a fantastic job of appealing both to the baby boomer as well as the millennial. I'm a boomer and my son's a millennial, and we both like Oakley gear and glasses. They've done a good job of that. I think Carhartt has, too, and we'll talk about some of the strategies behind that and how we're going to do the same things or attempting to do the same thing.

Kristin: Why don't we just go there, because I'm super-curious. I love that you brought up those two brands. I'm also just curious, is one tied to travel trailers and one tied to truck? Or are you pulling the pages from a playbook for both categories? Because, you're right. This is a very different demographic you're serving. I have a couple of questions that we'll center in on later in the interview as well. But tell us about some of what's your inspiration there?

Bob Rogers: Yeah. That very question or that challenge between the two products is no. They do require different brands and different strategies because of the demographic and psychographic. It's very easy for us to come up with ideas and co-marketing partners when it comes to our truck camping demographic and customer and lifestyle. But it's a bit more difficult on the travel trailer side, and we're struggling with that, to be honest with you, right now. We're doing some great stuff on truck campers, but we're trying to come up with some different travel trailer ideas as well. Then the other one, the brand that I look at that's struggling in that aspect in Harley-Davidson.

Kristin: Interesting.

Bob Rogers: Yeah. They've had a really tough time appealing to the millennial. They've tried so many different things to the point where, I think, they're really grasping at straws. Now they have electric motorcycles. Well, they might be successful with that, but my gut tells me a passionate millennial that's passionate about their Harley brand is not going to be passionate about an electric Harley. But I might be wrong there.

Bob Rogers: But going back to Oakley and Carhartt, I think what has worked, again, is just understanding the customer, but understanding that what appeals to a millennial as long as it's aspirational for the boomer, they may not actually go do that lifestyle activity you're showing in your marketing, but they aspire to it. They don't think it's beyond them. Or better yet, they think it's cool. Then you're okay with it. At your core you don't go away from your core, and that's what we're not getting away from. We've been known as a quality manufacturer for 54 years and a functional manufacturer. We're sticking to that core whether we're talking to a boomer or a millennial. I think that's key to the success of the whole thing.

Kristin: That's actually interesting because if you look at the electric approach or attempt by Harley, I feel that flies in the face of their core. I think that's what your point is. Am I right?

Bob Rogers: Absolutely. I really believe that. You got to stick to the core all the way through no matter who you're talking to. But, yeah, I must admit it is a lot more fun to market to millennials from a lifestyle standpoint than boomers.

Kristin: Do you feel like visually ... Because this is a great question for my audience is visually, I think, you're right. This might be my own. I might be kind of partial to

this, so please hear me everyone. This might be my own bias. But that millennial storytelling might be easier to do in terms of how they consume content. But I'm also assuming that it's about the type of content you're sharing and this brand storytelling that you're sharing with them.

Bob Rogers: It is. I mean, obviously, the media that they're using to consume the content is important, and we have to be totally cognizant of that. Our boomer is all about Facebook, and our millennial is all about Instagram. As long as we keep that in mind, we're fine from a media or from a delivery.

Bob Rogers: On the media side, yes, whatever activity we're showing in that lifestyle piece. We just completed a really phenomenal piece for our truck camper, a new rig that we put together dubbed the Altimeter. I'll get into the strategy of why we build these show rigs as well a little bit later. But we did a lifestyle piece that's on our website to support that. We just basically wanted to show the functionality, the versatility of a truck camper no matter what your lifestyle is. But all the lifestyle we showed was really very active. We wanted to show all the way from a mountain to the ocean, and everywhere in between, you can take the Altimeter and basically have adventure at any altitude.

Bob Rogers: Obviously, the mountain was snowboarding and skiing. We came down to the valley area and we were fly-fishing. Then we went down to the desert area and we're off-roading. Then we finally ended up in the ocean, and we're surfing. Those activities traditionally are younger-oriented sports. No, I shouldn't say that. It's kind of a mix, and I think that's why it worked. Out here in California we have old surfers as well as young surfers. Fly-fishing kind of has been known as a older person's sport, and now some younger people are thinking it's cool. Even though it's aspirational to them, they may not participate, but they think it looks cool, and they've heard something about it. Then obviously the snowboarding is kind of crossing the generations. It's really important, I think, in the lifestyles that you portray.

Bob Rogers: The fact of just going back to a point. Moving in your content messaging away from just product to lifestyle for our industry. Obviously, other industries, they've figured that out a long time ago. I'll be honest with you, I just stole the idea from BMW Motorcycles.

Kristin: Okay.

Bob Rogers: I was in the market for a Dual Sport GS 1200. I was on BMW's site. They had this lifestyle video about it. When I got done watching that, the hair was standing up on my arms, and I wanted to go buy that GS.

Kristin: It commercially engaged you.

Bob Rogers: Oh, my God. It was phenomenal. The people they showed on there were every age from 70 to 20. I absolutely loved it and I said, "That's what I need for my

brand and our industry." Because prior to that, our industry and even our brand, when you pulled up a website and if it did have a video on it, because it was mostly still stills five years ago, if it had a video, it was a product video. It was a walk-around, walk-through of a product. I'll never forget. I saw the video, and I actually tracked down the producer and just said, "Hey, I want to do something." We put a deal together and made a beautiful lifestyle video that we launched about three years ago.

Bob Rogers: When I pitched it to my boss, who is the owner of the company, that it was going to be on the top of our Facebook and take up half the homepage, he really had a hard time with it. Because he just wasn't used to that type of marketing. I said basically, "Just trust me." Once he saw the video, and we haven't looked back since because our social following has grown to almost 20,000 Facebook. For a RV company that's pretty big and that kind of thing. But, so anyway, so that switch in strategy from product to lifestyle was big for us.

Kristin: This is really important because there are probably a lot of people out there listening who might be saddled with a legacy approach where they have a technical product or a luxury product or something that, obviously, a consumer is going to be reviewing a lot of the what and the how. What I think you're talking about, Bob, is that you were able to portray the why for the first time.

Bob Rogers: Absolutely. Just picture yourself in your lifestyle and how does that product support it? The other brand that has just since launch, has just been killing it with that, obviously, is Yeti.

Kristin: Oh, yeah.

Bob Rogers: I've been watching them since day one, and I'm a huge fan. They were the inspiration behind the effort that I put behind my video production and the budget it has to this day.

Kristin: Let's talk about how that shows up in the consumer decision journey. You obviously put that on your social media or your Facebook. How are you making these assets available or more readily discoverable to consumers? Then I want to ask about your historical dealer relationships after that.

Bob Rogers: Yeah. No, great questions. A lot of different ways that we're working with it and another big change in strategy for a conservative company is moving away from the traditional, obviously, printed publications to more digital. We're making that switch and have made that switch. But also in terms of influencers and how do we co-market? I love co-marketing and co-branding with partners that have brands of equal or greater brand attributes than we do. Our brand attribute of quality and engineering and that kind of thing, I want to make sure when I partner with somebody, their brand, it fits right in that same, those categories, and even elevates us a little bit as well. Picking those partners well is important.

Bob Rogers: Then, obviously, influencers, working with them, with their broad audience. For example, we just partnered with a young couple, Cait and Tom Morton, Mortons on the Move. They're full-time RVers that are millennials, and they're traveling to Alaska and back. We partner with them providing the camper and the truck. They're just generating phenomenal content, beautiful video. Obviously, we're reaching their audience that we normally just wouldn't reach. Then we also serve up our content through them. That's one of the ways.

Bob Rogers: But a lot of our marketing partners, some key brands that we're working with, Yamaha Motorsports we're working with. I'm trying to think of some other brands. We've worked with Yeti actually in the past as well as Kawasaki and some other great brands. We give them our content. We share content. For example, two weeks ago, we did a video shoot with a truck camper with a Yamaha UTV behind it. It's a full rig, and we share that content on all of our sites and social pages and so forth. It's reaching customers that we never would be able to afford to reach on our own.

Kristin: How are you seeing them join up with your brand? Is it becoming part of your email marketing campaigns? Or is it more social media? How are you getting them to join an audience that you own?

Bob Rogers: Yeah, mostly social. Not too much email quite honestly. That's one of the areas that as an organization is one of my last things I need to do before I decide to semi-retire from Lance Campers. But our whole digital or email marketing and CRM is just getting going now with Salesforce and so forth. We'll just be kind of getting advanced on that even though I'm taking a lot of tools we learned from the motorsports area and bringing that over. Mainly, primarily, right now it's social as well as event marketing and experiential. We're doing a lot of that both with the industry as well as some other partners like Red Bull and that kind of thing.

Kristin: Before we get into some of the industry stuff because I definitely want to ask you about that, tell us about the impetus of the Altimeter product itself. Can you talk about how that was devised and how you launched it and how it really has served as kind of a directional product for you guys in the truck camper space?

Bob Rogers: Yeah, absolutely. I mean it's really fun. There was another thing when I first came here. One of my first goals was to get us involved with SEMA, so I'm not sure if you're familiar with SEMA, but a-

Kristin: Yes, we're members at Verde.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, SEMA is the largest automotive aftermarket association there is. Been around forever. I was involved, obviously, with Nissan, and I saw what happened there from an OEM standpoint from where they weren't involved at all to now being so involved with the displays and everything else. The whole

impetus behind it of being, "Hey, yeah, it's in a wholesale show, but consumers consume the media that's generated there huge." So I said, "We need to be at SEMA." Again, a lot of the insiders are like, "Why are you taking us to SEMA?" I said, "Well, it's from the exposure that we get." Not only with the people that are at SEMA. All those business owners that are at SEMA, all the accessory manufacturers and suppliers as well as OEM employees, a lot of those people are gear freaks like I am and outdoor people in their personal time. Forget their business.

Kristin: Right. That's their identity.

Bob Rogers: Yeah. They're outdoor people. They're Jeep people. They're truck people. They're off-road people. I wanted to get our brand in front of them, raise the awareness because there's still a lot of people out there who never heard of Lance Campers. I want to get in front of them and increase our brand awareness and likeability. We put together what I would call a SEMA build three years ago or four years ago now. It went over really, really well at SEMA. We've got unbelievable incremental press out of it to the point we had CarandDriver.com spent the night in our camper in SEMA to do all their reviews during the night. Like Night at the Museum kind of approach.

Kristin: Oh, very cool.

Bob Rogers: It was awesome.

Kristin: I love it.

Bob Rogers: Just awesome. There's no way we could have got Car and Driver to do that on our own, so we had to and use SEMA and get involved that way. Since then, we've built three products, and the latest one is the Altimeter. Actually, on the second product, we got such a great response out of the graphic wrap that we did we ended up incorporating that design into a stock optional graphic option that has become our number one graphic choice. It's getting away from the swoops and swirls and has a mountain scene on it, which everyone loves regardless of age.

Kristin: Right. It's so interesting because I feel like there's an exterior package that they feel aligns with, I mean, I'll put links to your brand videos in the show notes so everybody can see that on their own time.

Bob Rogers: Sure.

Kristin: But you're essentially putting the person who is your target consumer right there in the video in the storytelling. But then you're also extending that into the product itself in terms of I want to have one that matches my style and my identity, which I think I super-interesting. But how important is that inside

package today? Because, obviously, you are a luxury experience, if you will, as a product.

Bob Rogers: Yep, yep.

Kristin: Can you talk about how you're making that bridge to this audience as well?

Bob Rogers: The bridge in terms of?

Kristin: Conveying the inside, the design of the actual living space.

Bob Rogers: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, and we have outside and inside, so it's all the functionality of it. Kind of wrapping back to the Altimeter project, it's basically a stock camper that we've wrapped. But we have done some modifications inside based on that specific customer and more the millennial customer. A lot of it just has to do with, "Hey, you know what? My dad was okay with running the generator for three or four hours a day, but I don't really like the noise and the pollution of that. I need a solar system that I can run all my stuff off of." So, we put a lot of time and effort into developing systems that are a lot more green and a lot more user-friendly for both demographics, millennials as well as boomers, which has been phenomenal.

Bob Rogers: Then from the functionality standpoint and lifestyle support standpoint, we're constantly evolving. A great example in Altimeter is, okay, instead of having a fixed stereo inside the camper which has four speakers in the roof. The speakers aren't really that greater speakers, but they're okay. But they're sitting in a two-inch roof, so there's so sound box behind the speaker, so our sound quality is terrible for most millennials. Okay, a boomer might have been okay with it and just whatever, didn't listen to music that much. Now we're saying, "You know what? When we go camping, no one uses that stereo anymore on the camper. We use Bluetooth speakers. Wherever we go, that's what we have."

Bob Rogers: So we said, "You know what? Let's just put a really awesome Bluetooth speaker in there as standard. Get rid of that fixed stereo. It's kind of the evolution of the product based specifically on a demographic and a psychographic.

Kristin: That is actually a really great example. Thank you for sharing that.

Bob Rogers: Sure.

Kristin: We have really kind of OD-ed here on truck camping. I do not [inaudible 00:31:26] travel trailer. You have a fantastic collection of products there. Let's talk about how you're modernizing that collection and, really, how you're creating that emotional engagement with perhaps a different demographic. Or maybe there are some things that have actually bridged these two categories together that's enabling a younger consumer to discover both. I'm just curious what your take is on that. I want us to shed some light on that as well.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, and it's a great question because just like you and I get passionate about it and can talk about it forever, my team, internal team, is the same way. Here's the interesting thing. We built truck campers from 1953 till now. We started building travel trailers in 2008. The only reason we got into that segment was because ... I don't know if you remember, '08 and '09 it was the recession.

Kristin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Bob Rogers: The RV industry from a manufacturing standpoint and from a dealer distribution standpoint got cut in half by 50% in about a year's time.

Kristin: Wow.

Bob Rogers: Lance said, "You know what? How are we going to stay in business because we're not going to be staying in business at 50% of our current truck camper production?" They looked at the market, and they said, "Well, we think small, ultra-light travel trailers is going to be the next big thing with trailers." They started building travel trailers, ultra-light weight, first ones to use CNC manufacturing in our plant as an RVer, RVer company, and built really good quality light-weight aluminum frame. Got away from a lot of the wood, more composite construction and started building those trailers.

Bob Rogers: Well, the market started rebounding in '09 and in '10, and they were dead on in terms of that segment being a hot segment from about the 14-foot to 25-foot travel trailer segment. Since '09 till last year, we had double-digit growth, and it was in the travel trailer segment. Right now we build actually three to one travel trailers to truck campers.

Kristin: Isn't that interesting?

Bob Rogers: Yeah, yeah.

Kristin: Do you think that the kind of the cachet of what you're doing with collaborations and everything in your truck camper collection is almost like a center of the halo, if you will, from a merchandising standpoint that brings the travel trailers up to a different par, if you will?

Bob Rogers: I think it does. I really do. I think our demographic sees what we're doing with truck campers and we are doing with travel trailers. To be quite honest with you, a lot of the success and what we've seen marketing on the truck campers, we are bringing into the travel trailers in just subtly different ways. The events that we go to, the brands that we partner with are going to be slightly different than what we do. But, there is still this crossover, so as you probably saw at Overland Expo, there's a lot of off-road travel trailers out there.

Kristin: Is that something you guys are ... Tell me a little bit about how you're evolving around that. Because there are some people who might think if you're doing, what is it, you said, two to three to one?

Bob Rogers: Three to one, yeah.

Kristin: Okay, so is it the tallest midget in the room? Right?

Bob Rogers: Yeah. It kind of is. It's funny because you say off-road travel trailer, well it's kind of like the SUV marketing approach. How many SUV customers really went off road in their Land Rover? But they still love to see them blasting through the snow. Travel trailers and even overland rigs, quite honestly, are that way too. They love to buy a Jeep or a Land Rover or even a very off-road rugged trailer. Yeah, you're taking it off a developed road, but you're going down a dirt road or a two track. You're not really boondocking with a trailer.

Bob Rogers: That's kind of the evolution of the trailers. Hey, let's lift it up a little higher so it has more ground clearance. We put some bigger, knobbier, beefier tires on it. We put some better shocks on it. We changed the graphics to appeal more to that demographic and you're there. That's what our travel trailer is evolving to all the way around. It just makes sense from that aspect.

Kristin: Right. Okay. It really sounds like where you're finding success with your marketing is about enabling your consumer to believe something about themselves. Right?

Bob Rogers: Absolutely.

Kristin: All this from your automotive and Kawasaki days, right?

Bob Rogers: Yeah. It's aspirational and they want it, "Hey, God, man, I want that lifestyle," whether it's a full-time van life or whatever. How do I make a living when I'm out on the road? Or I want to do a three-day weekend and go whitewater kayaking or mountain biking or fly-fishing or whatever it is. How do I support my lifestyle with that product and see me doing it? That's what it's all about. It's all about selling the lifestyle because it's phenomenal.

Bob Rogers: Quite honestly, that's why I got into this industry. I grew up racing snowmobiles in the Midwest with my family, and we towed them behind an RV. We camped winter and summer, and I just absolutely loved it. The memories that I had as a child growing up while camping and RVing were just phenomenal. Whether we were racing snowmobiles in the winter or in the summer we were just at a campground as a family and fishing and doing whatever.

Bob Rogers: When I got out of the car industry, those were the two industries I looked at. I interviewed with Arctic Cat and I interviewed with Fleetwood, and I ended up going with Fleetwood. It's selling that dream and selling that lifestyle, and then

how do I see myself in it not matter what I do? I might ride horses. I might show dogs. How does this product facilitate my lifestyle? Fortunately a lot of product does a really good job of doing that, so I think that's why it's successful.

Kristin: That's super-cool. Let's talk about your consumer today and how they've evolved because obviously they're showing up today at your point of distribution, which I'm assuming is still a dealer network.

Bob Rogers: It is, yep.

Kristin: Largely with a decision made in terms of this is my camper. This is the one I want. These are exactly what I need. How are you evolving the way that you're working with your dealers to serve this new consumer?

Bob Rogers: Yeah. No, it's a great question. Just like most other industries, because of all the information that's available, they are showing up really well equipped and with decisions made and that kind of thing. Fortunately for us that's a really, really good thing because our value proposition we love it when a customer is at a show or an event or at a dealership and asks the question and points at the MSRP label and says, "Why are you so expensive?" We absolutely love that question because then we get a chance to say, "Well, let me tell you." We have some really good reasons for why we are starting with the materials we use, whether it's stainless steel screws that don't rust to CNC machines that cut the cabinetry perfect, and we don't have gimp and tape to hide bad joints all the way down through.

Bob Rogers: We love to tell that story. One of the things that we partner with --with our dealers--was, okay, most RV dealerships are multi-line. Not as much in the car business but in motorsports business certainly, a standalone brand dealership just cannot make it so much anymore because of overhead. Like in motorsports, you won't have a Kawasaki dealership. You'll have a dealership that has Kawasaki, Yamaha, KTM, et cetera.

Bob Rogers: Same thing in our business. We have a few standalone dealers but most of them have multiple brands, so how do you stand out and differentiate yourselves? One of the big things we do is our salespeople at that lot, we are not successful on a typical RV lot where there might be four, five, six brands and somebody's just going off price. Not at all. We're very successful with the dealership that carries multiple levels of brands. Once the retail person understands what's involved in the Lance ... in making of a Lance and designing and manufacturing and servicing ... they easily can sell it, the value proposition, to the customer. Everyone loves it because the dealer maintains the margin. The sales person can make a decent living doing it, and the customer feels great that they paid a lot of money and they got a great product.

Bob Rogers: We partner with our dealers, and we fly all of our retail sales people out here to Lancaster from all over the country and Canada, and we go through a three-day

training program with them here at the plant. That's exactly what we do is we show them the story hands-on. They're down on the plant looking at exactly how we build things, the materials we use and that kind of thing. When they go back, they build their own story around it and they can say, "You know what? I've been to the plant. I've seen how it comes together. I've seen the materials." It's really compelling when a retail customer hears that from a retail sales person.

Kristin: Right because I think that the really strong dealers and their sales people are still seen as a very strong point of permission or validation or just proof of concept to the consumer who's spent all these hours researching online happily. Right? We love to do that. But at the same time, when it comes time to pull that trigger, you definitely want to talk to a person who heads up that tribe, right?

Bob Rogers: Yep, absolutely. Yeah. The more of what I would say legitimate they are, if they're RVers themselves and they've used Lance product and obviously have been to the plant and that kind of thing, the more rapport they have and the more legitimacy they maintain. Those are the dealers that we're very successful with. We go out looking for that kind of a dealer that will invest in the sales people to send them out here and those kind of things. It's been great.

Bob Rogers: The other thing that we do with our dealers, which is kind of different, is every asset that I develop from a marketing standpoint, from a sales training standpoint, we make available to all of our dealers at no charge through an online marketing assets library. All the content, whether it's stills and brochures and video and our lifestyle brand videos or whatever it is is available. Then we go ahead and edit it to their needs. We'll cut that three-minute lifestyle video down into a 15-second video they can use in digital marketing and so forth and email marketing. We're very aggressive that way, and we make it real easy for them to access that.

Bob Rogers: That gives us a leg up with our competition as well that doesn't go to that extent. Because if you're one of those three or four or five brands in the dealership, if you make it real easy for them to market your product, they'll do a better job of it. We've had some great success with that.

Kristin: That's good to hear because I really have hit and miss stories across the different industries that we serve and the people we've had on the show here. I think when there are less layers or fewer layers such as like maybe there isn't an external salesperson, but more of an in-house customer service or marketing support person for that dealer, that seems to work better for these larger purchases.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, absolutely. No question about it.

Kristin: That's really interesting. The other thing I wanted to ask you about, we talked a lot about Overland before we hit the record button here today. Are you looking

into expanding your dealership to include some of those builder-dealer format that really serve that do-it-yourself consumer who wants to really build out their own truck camper, their own trailer, the way that they want to? Some of it could be refurbishing. Some of it could be selection of what they want to put in it. How are you actually expanding to the point of distribution that serve that consumer?

Bob Rogers: Yeah. To be really honest with you, we aren't. I wish I could say we were and we're going to do semi-custom and all that kind of thing. That's a very difficult market. Smaller little niche manufacturers, if you go to Overland, there must be 30 van manufacturers with Sprinters that can build different things for you. But by the time you're done if you really get down into it and you get what you want, that Sprinter's going to be 80 to \$150,000.

Kristin: No doubt. I know you're absolutely right on because I've looked at that myself. So many of the CEOs of the great outdoor active lifestyle brands that we serve at Verde like they have that version one. So many of the people my age in the industry are like, "Okay, well, when they're ready to uplevel, I'm going to buy that one off them used in about five or 10 years." Right?

Bob Rogers: Right, right on. No, that's exactly what happens. From a profitability standpoint and from a business model standpoint, we're not really interested in that segment to be quite honest with you because it takes a whole different manufacturing. We have almost 580 employees here in our plant. To go down to an individual unit like that and take so much time and effort to put together a custom rig, it's really not profitable from our standpoint. You'd have to be a lot lower volume, so we're really not going that way.

Bob Rogers: But one of the things that we do love to do is listen to the customer and say, "Okay, evolve the product all the time, not just at model change." We don't wait till model change like a lot of the automotive companies do to enhance the product. We do it constantly. For example, if we hear that, okay, now lithium batteries is the big trend now. Instead of one 70-watt solar panel, man, I'd like two 120-watt panels and three lithium batteries so I can run 100% solar with my microwave and air conditioning and everything. Great. Let's start looking into that. How do we incorporate that into our product as soon as possible and make it an option or standard depending on what the customer wants?

Bob Rogers: But, and also, décor is really interesting. I mean graphics is one thing, getting away from the swoops and swirls and doing some good decent graphics when you still just have, quite honestly, this big white box to cover up. But décor, the same thing. Going away from the traditional wood tones to more of the whites and the grays. On the fabrics it's more leathers and vinyl, solids versus any kind of patterns, things like that. It's just constantly evolving that stuff and keeping your finger on the pulse from our owners. We have a very active owner group.

Kristin: That was one of my questions. Let's talk a little bit about them, so just how they fit into the product design and development process.

Bob Rogers: Boy do they ever. We love and hate our owners sometimes. I'll tell you what.

Kristin: I love your honesty.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, I mean, you got to be honest. We tell them to their face, and they just laugh at us. But they're a phenomenal tribe. Lance Owners of America is the largest tribe that we have, organized tribe, of owners. I think there are 15,000 of them or something like that to date. They're a phenomenal source. They have their own website. When we started really getting into social marketing and how do you launch the social pages? Then how do you maintain them and how do you work with them? One of the biggest things, again, I had to overcome with decades of management kind of not wanting to engage negative input was like they are the best thing that we could ever have. Because they come to our defense every time.

Bob Rogers: Say a customer's having a problem with this. They say, "You know what? We haven't really experienced that at all. This is what we've experienced. But if you have this issue, this is what you do or this is who you call or whatever." They've just been a phenomenal attribute to the brand and supporting us because we are a quality product and they love that, and they want to share that with their friends.

Bob Rogers: The other thing of it is from a product input standpoint, every other year we host a rally here, a campout for the group at the plant. Well, years past we didn't have it at the plant. They'd have it at a local campground, and we would just bring them up for the day and do plant tours and do a barbecue here at the plant. Last year I said, "What if we invite them all to camp right here at the plant?" They said, "Well, we're probably going to have a couple of hundred of them, and they're going to be dry camping" and blah, blah, blah. I talked to the president and he goes, "Man, that would be cool, man. We can dry camp for three days. That's no problem. That's what our product is is showering in bathrooms for ourselves."

Kristin: Right.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, we put on a great rally, and it was super-cool with barbecue and a live band. Then the best thing about it was sitting around that campfire drinking a beer and talking to the owners about what they did to their product, their DIY, or what they'd like to see change from a feature standpoint and in a very informal environment. We had all of our product development team out there, all of our sales team, all of our marketing team. Man, that was some of the best research you could ever do.

Kristin: I have to ask. Was this mixed company truck campers and travel trailers? Or do you do two separate ones?

Bob Rogers: Oh, no. We put them together.

Kristin: Awesome.

Bob Rogers: It's funny. You say it, we put them together. We debated over it quite a while. Hey, are they going to have to be on one side of the road?

Kristin: The Hatfields and McCoys.

Bob Rogers: Be on the other side of the road? Or those guys got dirt. These guys got cement. What's going on? But, no, at the end of it we mixed it all together and it was super phenomenal, and we're definitely going to do it every other year. Not every year. It's just an amazing undertaking as you can imagine.

Kristin: Yes.

Bob Rogers: But really cool and that's another resource that we use. The other big resource, quite honestly, it's just a real simple one, is our owners' surveys. We have a unique demographic. They're very involved in the brand. When we put out a new owners' survey, we get back almost 60% of the surveys we send out.

Kristin: Wow.

Bob Rogers: You've been involved with surveys for a long time, and I have with automotive motorsports. We were lucky to get 20%, 10% sometimes. 60% comes back and in there is a lot of questions on, hey, what do you like? What would like to see changed? They are very vocal with that, so we compile all that data and we prioritize and say, "Okay, guys, these are the things that we need to change in this order, and enhance or whatever." That keeps us pretty much up to tune on what's going on.

Kristin: How often are you distributing those?

Bob Rogers: Every day. Every time a new owner takes delivery, they get the survey.

Kristin: Okay.

Bob Rogers: Then we do a follow-up survey at six months as well.

Kristin: That's super-cool. It sounds like so basic, but honestly, when you invest in something like that that is where you're spending the best part of your life, right? Of course, you're going to respond to something like that.

Bob Rogers: Well, yeah, and you think about best practices, and that's what I love about the industry. I love and hate about it to be honest with you. I mean we're so far behind in so many ways, but so all I need to do is take a playbook out of Lexus Automotive and look at how they generate their how often, how they do it, what's the messaging behind their consumer, their new owner surveys. If we can duplicate that, man, we hit a home run in the industry. I love that about us. We're still not sophisticated enough to where we have it all together and this huge opportunity from a manufacturing standpoint, where we're just talking about the state of the industry. CNC's been around a while, but no one's using robots yet in manufacturing. Huge opportunity. Low hanging fruit to get to increase efficiency and quality most importantly with use of robots for instance. There's still just so much to be done and fun stuff.

Kristin: I have to ask. With your green approach ... I know that that's important on both travel trailers and your truck campers ... are you looking at electric vehicles to partner with from a co-lab standpoint or even from a build standpoint?

Bob Rogers: Yes, I'm laughing because I just got a picture put on my desk yesterday of one of our trailers being pulled by a Tesla SUV.

Kristin: Oh, wow. I thought you were going to say Rivian.

Bob Rogers: No, no. It wasn't Rivian. It's funny you bring them up. There's been some correspondence, but we'll leave that one aside.

Kristin: Okay.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, in Tesla they actually introduced the SUV with an Airstream pulled behind it on stage if you remember that.

Kristin: Yep, I do.

Bob Rogers: But, no, so from that standpoint. But from a green standpoint, the thing that we've all been about green from way back when it wasn't even cool. In the product side of it we're trying to get any chemical-based compounds out of the product. We've gone to a lot of aluminum and composite whether it's fiberglass or there's another material called Azdel which has replaced some luan wood componentry. Not only does it not emit gases like some of the previous formaldehyde products used to in the industry, but it also doesn't absorb water, so you don't have the rotting issues and things like that with mold and things like that in the product side of it, which has been great.

Bob Rogers: Now, obviously, solar is huge from a power standpoint is great. I just spent four days in Mammoth Lakes, California, in one of our products and never turned the generator on the whole time. It was really nice to have that quiet, clean power from that standpoint. But and then moving that upstream from the manufacturing side, our second manufacturing facility we just completed about

a year ago, the roof is completely covered with solar. We're currently, I think, we're providing about 45% of our power needs there only because the panels were a little older. We need to upgrade the panels to get a little bit more efficient there.

Bob Rogers: We just got a Green Certification in our industry, which includes looking at your manufacturing as well as your products. We're proud of that as well, and we're going to keep pushing that to get even better at it. Yeah, it's funny. You talk about electricity and the tow vehicles underneath them. There's a lot of great opportunity there that we're going to be looking at. For us it's all about lightening up the product because when it comes to battery power, electric technology, weight is an enemy in terms of how far you can go and how much you can pull and/or tow.

Kristin: Right.

Bob Rogers: Light and getting lighter and stronger is what we're all about. Huge potential with composites with carbon fiber and those kind of things that we're looking into.

Kristin: That sounds super-interesting. As we look to wrap up here, and I thank you so much for being so gracious with your time. But let's talk about that van life movement because I just feel like that has really taken off like wildfire. Then there's truck camping, which, obviously, it has so many similar benefits, attributes, et cetera. But you talked with me earlier about how you're engaging influencers. Is that one thing that you're doing to elevate the experience of I'm going to use truck campers versus van life just because my audience, I think, would see those more as like a point counterpoint than they would perhaps a travel trailer in a van.

Bob Rogers: Sure.

Kristin: But I guess we could look at all. But tell me what your thoughts are on the movement itself and how you plan to elevate your categories to be found alongside it or find your tribe within that movement.

Bob Rogers: Yeah. No, I think the movement is phenomenal. Personally I've always been attracted to living outside, being in nature as much as possible, camping as much as possible, traveling as much as possible. Man, it's so funny because I get proposals here at Lance from people looking for free product to go van lifeing in everyday. I love them and I hate them because I'm jealous. I'm like, "Man, I'd love to be doing that."

Kristin: Right.

Bob Rogers: We all kind of look at that and go, "God, I'd really love to be doing that." It's a phenomenal, I think, lifestyle. I did take a few months off, three months off

actually, with my son, and we traveled across country. Actually with a travel trailer and a pickup and camped all across the country and Canada and back. It was the best things I've ever done in life, so I highly suggest it for everybody, especially with kids taking their kids one at a time separately away from mom and away from their sibling for a week or do and doing it. It's great.

Bob Rogers: But so the lifestyle's phenomenal. I'm bought in 110%. Like I said, we were doing it before people called it van life, before people called it overlanding. The thing I love about the van life is that you can start on any budget. You can buy a used Sprinter that's been used commercially for \$15,000 or \$10,000 with 80,000 miles on it, and build it out on your own at your own time and your own budget. I think that's cool as heck. I see a lot of people doing that, and so and that gets people into the lifestyle. Once you're into the lifestyle and you see the benefits for yourself and for your family and all of that, then, man, when you're ready to move up and into a Lance ... Whether it's a trailer or truck camper, because you need the more room. You have the budget and you want a few more features and things like that ... we're going to be there, and we're going to be ready for you. We understand you. That's why I'm excited about it.

Bob Rogers: From a functionality standpoint, quite honestly, vans are small, man. It sounds cool, but it's different to spend two or three days in at one than to spend a month or two. Living in it and working out of it, man, if you don't have slideouts and you don't have a full-size shower, and you don't have some of these other basic things, storage capacity, it gets unromantic really quick.

Kristin: Some of the people I talked with at Overland both last year and this year at the different venues who do the custom build-outs said that so much of their obstacle in selling it is to the 80% buying power of the household, the female. Right?

Bob Rogers: Yeah.

Kristin: I'm really guessing that what you're talking about in terms of this more hospitable interior, more comfort, et cetera, really does appeal to the pursestring holder, I would imagine, in a lot of the marriages.

Bob Rogers: Absolutely. You hit it on the head. When we took the Altimeter to Overland Expo this year, people walk in and go, "Wow." It has a slideout on it. They said, "I had no idea you could get this much room in the back of a pickup truck, in the bed of a pickup truck." Then the versatility of it, you can take it on and off in about 20 minutes because it's all remote control electric. Four tie downs and you're done. They go, "Wow. Then I have my truck to do whatever I want with with that, which is great."

Bob Rogers: They see that and they come and they say, "Yeah, oh, man, you have a fully-enclosed shower and a toilet. You have a microwave. You have storage to put stuff and hang things, and you're not rolling over your partner trying to get out

of bed in the morning," and different things like that. We opened up a lot of people's eyes to going, "You know, I heard about truck campers maybe. My grandfather had one when I was little or whatever. But, man, I can see now you put it on a capable truck, a really capable four by four truck, you can go anywhere that truck can go and then still have the ability to tow something behind it." More and more of the overlanding and the van life people are seeing the truck camper and trailer as an alternative to the van life.

Kristin: In terms of the influencers, I have just one more question here. As you're looking through that, I know that in so many of the overland communities it's based around the actual vehicle that's pulling or housing the rig. Right?

Bob Rogers: Yep.

Kristin: Whether it's Toyota or Chevy or whatever.

Bob Rogers: Sure.

Kristin: How about with you? How is your community getting itself together online outside of your control?

Bob Rogers: Yeah, well, all over the place. In terms of the both truck camper and travel trailer, the vehicle, the tow vehicle brand of choice is very emotional.

Kristin: It is.

Bob Rogers: The Ford versus Chevy versus Dodge pickup truck situation is really, really funny. We have to be careful of, man, we've been putting too many Fords on our brochure cover. We got to start showing some Dodges and Chevys.

Kristin: That's interesting.

Bob Rogers: They're very brand loyal you know, so it's important. And matter of fact, I'm working with General Motors right now in a co-marketing situation where we're launching a product together. For obviously it's me. I understand the power of an automotive OEM when it comes to marketing. It's gigantic, second to not many other spenders out there. Those are the kind of people that we love to work with and we try to work with to get to the tribe and find out where they're consuming their media and so forth. It's really crucial to us in all that we do, so we think about it every day.

Kristin: I imagine that you're an incredibly important ingredient brand for them as well because you bring their product to a very specific, highly enthusiastic end consumer.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, absolutely, so all the way from hey whenever I can get in, say, a Ford towing guy, and you see our product on there. For years a lot of OEMs including

us, whatever, didn't want to leave brand names on those other complimentary products in your marketing. Now everyone said, "You know what? If I partner with the right brand, I really should leave the brand on there."

Kristin: Right.

Bob Rogers: They are, so Ford is leaving the brand on there and Chevy and those kind of things, which is great for everyone. We're looking every day at partners with that kind of thing.

Kristin: Well, this has been a fantastic interview. Just so everybody know in the audience, Bob and I had a whole script of questions, and we hit maybe 5% of those. But I loved everything we hit here because it was very organic and very from the trenches of what you're working with--with so many interesting stakeholders and how you're evolving this 54-year-old brand on a day-to-day basis that caters to such a different demographic with both of its core offerings of truck camping and travel trailers. This has been just a fantastic interview. I really appreciate your time so much.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, Kristin, I really enjoyed it. I love podcasts. I love the media and love the questions and conversations. We really, really appreciate the opportunity and the time.

Kristin: Let us know not only where we can find out more about Lance Camper, because that's pretty obvious. But also, tell us quickly about your podcast that you just launched, and I'll have the links to that in the show notes to everybody.

Bob Rogers: Yeah, that'd be great. Appreciate that. Yeah, it's LanceCamper.com, which is our website. Then all of our social pages are based off that. I'm very active obviously in Facebook and Instagram and Pinterest and YouTube. Yeah, and, I'm sorry. What was the second part?

Kristin: Oh, just about your podcast.

Bob Rogers: Oh, yeah, podcast. Yeah. Oh, yeah, that. Yeah. We just launched one recently and started hosting one. We've done three or four segments at one of our industry shows in March in Salt Lake City at RVF. We're going to be adding to that. We'll officially launch the page probably in a week or two off our main site. We'll have a landing page for it. Then we're planning to interview our customers. We have amazing customers, people that are full-timing, people that are 100% solar. They know the best campgrounds. It's just fun people to learn about the industry and the lifestyle, so we'll be highlighting them.

Bob Rogers: Some of our key suppliers that we really bank on to make the quality product, be talking to them about what's new and great with them and how we're kind of differentiating ourselves with those partners. Then some of our co-branding partners and our co-marketing partners, we'll have them on board as well and

talk about why we work with Yamaha and do the events that we do with different partners like that. I'm really looking forward to it. We'll be launching officially here in probably another two, three weeks.

Kristin:

By the time this show goes live, it'll literally be right when that's launching, everybody. Just be sure and check the notes for the show and you'll be able to have access to that right when it launches. Thank you, again, so much. This was a fantastic interview, Bob. We will be watching and cheering on Lance Campers as you continue to blaze a new trail in front of you.

Bob Rogers:

Okay. Thanks again. Appreciate it, Kristin.