



# channel mastery

## 142: Replay of Outdoor Retailer The Weekly Chat Webcast with Doug Schnitzpahn and Kristin Carpenter

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Doug: Hello everyone, this is Doug Schnitzpahn and this is the Weekly Chat which is an extension of the Weekly, a digital magazine that we've been doing for Outdoor Retailer in the face of the pandemic and economic shutdown. Every week in the Weekly, we have a Q and A with a luminary in the industry and then on Thursday we have them on the weekly chat. And today I'm very excited to have a good friend and colleague of mine, Kristin Carpenter on, and we are going to be talking about the battle for trust, tension, and engagement, how media institutions can serve today's ever evolving consumer as they search for trust and community online. It's a topic, that I think a lot of people are extremely excited about.

Alright, time to get into it. First I'd like to introduce Kristin Carpenter, who founded Verde Brand Communications after a good decade in journalism, she was writing for magazines including Hooked on the Outdoors, which I was an editor reporter at the time was the first time I met her. She was also with various other publications. But 20 years ago, or almost 20 years ago in 2021, three, 20 years she founded Verde brand communications a strategy agency that deals with media and PR and marketing. In 2017, she launched the Channel Mastery podcast which was voted Best Outdoor podcast by SNEWS in 2019 and last month, Kristin and the Verde team launched the agency's first digital product, the Multi-Channel Marketing Academy, which is an eight week course that teaches marketing professionals in the specialty markets how to serve and sell to their target consumers across multiple channels. Kristin lives in Durango, loves to get out in the mountains, play hard and work hard.

And we're here to talk to you about the evolving media landscape. So the first big question I think I have for Kristin is how has the current pandemic here irrevocably changed the media landscape? It's obviously a big question a lot, but

Kristin: It is. And that probably will take up the whole hour. Just kidding. Thank you, Sarah and Doug for having me, I'm very proud to be on the webcast and podcast here and just really appreciate all the work that you've been doing. And I guess the first thing I'd like to talk about with that is I think everybody has experienced a couple of things. Either

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you've aged three to five years in the last four months, or you seen your business accelerate three to five years worth of acceleration or both.

I think that's the case for me times seven because of all of our clients, right? But the point being is the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the recession. And now the current state of unrest in America has really just dropped the clutch. Things have changed. They were headed for change, which is one of the reasons why we created and launched the Channel Mastery podcast three years ago, but boy, they have changed. And they'll never be the same again. And I think there's a lot of opportunity in that. But within our communities that comprise the outdoor specialty markets and communities, there really is no going back and ultimately what's happening is the consumer has been changed by being trained in a way that they won't necessarily retain all of the behaviors that they've been learning and have been trained with since they've been in quarantine or lockdown, but they will, I think, become increasingly tired of friction. They definitely want to be given what they need at the time. They need it and want to be able to do what they want to do in terms of how they want to research, engage with them, buy from brands or look at products, et cetera, but really the big part of it is joining a community.

And I feel like what's happened since we've all been tethered to our browsers. That's really sped up. The rate of change is the fact that we're tethered to our browsers and we're looking for ways to connect with each other and join communities and follow stories as we're going through a crisis. And that's something that is part of who we are as humans and always has been. I mean, literally it's in our DNA. So we've obviously seen an interesting ecosystem system shift in specialty, because in the past we've had lanes that our businesses have been built around and media is exactly like that. I mean, we have ways that we've created revenue. There's ways we manage profitability. Those things have usually been built around a point of distribution, some cases, the media it's built around advertising different things, but at the time everything now should be focused on the consumer and that enables us or makes us rather have to be very nimble, flexible pivot all of our favorite words that we're hearing over and over again right now, but ultimately like the secret sauce is that people want to connect with other people.

And one of the ways that at Verde we've seen the landscape shift is, you know, people, the, the media, the more traditional outlets in our space are definitely trusted and have a huge role in the discovery and the validation process of the consumer decision journey. But often times they're not able to connect with a person they're connecting with a masthead or they're connecting with a media property if you will. And now I think people are really looking and they're hungry for connecting with other people. We've had in recent years, an influx of influencers, ambassadors, creators. We've seen younger generations really embrace this. As we see, I have kids who literally only watch YouTube or are on social media to get any information they need, even as they're growing into young adults. And ultimately they're connecting with people there. And I feel like through the pandemic, we went through that, you know, all demographics went through that on some level, but that's a really important part of the shift that we're seeing. So I think that's, that's a big part of what we can talk about here today.

Doug: Sure. And I think one of the big things you talked to me about is we're seeing a real drive

towards creators and creators as, as opposed to institutions, right?

Kristin: Exactly. Yes. And no, there's a fall of the Institutions. There is a fall. Like what we're seeing now is a fall of the institutions, meaning the institutions are not as strong as they used to be. So if you look at religion or government or, you know, any kind of tried and true and trusting institution that our parents maybe identified themselves with, they self identified as, you know maybe it was a religion, maybe it was a political affiliation, but ultimately now people have so much choice online in their browser that they can literally self-select and self-identify with creators and people instead of institutions.

So they're belonging to brands that do a great job with this. They're belonging to YouTube creators who do a great job with this and who make them part of the whole journey from concept to product. Like they're behind the scenes, they're seeing the stories, they know what, what the creator stands for and they aligned with that and they can be super targeted with that.

So it takes away the efficiencies that we've all been used to. I think in terms of like this entity serves this demographic and you know, this is the experience you get when you open this legacy media. But now I think people are just really getting creative and they want to be aligned with people instead of like what their, you know, the planned editorial. I love that I grew up in that and I do think there's still a place for that. But if it's delivered in a way that's, you know, more human to human, I think, where maybe you're pulling the people on the editorial team and making them more of a character, something that their audience can actually connect with and relate with them. We are seeing publications do this legacy publications, but a lot of the upstart media are starting this way. And a lot of the YouTube creators are training our consumers to do, to want more and more of this. And they've been doing this for a while, but now it's becoming, I think, expected and has really changed the way people are getting their news, joining up with brands or communities, et cetera. So I think it's really like COVID has really brought across like a fall of the institution across multiple institutions, not just media.

Doug: And I mean, we've been seeing this for a long time, right? With Kuala, like network news used to be the trusted institution. And now we've moved to even you know, intelligent blogger like Josh Marshall with Talking Points Memo. Where you have a single person being more of an expert

Kristin: That's right. Yeah. And, and being able to go on and research that person and understand who they are and kind of look at how they interface with their audience, I think is another way that they can just, you know, the person looking to connect and follow somebody. That's how they're building trust. And, and in the era of robo reviews, fake reviews, fake news there is, we are just in such a dynamic time and, you know, it seems like you can read reports and surveys that will point you back to like, you know, local media is the most trusted brands or the most trusted brands or the least trusted.

And so even like the surveys make it difficult to really understand where we want to forecast...where do we bet our chips, right? And it literally comes down to

understanding who your brand serves or who your retail shop serves very intimately knowing exactly who you're serving and what your brand or your experience does for them, that they can't get anywhere else and continuing to build on that and watching how they're engaging with what you're doing and understanding what's working and what isn't in real time. And it's just really changing the game in terms of the planning process and execution process. It really kind of feels like that's out the window right now.

Our brands and our company at bear day we're, we're not, we don't have a playbook right now. We're basically listening to where the consumer's going and we're creating things as we're going with that. And that is, you know, running a company for almost 20 years. I have empathy for other companies that have built in efficiencies and, and a way of doing business. That's all getting blown out of the water right now. And I just think everything is up in the air. We're in the middle of this gap jump and we, we're not quite sure when we're going to land it or if we can stick it, but the number one thing that we can do to get through it, and this is media business, et cetera, is to understand who are serving and be nimble and watch how they're interfacing with everything that we're doing.

It makes me tired just talking about it.

Doug: I know. We have, we have a question. Someone wants a little clarification on two things. They wanted to know if by accessing communities does that include Facebook groups and online forums? And they also want to know if creators. Is like a user generated content?

Kristin: Okay. So let's talk about the first one. So looking at how people are aligning on social media, I think that's a little bit of a double edged sword right now, and I'd have to go back through the lens of it. If I look at it through who your brand or your shop is serving ultimately we're going through an experience with a client right now where it's a bit of a crisis situation. We have one viewpoint on Instagram, one viewpoint on Facebook. You can really see that there are two very distinct demographics on those two platforms. And so I feel like throwing out a blanket answer to that wouldn't serve anybody. So it really depends on how your brand is positioned and how you're trying to serve your target and consumer. And so I would say, of course you want to watch social media and that's becoming a you know, I think that channel is evolving. Those, you know, I call a social one channel. There's obviously multiple channels within that. That channel is evolving. And I would love to talk more about that, but in the case of your question, the context of your question, I would say it really depends on where your people are. And yes, you do have to be mindful of what's happening on your social media, because that is ultimately real time as well. What was the second part of that Doug?

Doug: The second was they wanted to know if "creator"...was it user generated content?

Kristin: I mean, I guess you could, I guess they could fall in the same camp. But there are people who are just building just huge followings on YouTube, around, you know, serving a community and launching product to them. Or maybe like you've seen some of these folks coming to your shop when, when they're reviewing product or they're at a

consumer event in the past when we had those where they're reviewing a lot of product, then they're broadcasting from the event to their YouTube channel. And so I feel like that is user generated content, but at the same time, in the case of like a YouTube creator, they're usually creating a community around a channel or a brand can be doing that too.

Doug: And as you were saying, people are even searching through YouTube that, right. If you want to search what backpack you want to buy, there's people who do that now through YouTube, right? And then find answers on.

Kristin: Absolutely. I just became the proud new owner of a Taxa Cricket, Overland Edition. And 100% of my research has been on YouTube and there's not enough content there. And that's something else that we've heard through our brands and also through studying consumer behavior. Cause we do for channel mastery every week, but also for the SnowSports industries of America. We are definitely seeing that, like people can't get enough of their whatever they're enthusiastically part of from a community standpoint. They want more content right now, even as they're starting to come out of their house and reengage in a new normal, they definitely, you just cannot provide enough right now. It's crazy.

Doug: And then we both have teenagers. So we both know there's also like TikTok, which was just huge in the news for taking over all the seats at the, at the Trump rally. Right. So that's another platform. Are you seeing anything there, but then

Kristin: I'm personally not on TikTok, but I have multiple people in my family, you know, my children included, but some of my nieces and nephews who are very, very excited about tick talk. And I think it's a fantastic channel for discovery. You can build an audience there very, very quickly. And there's definitely a formulaic way that brands can do that. But keep in mind the algorithms keep changing. We are actually going to be posting a blog post on that pretty soon over at the Verde website. But I do think that TikTok is important because it's very hard to get that type of organic exposure on any other social media platform right now. I'm sure that will change, but getting started there, it's not too late getting started there right now, I think will pay off and just drives.

Doug: Sure. And to kind of like further clarify too, when we say creator the big thing is really like personality, right? Whereas a personality, someone who's an online personality, you can see their face doing this thing as an extension of the magazine. Isn't even, is it sort of form of what you're talking about right. By being more, more human, more personal?

Kristin: Oh yeah. I'll give you an example of one of my daughter's favorite ones, Liza Koshy. So you might want to look her up. She has millions of followers on YouTube and she's, you know, like the dollar store has given her a lot of money to do like fun shopping, excursions back when, you know, before COVID. But point being is, she basically just has like a funny YouTube channel that a lot of kids have kind of gravitated towards. Cause she's, you know, she's in her twenties, but she basically functions like an 11 year old and she is very funny, but she has merch, which is like, you know, beanies and sweatshirts and different things like that and she goes to a consumer show for creators in Vegas.

Oh, it's VidCon. And literally my daughter at the time was she's 14 now, but she was 12 that she's wanting to go to that, like make a, you know, pilgrimage out to see her creator's okay. And I realized that she's a young person, but some of the creators that she's been following more recently that I think are really interesting are basically they create like makeup pallets and they bring people in a year before they're releasing this and they give them factory tours. They crowdsourced the name. The two creators behind it have interesting stories that draw a lot of empathy from the kids. And ultimately they're kind of, they're like rooting for the launch. And then all of a sudden the cart opens and it opens online and they also aligned with retailers and they literally will sell out in four hours, they'll sell out like \$50 million worth of product.

So it's a model that we have to look at because I think we have all of the arrows in the quiver. We just haven't pulled them together to do things like this. So testing and learning and being open to having your competitors see things are going to become more and more important in the future because ultimately I think the more we can align people around the concept and bring them all the way to the direct to consumer launch, not the direct to market or like starting to like go to market, go to consumer instead of go to market is the way we talk about it now at Verde, we don't think about going to market. We think about going to the consumer. And so looking at ways to creatively bring your consumer in from concept to that point of when they're actually able to have the product is really, really important.

So another example of this that I've mentioned a lot of times on the podcast is SRAM into 2019, did a launch of a, the access group set in the cycling industry and they worked on it for a good, I think it was 12 to 18 months orchestration where they basically came up with the product. They partnered with the brands, they partnered with the retailers and they did a global direct, go to consumer launch where everybody got product on bikes in retail the same day, it was available to consumers. It threw the old, like playbook out the window where it's like, okay, we launch at Interbike or Euro bike. And then a year later we make this available to you. Kate Powlison told me something that was quite memorable in the podcast. We did she's the road manager at SRAM.

And she said, the only reason this was possible is because we had a CEO who didn't know this was impossible to do. And that was a new CEO that came in, basically saw the opportunity, resources, team enabled them to fail. Okay. So like, think about that. When you look at the media landscape, think about the way that we have created a lane to bring products to a trade magazine or bring products, you know, preview them. And then ultimately we like nurture the media until it's time to actually launch and the consumer can buy it.

How can you integrate your favorite or your most powerful media partners in a way that supports the entire launch process and makes it more of an experience for the consumer that really humanizes the brand and humanizes the media practitioner, not just the brand logo and the masthead? In the old days that hooked on the outdoors, wink, wink for her, hooked on the outdoors, covering my hiking boot or whatever, really went a long way for the retail point of distribution. And it did, but we were in a totally

different world now. Now it's basically like, okay, where is the consumer? And how can we get them to discover this? Relate with the person that they're, you know, interfacing with about the product, not a masthead. And then ultimately they can buy from wherever they want. They can buy from their favorite shop. They can buy online, they can buy online, pick it up in their favorite shop. Like there's 1,000,001 ways to skin that cat, but the point is you have to now look at the consumer evolution and you can start a plan 18 months in, and that consumer will change thousands of times before you go to market. And that's why today there is no set and forget. And it's a bummer because it makes us have to work harder, but we also learn because humans are very good at adaptation. If we're aware that we need to evolve, and we're aware of what we're looking at, evolving to i.e. our consumer, we can do this. We totally can. And traditional media plays a huge role in that because it's a very big validator still.

Doug: Sure. And I think that's kind of getting to the next thing I really wanted to ask you is, so if brands are doing this, you know, straight to consumer and it's turning retail, it's turning trade shows on their head, how can they retail or tradeshow... how can they adapt to it and kind of retake where already?

Kristin: I honestly am not sure what's going to happen with the future of trade shows. I do know that there is a definite role for that. And there's a huge opportunity on that as one brick in the pathway that we're talking about here and a very important one that will get us to a consistently presented, you know, experience around a brand and a product. So I think that that needs to evolve. And I feel like there's going to be a whole heck of a lot of before, during, and after that trade show going forward, that's much more than meeting media deadlines to get like, you know, X product in a review in the trade show daily. I feel like there's going to be creative ways that will virtually engage people before, during and after. And I love that we actually have the opportunity now to be looking at things like our demo fleet budget, for example, or our event budget, or, you know, different things that we had budgeted around the trade show line item.

And how can we look at those now and, and look at our consumer and figure out creative, new ways to get there. When those shows come back, we should keep what worked and do before, during and after engagement with our consumer. That includes that trade show, but isn't solely focused on it, like a main thing in the annual calendar. It's just one more part of that process that we're going through. I feel like the way that trade shows can evolve in the most important way is to actually help everyone who is invested in going to that trade show, change their value equation, so they can learn how to really serve that in consumer, not just the point of distribution, because ultimately that's the spirit that it all started with was creating that theater for the brand in a physical way to come and look through and see the merchandising and have media come and look at it and have the buyers see like, Oh, there's a media person here and that means this is probably gonna work like proof of concept wise.

Now I just think it needs to be seen as like another way to convey the story to a channel. It's not the only way. It's a way consumers will potentially come in and like want to touch and feel something or want to buy from a place. But it's just part of the story. It's not the whole story. And I think that's a big shift in the way that we think if you look at what the responsibility of the retailers, the media, the reps, traditionally they've carried

the bulk of the storytelling. And I think the great brands that are going to really rise to the top and are already, are really taking, you know, responsibility for being the mothership, if you will, and building that brand from the brand side so that all of the channels are elevated because they're doing their job, building that audience and then empowering that audience to buy from where they like.

Traditional media is not only becoming a lot more creative right now, but they're open to creative collaborations more than they ever have been as well. They know they need to evolve and their journalists are exceptional at going to where their audiences to figure out what's needed. Aren't they? And so I feel like if the people working at the magazines and that includes like ad salespeople, journalists, you know, everybody needs to kind of listen to the journalists and understand how to go to the audience and then portray the journalists. And some journalists might be like throwing eggs at my picture right now they need to be on available to the audience so that the audience can align with them. So we are seeing this happen for sure, but it has to happen more because the consumer's already well out there expecting this and we're still kind of just giving them breadcrumbs, in my opinion, in our endemics. Would you agree, or do you think I'm going of on a limb here?

Doug: I mean, I think we always have to be adapting in some way and we can't stay stagnant. I mean, nothing happened in media, you know back with traditional newspapers when they just fell apart and people had worked at newspapers, all their lives. We didn't know how to adapt away from that model. I mean, I've always been adaptable and seeing what's there to be a freelancer. You gotta be a bit of a hustler, right? Big question here - So why should we still have trade shows? Why should we still have traditional media? Why should we still have anything except brands just going through to consumers?

Kristin: Well, consumers need to have validation. And it's a well known, I mean, Rich Hill of course is the president of the Grassroots Outdoor Alliance, but he's worn a lot of different hats in this market. And he has seen it from every side of the equation and he had a really poignant thing that he said in one of the times, I've interviewed him on channel mastery. And that is that, you know, prior to COVID and I'm sure we'll go back to a higher percentage again, at some point in the future. But prior to COVID 90% of the sales that happened, happened in brick and mortar that's across every retail category, even over, I think it was like 92% in, in holiday of last year. And that's because the retailer provides validation permission, join me here...you can get your skis or your bike, your backpack fit, whatever it is like, that was the opportunity for retail.

So obviously that showed us, they did a lot of research online. And then they bought and got a purchase validation in a store. And that was as recent as like December and January, even though it feels like that might be a long time ago. We have that in us and we've been acting that way for a long time. All of us are consumers on this Q and A right now, like everybody tuned in here, you're a consumer, you're being trained the same way your consumer is. And the media and the creators and the brand communities and the brand content in the athletes of the brand that shows up all along that consumer decision journey. And when a brand, if, if a brand was to go just straight to consumer through one channel, it may work for a while, but look at Amazon, they, they decided are our consumers want more choice than that.



People are more multifaceted than that. And they will align with creators or their favorite journalist working at a stalwart in, you know, media, traditional entity. And they will read and say to themselves, wow, I know that might be, the must be for me because this person said it. And then, you know, that's part of the validation process. It also is part of how their self identifying with the community they're in. This must be for me, cause I know this is my community and that can't all be accomplished, just going direct to consumer. They want to have more choice than that. And a community is more than just a brand going to a consumer.

So you have to think about all the arrows that you have in the quiver already and how you can point them in a way that graduates that person like through the journey. And sometimes the journey is years long and sometimes it's quicker.

Doug: You said when you're talking about theater, I think Pearce Bach said that there has to be retail theater, right? And people still want that. Like they were saying like holiday shopping, they still want to go see things, touch things, you know, trade shows. People still want to interact, touch things, have that chance. I mean the most powerful consumer place I've ever gone was the Medina in Tunis where you walk through these tents with guys reaching out to you and try to give you things. And there's crazy mirrors and gold everywhere. Right. So that's still part of the experience.

Kristin: Oh, totally. And I think, you know, having a favorite person at a local shop is part of the experience, you know, maybe that's who you align with. It really depends. I feel like that's what it truly is still an ecosystem is just evolving quickly. And, and again, it's not that, you know, retail and media or obscure, it's that we need to humanize it more so. And I do think that we, that, you know, whatever the role of the trade show is, I think on one hand it may evolve past being just a trade show and we may get over ourselves in terms of like, Oh, consumer days never work for these reasons. Like we, we really cannot create our future by thinking about what worked in the past that has to go away. So I feel like as we have this opportunity to reinvent key parts of our calendar, I think that we need to really think carefully about how we can change the way that we have been going to market. And instead go to consumer and look through that lens at every single opportunity, whether it's a consumer event, a demo opportunity, a retail, you know, dropping new season into retail, et cetera, or a trade show, we need to look at like how that needs to work for the person we're serving, the actual human being.

Doug: Sure. Yeah. And I mean, we're seeing that with Outdoor Retailer becoming more and more of a, you know, a community gathering and those are some of the people are getting hurt the most, but the trade show not happening now are advocates and include people who want more inclusion got left out when we don't have that gathering. But I guess I'm going to see if we've got some good questions coming in. So I wanted to ask you a few of these questions that we've got.

The first one came in a little while ago. I've been kind of holding it though. The person wants to know because BLM and COVID have dominated the content in the last month as they should, how has your team pivoted when pitching or reaching out to media when your goals are getting product placements. It's emotionally challenging to pitch

socks or apparel when other topics are more important, how do you set expectations with your clients on this?

Kristin: That is a really great question. And I think that we've been doing this obviously we pivoted our podcast to only be about communication through COVID and the recession. And now it's basically about communication in a time of challenge because we just keep getting more and more challenges. And ultimately if you were to go to where your consumer is nine out of ten times back in like late February, March, April, and May, it was not about transaction. It was about service.

And we were very clear with our clients. We did a lot of calls, a lot of calls sometimes every day, they didn't know what to post and we would say, don't go dark. You need to, give the consumer a place to go, give them some content, but don't try and transact with them. This is all about service, right?

So at that time, that's what they needed. Then we started to study and see that consumers were ready to want to be part of a solution. Then we pivoted and told our clients the ones who are in a position because they had a really solid company culture, mission, vision values, and a cause, they already were all set.

So it wasn't like they were just jumping in and there are solutions for brands that maybe weren't a hundred percent set either, but we were then telling our clients like now give them a way to become involved, communicate with them in a humble way, how you're trying to be part of the solution. And we also were very adamant about helping them with their internal communications, because that was a huge, huge thing that we saw across multiple surveys and reports is consumers were actually trusting what they heard at work more than media. Think about that. Because of how crazy the news streams have been when the company was communicating a policy or an update or anything like that, or a way that they were trying to give back.

That was what the workplace or the workforce really embraced. And those are consumers. So it went from - it's shifting their value equation from, I need to get this in, to support where I am in my calendar year in terms of getting this into visibility or with an audience to how do I make sure that my brand is actually creating the impact that it can.

Think about these brands between the brand, their ambassador, their athletes, the retailers, and the media coverage that they get in the content they produce, they have really big reach. And when they can use that reach to create positive change or move the needle in a positive way, consumers respond to that and have reverence for those brands. So we saw over and over again, that consumers were basically like open books to reestablish loyalty. If they had a favorite brand that wasn't doing something to create something positive through the face of COVID, the recession, the impact of all of that.

And now with Black Lives Matter, it is true as well. If a company was not doing anything or staying silent, the consumer that they were targeting, who cared about ethics, because obviously you can't put a blanket on all consumers, but the consumers who

really prioritize that, and a lot of them do in our passion markets, they were looking for other brands to establish loyalty with. That became so important to them. So there were incredible huge amounts of value we can bring, helping them communicate to different stakeholder audiences, not just what they have seen, in terms of equation with, okay, we're in this part of the launch, okay. We need to get this in order to drive traffic to here. And like, that's kind of the way that we've all, you know, developed a habit and a cycle around as we go through the quarters of the year and ultimately the goalpost and it changed the entire game changed in the first quarter and second quarter of this year.

So we have to stay super tight and close to the consumer and then bring them counsel on how to be back in front of them. A great example of this would be Nike during COVID. They basically made all of their workout, home workout stuff, free their resources. They didn't try to sell anything. And then, you know, they definitely introduced what they were doing to try and help the situation. They're doing so now with what's happening with Black Lives Matter as well, but then as people were going through COVID and consuming this content and feeling reciprocity for, you know, what Nike was giving them, they started to inquire about the products that were being shown in the fitness videos that they were watching. So it became almost like a natural progression, but they started with service first. And that's...it's really reinvigorated my entire team and I around the importance of communication because there isn't, I mean, I can't think of an example of a brand or a retailer in our specialty markets that has a bad intention.

They all have the best of intentions and they're so trepidatious to mess up that they're just triple checking what they're doing. And ultimately they're really looking for value in terms of - take my hand and help me with this, tell me what to do. - And I also think one of the ways to set the expectations right now of the brand is to let them know that failing forward is okay, whether it's inside their workforce or whether it's something that we try, as long as it's in the spirit of, we're trying this to serve your audience. This is the goal. That's another way to set expectations. You have to say, this may work. It may not work. It's not going to be black and white. There will be some pull or push that comes from it. And we have to be doing more testing and learning to see what's working as this, consumer's evolving with this relationship with your brand. That's a long answer. I know, but it's been, it literally feels like a whole different profession lately. It's been, I think I were really fired up in terms of what we do having an impact.

Doug: Sure. Yeah, no, I mean, we feel that with the magazine we're putting out with the weekly, that actually matters now in some way. It's more vital now. I think it is more vital. It, it, you know, there's more at risk for sure. The next question here we got from someone who is, what would you say to someone who says we don't use social influencers because people don't trust them anymore?

Kristin: Well, again, if I, if I was to know the context of who you are and who you're serving I think that that's, you know, obviously you've made a decision it sounds like through trial and error. But I will say that influencer marketing is nothing new. This has been around since the dawn of time. People look to other people that they respect and want to emulate or self identify with. And if so, and so influencer who I want to self identify with is using a product and I'm aware that that is part of their suite of sponsored products,

but I'm looking at this, that is going to sway me in terms of trusting that that could be for me because it's making me believe something in my head I want to believe about myself and it's a person doing it. So it's very powerful.

Social influencers, like if you've had a bad experience with them, obviously there's a lot of regulation happening in that market. Our clients are all over the map without, in terms of like how they're using micro influencers or how influencer marketing and user generated content and all of that is coming into the consumer decision journey and how consumers emotionally connect with brands. But if that's a decision that you've made, that's a decision you've made. I do think there are ways to vet it and I would never advocate going through one of those websites that claims to match you up with an influencer. In our specialty spaces, this is a sacred relationship, not only with the brand, because they're going to be showing up with that brand online for a long time through impressions; it's a sacred relationship from brand to influencer to the influencers audience.

When the brand has incredible respect for the influencer and the audience they've built and gives them freedom to take the message and make it relative in a really good way to their audience. Those are the best type of influencer relationships. You cannot expect a true trusted influencer to just take what you've given them and present it to their audience. So it's a lot of hand to hand combat and a lot of trust building to kind of create a really strong influencer community. Keep in mind too, I think in specialty, a number of our brands just have a lot of athletes who really do have reverence for the brand and the product because the product has worked so well for them and enabled them to become better in their world and build a bigger audience. So I think if you just spend time finding more of the right type of influencer, it could be very, very helpful. I mean, influencers have huge reach. I would count creators in the camp of influencer. We don't consider ourselves doing media relations anymore. It's literally media influencers, ambassadors, creators. We help bridge our brands and our brand stories to audiences and they have to be, you know, a gatekeeper audience like that usually is how it happens even in traditional media. So it's the same with influencers and I think it might be a vetting process on that end.

Doug: Sure. You always see a lot of talk where influencers are saying that they should unionize. So what, you know, what do you think when it comes down to it on both sides? What actual value do you think influencers, what value and leverage do they have and how much should brands be taking influencers seriously or, you know, or putting more value into them?

Kristin: That's a really good question. Can you talk a little bit more about the unionization before  
I answer that?

Doug: I think that a lot of people are influencers and they are expecting to be, they feel like their image and their staff, as you said, this is the thing that we're creating these creators. Right. So I think that people then feel if they are the commodity, if they are

what's the value, they feel like they should be compensated better than they are for that, that they should be compensated well for the use of their image and themselves as commodity.

Kristin:  
because

Well, I mean, it's, there's a little bit of history repeating itself. If you look at that,

look at how traditional media has grown revenue streams and created profitable business models you know, there, it really is all based on the audience and how engaged that audience is when it comes down to it. So I think that, you know, you're dealing with a person who has spent a lot of time in a lot of cases anyway, you're dealing with a person who has spent a lot of time being very authentic to a very specific end user.

And when you know who your brand is serving or your retail entity is serving very specifically, because again, search engines have taught us to do very targeted searches. I mean, Amazon is a search engine, YouTube, Google, we can put in like, you know, basically what our deepest, darkest secrets are and look for a solution on Google.

And ultimately like we can be very targeted and brands have to be just as niche with how they're presenting, what they do and aligning with ambassadors can be, or influencers can be incredibly powerful for that process, if there's a match. And ultimately I think the same way we've seen like the best athlete relationships or the best media relationships, it all comes down to a two way relationship. And that might be what, you know, the influencers are crying out for is like, you know, treat us as, as you would somebody who's caretaking a very important audience for you. I think that we may have grown a little complacent in terms of understanding that as we've dealt with traditional media houses, if you will, because they built these huge audiences, they have their subscriber lists. They have said, I can show you readership and impressions, and that has translated to value.

And when an influencer can't necessarily say the same thing for apples to apples, that might be where the disconnect is, but I'll tell you if you, if you find the right one that is really aligned with exactly the direction that you want to have your brand go in and it's a good fit, it is an invaluable relationship. And I just think honestly, like the way that we price and sell things, that's probably big part of the problem. Like you've, you've seen it as much as I have. As writers were let go from publications, they started to write for a number of different blogs and everything started to kind of go haywire in terms of how we were reporting. And ultimately, now it really comes down to like, again, going to where your consumer is and knowing exactly who you're serving and the reach of the person who matches that and who will speak to them authentically in their way that they have to build the audience in the first place that requires a very equal relationship.

There's no I'm the brand and I'm above the influencer. The influencer has the keys to the kingdom and a lot of ways, and the media does too, right? Like it's just a different type of kingdom. All of these are important to validate a purchase or research, a purchase or belong to a brand and identify with the brand as the consumer is kind of

engaging online. It doesn't just end with the, with the consumption or the buy. You want to keep them in the ecosystem. That's where like all of these pieces become important.

Doug: Sure. Who are you seeing and who's doing a really good job when it comes to navigating all the lanes of current media ecosystem.

Kristin: That's a, a really loaded question. I'm going to answer it. I'm going to answer it from the viewpoint of an influencer. And this person happens to be a pro athlete as well. And his name is Payson McElveen, and he's in the bike community. He's probably in his mid twenties and he has a podcast he's grown a huge Instagram following and has grown into a very special relationship with some of his main sponsors and all of the race directors that he does events for...this guy totally gets it. And he speaks to his people and he creates incredible content and just pumps it out while he's also maintaining his fitness, living out of a sprinter van. That is an example of someone doing an exceptional job across multiple channels, who is, I think just an exceptional influencer today.

Doug: Fantastic. And I think going back to something you said earlier, the big thing is, is being nimble, right? Because everything we're talking about today could be different in six months even. So how are you, you know, how are you navigating that? How are you going through the Ninja course of that?

Kristin: Through understanding, like watching data, frankly. We watch closely how people are engaging with the content online, how they're sharing it, what their sentiment is around it. And it's about, you know, basically about recording that back in and doing more of what's working and less of what isn't. It literally is taking the temperature on a campaign every single day. There is no, like I'm going to set, you know, all of these auto posts to go for the next month or whatever that doesn't happen anymore. Like you have to show up and be a person that's why, you know, even now, like, I'm sorry, traditionally. And now one of the number one ways to like get through a crisis is by putting a person from a brand in front of the crisis so that people feel like, okay, somebody is there, they're listening to me, they're engaging with me.

And if you don't end up doing that in a certain period of time, they lose trust that there's a person in there actually reading social media. So I guess the way that I would say is just make sure that you're watching your dashboard on, on how things are working and do more of what's working and less of what isn't. And then I also think I have a very soft spot in my spot, in my heart for marketing leaders at specialty brands, because they're tasked with so much, as all of this transition is happening, they should be elevated to a leadership role and have the respect of the person who literally handles the relationship of the most important person, which is a consumer. And traditionally they have not, they've almost been in a role where they're supporting sales and supporting the point of distribution more than they're supporting what the brand can give the consumer. That right there is the opportunity for traditional media, for influencers for ambassadors is enabling that leader within the company to like make an impact on traction with a consumer. It's not about like driving stuff to retail. I mean, of course it always will be, but that used to be the Holy grail. Now it's about engaging that consumer and making

them emotionally connect with your brand that helps raise the channel everywhere, all of the channels.

Doug: Sure. You know, going back to traditional media for a moment too, do you think there's, I

mean, you said there's still a place and you think there's like maybe a sense of calm is some real traditional media? Like I know my man, my friend Mike Robey just bought mountain Gazette and he's going to make it a big coffee table type book there's Adventure Journal. I've been getting magazines and New York times in the mail. There's, there's a certain comfort to today to them. Do you think traditional media sources still have a chance to, or, or, you know establishments as we work on them still have a chance to bring some, calm to a super frantic landscape?

Kristin: I absolutely do. I don't know if it's because I am the demographic I am, but we, I feel like when when that Adventure Journal shows up, it's like a friend showed up in my mailbox that I, I literally like will reserve time to sit down and visit with. So I do think so, but to kind of bring that to the forefront, I'm going to bring up Blister Reviews. They were in the article that you guys, when you, the Q and a with me, but Jay do, I think it's very interesting to look at at their business model. And they are revered by brand, by consumer. They have an interesting revenue model. I know it's a lot of work, but what they do is, is really moving the needle in the specialty world. And that is long form reviews where you really get to know who the person is. I don't know if everybody on this call knows who DC Rainmaker is, but legend. I mean, he's been doing this for awhile and he's evolved into a retailer. He's still a revered enthusiast and an influencer. And he's a journalist. So I would check out his content. He does a lot of stuff in consumer electronics, and he's basically a gold standard. And we have our version of that showing up in our markets. And that's definitely editorial.

Doug: Absolutely. We have another question here. Someone wants to know what advice might you have for someone who is trying to start a new brand right now? And I think what they're looking for is advice along the lines of how you're going to set up your, your media strategy.

Kristin: I love this question. First of all, I love entrepreneurs. So whoever you are, my heart is with you. Like that is who I am like through and through. And you're at a very special place. You have an empty canvas. Proof of concept is important for anything new. I would definitely identify like you might be your target consumer right now, your shopper, your avatar, whatever you want to call it. Cause a lot of entrepreneurs create something that they want that isn't available at the time. That's when I started Verde, I did the same thing. I was a journalist who wanted a different experience from a PR agency and it didn't exist. So I created my own and that's essentially like where my heart and soul has always been is as an entrepreneur. And I feel that what you're doing, you're at a very special place.

Take the time to understand who you're serving and then go to your audience. Don't just send them a Google form. Although I would do that and I would pick up the phone I would, when you can go and meet with them, meet with them and talk to them. And

the success of your company will depend on the questions you ask, okay, don't just say, check this box. You know, this one, then ask them, why, why do you feel that way? You know, what is it about this that's important to you? Try and get as deep into it as you can with them so that you understand that they have an internal and an external problem you're solving. They have an external problem. Like I need a new water bottle. They have an internal problem. The person wants to identify as a conscious consumer.

They're going to want a steel water bottle that's made in the United States that the company supports XYZ. Like you have a chance to get out of the gate with a solution that solves the internal and the external problem and going to your audience to get that consistently. Not just one time, that's how you build the launch. That's how, you know, what channels they're on, what they want, how to talk to them. All of that, it all come from the person you're trying to sell to. And I think that it might just be the journalist in me who won't die. Journalists truly do know how to give an audience what they're looking for. And so you have to kind of act like a media entity from the beginning if you want to have a successful media plan

Doug: I like got a lot. One. What do you feel like is your big success right now? What is something you're really excited about is your big success in this realm?

Kristin: I'm, I'm not sure what you're asking me.

Doug: Do you feel like you're winning?

Kristin: Well, honestly, like this sounds a little cheesy, but like when things were really grim back in like late February, March, April, when we really you'd wake up and you would just be like, I mean, sometimes you never went to bed, right? You were just working, working, working, working to try and create a solution. So there's two things. One was I would literally get out of bed in the morning feeling like there's a role that I'm going to play here to help my employees and our clients get through this. Then I started to see that people being affected all over the world by COVID and the lockdowns, and frankly, just the way that their lives were being dictated to them, we're starting to crave being outdoors.

So I didn't create that, but I consider that one of the things that really kept me going was watching people go back to freedom by discovering, being outside, even if it was just walking their dogs and every single person watching this today would be maybe out at nine o'clock at night when it, you know, walking their dog and see just way more people or more cyclists, you know, or, I mean, it's all around us.

So I feel like that's something that a win has been helping our brands and helping the industries we serve, take this opportunity and run as you know, like don't mess it up, don't be too technical, don't exclude them, let them be exactly where they are, you know, like share your stoke with them in a way that's, non-intimidating like, there's, it's not just a bike boom, it is an outdoor rec boom. The more we can engage them and make them feel like they belong the healthier we're all going to be. But also the more they're going to want to protect the environment. And that's really, you know, point number one for all of us. And just looking at the fact that emissions and everything went



down so much through the lockdown we were in, is it just really excited people, even more to like stay using their bikes, et cetera, or walking or whatever it was.

And that just the health and wellness benefits of that were rediscovered. And I think it came at a time when we were all exhausted from our screens at the end of last year, it was supposed be the year of the experience...Or the experiential economy is supposed to be \$12 billion by 2023. Like these are all the things that we were looking at with our brands is we are planning this year. People were excited to get away from their five and a half hours on average that an adult spends on a device and actually engage with people again. And we were thinking how for specialty, how amazing that was. Then we all got in lockdown and we had to be on our screens all day.

And now we're seeing incredible pent up demand get outside. We haven't seen that in like getting on an airplane or any of that yet, but we are seeing people wanting to recreate and wanting to kind of get back to themselves and they're finding that through getting outside. And it's, it's just incredible to see. So that, and then what I said earlier about really rediscovering the power of communications and the power of story and the power of community building, which are tenants of what we do for a living at Verde has been very much a win. And that is like being vulnerable, get in front of clients and say, I'm going to find out what this is for you and with you. I'm going to make it work. If you're willing to let me get out on the sharp end and fall on my face, I'll give you progress. You know? And if you build that kind of a relationship with your clients and your employees are kind of in it with you and you're working together to make that change happen, that's, that's really what kept us going, but I it's exhausting, you know, but this is our life's work. So look where we are. I mean, look at the outdoor recreation spike. It's pretty cool.

Doug: Yeah. Yeah. I guess for one, we're kind of at the top of the hour now, so for one last question for one takeaway for people listening, what would you suggest they do to try to adapt to a new media ecosystem or more creators and always evolving? What would be the one take away and think about, and do?

Kristin: I would look at what I mean, even though your plan might be buried under a bunch of things now that you put together for 2020, take that plan out, look at it through the lens of how can I go human to human, a hundred percent of this plan and look at your existing, the investments that you may have had, and maybe, you know, unwound, but look at every single thing that you thought was going to serve, maybe your point of distribution or a sales goal.

And instead - look at, look serving your consumer. So look at your plan and look at your specific part of that within your company, but then charge your leadership peers to do the same thing and come together and start working on what's going to work for the consumer first. Okay. And you don't have to start from scratch. You can take what you already planned to do and look at it through that lens of consumer first and start to evolve your plan that way. I do think that we're going to see what is it they're saying Doug, it's not a U shaped recovery or a V-shaped recovery. It's like a bunch of W's, right?

Doug: Yep.

Kristin: That sounds like a really relaxing thing to go through. Right. So we have to do this anyway. And the more you can get attuned to the pulse of your consumer, the better you're going to do. So that's what I would do. That's what I am doing.

Doug: Fantastic. I'm sure we did get, we got one last question here that I can't avoid because the first sentence of it is you guys are rock stars, thanks for sharing your magic. Now, how can we not answer this question? They want to know what advice would you give brands that need to create detailed rich visuals that can drive online sales? Can you point out any examples of who is crushing it on the digital stage? Any tips on virtual presentation are very much appreciated.

Kristin: Wow, that's a great question. And I'm assuming they're talking about consumer, so I would look at the journey that you've mapped out for your consumer. So the traditional funnel, right. But you turn that to look at instead like the discovery and then engagement, they join your brand, maybe via email, then there's nurturing. Like there's the whole experience that you're offering. And I would look at that journey and I would temper what I was going to offer from a visual standpoint to fit that journey. So I wouldn't get super tech on how and what, at the beginning part of that journey, I would get very much into the why. Because that's ultimately what they're going to fall in love with then as they get that emotional connection with you, I think making it available to them, to engage on maybe a more spec heavy visual presentation might be appropriate, but I really think I would really, you know, it sounds like you might have a technical product and a lot of our clients that have technical products really fall prey to the how and the what, because that's how, you know, we've grown up with product is King or Queen, right?

You really do have to look at the why behind this and figure out, you know, is it about your mission, vision values? Is it your founder's story? Is it the impetus for creating this product? What is it going to solve for them on the external and internal side and really kind of establish that emotional connection before you just dump a bunch of like tech on them? Some people who read DC Rainmaker who read blister reviews, they want every detail of that. I there's a podcast I listened to called Ask a Cycling Coach that trainer road.com puts on. And it's like literally two hours of nerding out on every aspect of training and competition as an endurance athlete. And I listened to the whole thing, right? I wouldn't have done that until I got to know them. You have to date them first, think about that with your content and you want to date them and meaning you don't want to overwhelm them and ask them to get married on the first date.

And then you nurture them to the point where you can offer them more. So I think that's what I would do. And then I would test and learn like, maybe you can take that approach, but then also make a downloadable resource available that is more technical. Maybe they'll download it and you'll know a weight. They are ready for this. So there's also things you can do to just test and learn. And then in terms of just the visual format, I mean, honestly, I don't think that in Doug, I'd love to get your take on this, but I feel like what's happened with Kobe is people have become a lot more open to having not well-produced content that feels more real to them.

Doug: Like what we're doing, right? Yeah.

KristinN: Well, Doug had to go through hair and makeup before we got on today. We almost were late, but my point is, like the more real that you can be the better and the more relatable you are and the more they're going to trust you. So it sounds like you might have a complicated product to present, and maybe you have some beliefs in your mind around how that should be done. And I'm inviting you to maybe like not get rid of those beliefs entirely, but try some new things that are really emotional and why based and show the humanity of your company. And who's doing the creating of this product and why and how it's affecting people's lives. It's his storytelling.

Doug: Cool. Well, I think we are out of time now. That was a great place to end. Well, great to talk to you. Thank you everyone for tuning in and we'll see you soon. Bye.

Kristin: Thank you.