



channel mastery

150: Ashley Korenglat, Outerbike Transcript

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Kristin: Hey, everybody. And welcome back to another episode of The Channel Mastery podcast.

Kristen Carpenter here, your host, and CEO and Founder of Verde Brand Communications, the presenting sponsor of The Channel Mastery podcast.

I wanted to thank any new listeners who are joining us here today and welcome back our loyalists. You can always find out more about The Channel Mastery podcast at verdepr.com or channelmastery.com.

Let's get onto today's episode because it is an awesome one. I'm reintroducing a returning guest, Ashley Korenblat to you, who is CEO of Western Spirit, founder of Outerbike, and also the founder of Public Lands Solutions. And the website for that is publiclandsolutions.org. Welcome to the show, Ashley. It's great to have you.

Ashley: Yeah, I'm happy to be here.

Kristin: Well, I know you've been so busy. Here we are post election in November, so thanks so much for taking the time to join me here today. And it sure is nice to have a start to a new week, isn't it?

Ashley: Yes, new week. Phew.

Kristin: Yes. And we have some exciting things teed up this week. Verde is absolutely so proud and honored to work with Outerbike, and you and Mark, and the team over there. And we have a very exciting announcement. And I have you on the show today to talk about that because it ties together a lot of the things that I've really brought to The Channel Mastery community over the course of 2020, which is how to engage, endear, and nurture this incredible swath of newcomers who are coming into outdoor and cycling.

I know that there are a lot of entities that are working to do this and Outerbike has been just prolific in the last 11 years working to bring people in to feel so like part of the bike industry and really get rid of all intimidation. And I want everyone to listen to episode number 86, because Ashley goes into great detail about the secret sauce behind Outerbike, and how Western Spirit has truly built this incredible hospitality and host mentality to the experience of Outerbike. Give us a little sense of the brand new announcement that we're making here today. And then we'll talk a little bit about where

Outerbike and Western Spirit are right now.

Ashley: Sure. Western Spirit has always been an entry point for cyclists. I think that if you ride your bike a little casually and then suddenly you go on a five day bike trip, you come back and you're a cyclist. It really works to immerse people in being out there for a few days in a row. It really gives them a lot more confidence about their own cycling skills. And if there are any mechanical's or that kind of issue, they get to see that and learn it in a really supportive environment where there's a guide helping them. So this introducing people to cycling has always been part of what we do at Western Spirit. And then at Outerbike, it's just more people at once, at all the same time. And learning, and asking questions and welcoming them. And I think it's always been a challenge for the cycling industry.

Comparing to other folks, like if you ski one week a year, you're proud to call yourself a skier. But in the cycling world, if we've been off the bike two weeks, we're sometimes afraid to call ourselves a cyclist. And we really need to change that, especially now. Like a casual cyclist is a cool person, just as cool as the person who's devoted their life to cycling. And we need to be more welcoming about that. So that's a lot of the work that Western Spirit and Outerbike has always done.

Kristin: And I have to say, you bring an incredible point of credibility to that process. Let's just go back a little bit. When you founded Outerbike, you came into that obviously with 19-20 years at Western Spirit, but also you were at the helm of Merlin Manufacturing. Oh, wait. Manufacturing is the snowboard brand. Merlin, the bike company. So you were at a very, very niche, core mountain bike brand. And let's talk about how that informed how you approached Western Spirit, launched Outerbike, and now we have this brand new next step. And we're going to get to that, everybody. Trust me, it's worth the wait.

But this is important because if you're in the bike community and you're a little bit reticent, whether you're an IBD or whether you are running a brand or part of a brand in any way, you might be a little bit horrified at the number of newcomers in cycling and how different they look right now. But this is our huge opportunity to actually get more of a cycling mentality into the United States, culturally. And Ashley brings such a great perspective for that. It's almost like you've lived on so many sides of this equation, that you're the perfect guide and you've created the perfect turnkey vehicle for that, that we're about to talk about. Talk a little bit about your background at Merlin and then how that really shaped your mindset going through Western Spirit, Outerbike and into this new announcement that we are going to make.

Ashley: Sure. So at Merlin, we were definitely all about super core cyclists, people that were ready. We were making the most expensive bike in the world at the time and it was a huge deal. There were people who ate ramen for months so they could get a Merlin. And that core part of cycling is of course really attractive, and really fun, and knowing that you share this value and this commitment with the other cyclists is a big positive for our sport. But the idea that there's cool kids and not cool kids is a negative for our sport. It's a problem. And what I see happening right now around the country, that's really fascinating is this demand for trails. And the mountain bike community really owns the trail building universe, really. We're experts around the world about that.

But we haven't been as involved in the bigger picture in terms of public land and trails as economic development. And what we're seeing at Public Land Solutions is all these communities want trails now. And the communities where they're really succeeding it's because the mayor, the city, the county commissioners all see trails as one of their responsibilities, is something they're supposed to be providing. So it used to be if you were a mayor, you just did police, fire, stoplights, whatever.

But now it's like police, fire, stoplights and trails. And so I see this as a long-term change that it's part of quality of life. And this current influx of people using trails is not going to go away. It's going to continue. And sure, there'll be a little slow down in the growth, but these new trail users are not suddenly going to go back to just... Even when they can go to a big sporting event, or go to the movies or whatever. I don't think they're going to suddenly revert back to couch potatoes. The demand for trails has been going, it's been seeing solid growth for a long time and COVID just intensified it.

Kristin: It just is the great accelerator is what we like to call it.

Ashley: Right.

Kristin: That gives, I think, the background I was looking for. So thank you for doing that. My point in doing that was to showcase you basically knowing where a lot of people in the bike community might be right now. They are eager to bring this and enroll this newcomer, but they're a little bit flummoxed. And then let's first and foremost, because we've backed into the lead big time. That's a journalism thing. Let's talk about the brand new launch for today. And then let's talk about the meaning of it to different stakeholder groups in The Channel Mastery community.

Ashley: Okay.

Kristin: So, hit it. If you go to Outerbike.com, what will they find there today?

Ashley: We have a new button and that is your called, Your Friend In the Bike Business. And so all of everyone who have been in the bike business for a long time, you know this call, you get this call from someone like you went to college with or something like that. And you haven't seen them in a while. And they're like, "I'm getting a new bike. What should I get?" And you're like, "Oh my gosh. How am I going to explain it to this person? And it's going to take too long and they should just go get whatever's on sale." You're kind of, ugh. But when it's someone you really care about, you go through all these steps and you start asking them questions. Like what are your plans? Where do you live now anyway? You really go back and figure out what type of bike would be best for them.

And especially now, since there's so many options between, and the words are kind of confusing between trail and duro, all mountain, it's not self-explanatory. And so 27.5 or 29, that whole argument that may eventually go away, but for now, it's still there. And so what we wanted to do is provide an online tool to ask those questions and to help get

people to the category. We're not reviewing bikes and we're not recommending a specific bike, but we're getting them to the category so that they can see the list of bikes in that category, that Outerbike Exhibitors, and we've added everyone who's ever exhibited Outerbike into this model.

And you can see that some answers there's quite a few bikes. But our goal is to drive them to the manufacturer's webpage so they can look around and see what's there, maybe come back, check out another one. But they know why they're looking at a certain category. The way they answer the questions about the trails in their neighborhood and their goals for biking, lead them to the right category for them.

Kristin: Right. And let's not forget gravel.

Ashley: Right.

Kristin: I'm always there reminding - like gravel, gravel.

Ashley: Yes, gravel is part of the conversation and part of the model. And what's happening is we

really want to be able to introduce people to gravel who don't know about it and have them make that choice. Do they need a mountain bike? Do they need a gravel bike? What's happening with gravel? That's part of it. And then I think we've seen from the bike shops and folks that we know that people are walking in right now and they look tortured. They're like, I'm not even sure what I want, but I really want a bike. And can you please help me?

And so our goal is to get them to the category so they know why they're in that category based on the type of riding they tell us they're doing, where they live, what their goals are. And we've worked really hard to keep it simple to start, and have these tabs and opportunities to get more information if you want it. But otherwise, we can get you to a list of bikes pretty quickly. And then as we build on this model, we're going to be adding other components as we see the need for those. But we wanted to start with a pretty simple way to get you to the right category of bike for you.

Kristin: Exactly. And I also have to say what you're also creating, and I know you all were so cognizant of this is you're empowering the new cyclist to come into their IBD feeling like they have their legs under them. Because it is still pretty intimidating. And if you throw in how busy IBDs are right now and this entire year, even if we have the best trained shop sales floor people, and they're managing 17 flaming hula hoops, while they're fixing eight things over there, they can't make eye contact, welcome them in, ask how they are, get to where they are. They're literally just like, check the box, check the box, check the box. Because they're running harder than they ever had. So this should be, I think, a fantastic way for people to come in feeling empowered. And I think that's a whole different sales conversation when that happens.

Ashley: That's definitely the goal. And they may find themselves in a category and then learn something that pushes them to another category. That's fine. The main thing is that they need to know. One of the inspirations for this was we knew that at Outerbike, people

were walking into booths and they were getting confronted with this question 27.5 or 29? Some people really didn't know about it. And other people were just, they knew the choice was there, but they were uncertain why. They hadn't read all about it or thought all about it. I think if we're going to welcome new people into the sport, we can't assume that they are literate in every aspect of cycling. But that doesn't mean they don't deserve the bike that's right for them. That's the part that we're trying to bridge, is helping them get to the point where they know more and it's easier for them basically to walk up the price point ladder.

Kristin: Right. It's so interesting because we're in the forest, looking at the trees and hanging out with the trees. And basically the 27.5 or 29, I mean, that's just sort of like a very entry-level question coming from the people in the bike community, to the person who's walking up to their tent. I just love that you're basically leveling the playing field once again, just as you did with Outerbike. Everyone's welcome to the party. Everybody is welcome to try this, and come in and join it. And that's the other thing. They have an insider friend here and there's actually just... There's a need when you have a bike right now, when you're wanting to buy bike, there's the external psychological need. I need a bike. But there's an internal need to want to actually adopt a lifestyle or an identity of being a cyclist. And that's what I think you're chipping away at in such an effective way here with this tool.

Ashley: Yeah. Thanks. That is the goal, is just really break down these barriers to these people staying in the cycling community. If the bike they bought in a mad rush in the last couple of months turns out to be the wrong bike for them, or they start to see that they want something better or more sophisticated. We really want to help them make that choice and not put up barriers to that. And so that's our goal, is to help people learn more in a way that's fun. But not by lecturing them about the choices, or giving them big piles of data, or charts or comparisons. But rather starting from where they are and asking them questions about them, because everybody knows how they feel about different things. And so making it about them is our real goal. Starting with them.

Kristin: Right. And I do want to say really quickly before we get into sourcing and supply, because we are going to touch on that. It's also a tool that an enthusiast can use. If an enthusiast is interested in buying the next level up or the next rung on the ladder, as you said, Ashley, they can use this tool to identify potentially a tertiary category if their bike isn't available right now. And that's a very real thing that we're dealing with going into 2020, the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021. So let's talk about that a little bit, because that's almost like the big hippopotamus in the living room that we keep stepping around.

Ashley: In the tool, your friend in the bike business, one of the very first questions is, are you just getting started or looking for your next bike? So we've worked to tailor it a little more to experienced people versus newcomers. They get slightly different explanations and answers. And we think that's really effective because we're able to speak directly to the newcomers, but we aren't boring the more experienced cyclist.

And we worked hard about the tone and how we talk about it. So with regard to actually getting a new bike right now, it definitely is a big challenge. But, that is a relatively short-term situation in that everyone's working to rebuild their inventories.

And there's millions of challenges in that. And one of them is deciding, is this a blip or is this a more permanent trend? And we really are seeing it as a more permanent trend. Going back to that point, that communities are building trails as part of their economic development strategies, that is a big deal. When trail participation is part of a community's economic development strategy, that means they're investing real dollars in trail and access, and they're competing with other communities based on quality of life opportunities. And right now that is very much defined as access to the outdoors.

Kristin: Right.

Ashley: So we see this continued demand for outdoor activities, namely cycling, really continuing. And it's hard to predict exactly what the numbers will be, which I know is everyone's project. And that is hard. I've been there, it's very difficult. But everything that we see is really encouraging that. And right now we hope this tool can be used to, if you're taking orders for delivery in 2021, we're trying to drive customers to you now so that you'll know more about how many bikes you need to build, because those backorders will be there.

So we're hoping for that. We're also hoping that people can use this to find other bikes, maybe? Like if the bike of your dreams maybe isn't going to be available until 2022, there is another bike in your category that might work for you. So we're really trying to just get more people to get to the bike that they need more efficiently. And everyone knows it's going to be rough for a little while, but as we transition back into people having some inventory, we want to help people understand why they're looking at that bike.

Kristin: Right. And we're going to put all these links in the show notes everybody. But we pulled a PR Newswire article that reported the global market for bicycles in 2020 is estimated to be, at the end of the year, estimated to be 29.2 billion, with a B. And then projected, it is supposed to reach a revised size of 34.6 billion by 2027. That's a lot of product that I think people can count on building. And what I love most about what you're doing is how you're really showing how Outerbike and Western Spirit are truly in it for the long haul. I mean, Outerbike's going into its 11th year, correct, in 2021?

Ashley: Yeah.

Kristin: And I mean, obviously Western Spirit celebrated three decades. I mean, you were with Merlin prior to that. You have such an incredible track record. And also, we'll talk about before we wrap up today, the Public Land Solutions piece is really important to bring to awareness as well, so I want to make sure we talk about that in the interview as well.

But ultimately what I wanted to share really quickly before we hop onto the next point, is Your Friend in the Bike Business is an example of a small entrepreneurial company creating something that is working to create visibility and engagement and a nurturing

of this newcomer. And also of the enthusiasts who might be like, I can't get the bike I want, what else should I do? Right?

And so I want to encourage everybody, businesses of all sizes, we do have the opportunity to work, to catch and collect and keep this newcomer, while also keeping our enthusiasts excited about everything that's ahead in cycling. And ultimately, the cultural tide, I think, is really shifting in the United States around cycling and outdoors, which is super exciting. So my point is, no matter how big your business is, you can make an impact. And you've shown us that. I love that you just basically, literally I was on the other side of this phone call. You came up with this idea and you executed within a matter of months, and that's very hard to do during a normal business year, let alone a pandemic. So hats off to you. I've been really watching this and very excited to help you launch it. So let's keep working together as a community to keep this newcomer excited and engaged.

Let's talk a little bit about the expansion that we had planned for 2020 for Outerbike and what our plan for 2021. If you could talk a little bit about that, that would be great.

Ashley: Sure. Outerbike is this magic combination of a venue that's really excited about welcoming the cycling community. And has the trails and has made the investment in the trails to do that. And then the manufacturers bringing their demo fleets and looking for real shoppers, people who have made a serious commitment or real effort to be there, and who are really thinking about their next bike. And so when you get the combination of the venue and the bikes and the people who are looking for bikes all together, it really is super fun. And everyone's very excited about the bikes. I mean, when they first started lining up at 7:00 AM to get in, when it opens at nine, I was like, "You guys, you don't have to do this." They're like, "We're happy to be here. We've got our coffee and we are excited."

And so I've seen the sun come up in many places, Bentonville, Moab, Crested Butte. But it's just such a fun event. And we just work hard to make sure everyone who attends gets to ride all the bikes they wanted to try. And a lot of times people end up learning about a bike they weren't even thinking about, that ends up fitting them better or meeting their needs better. And they get to know the demo folks. And oftentimes there's marketing folks and even founders at Outerbike that they get to meet. So it's really, that part is really, really fun. So in 2020 we were going to do the most ever, seven events. Of course, we couldn't do them. But what we're doing now is looking at 2021, and everything that we see says gathering in larger groups probably will not be available until the third quarter.

So we're looking at, starting in July, with Killington would be our first event. So we're going to keep the same relationships, Duluth, Killington, Crested Butte, Moab, Bentonville, South Lake Tahoe. Where all these places are still really excited to welcome Outerbike and to have this bike component of their quality of life pitch be legitimized by the fact that Outerbike is coming to their community. So we're on deck. Everyone's excited to go try again, keep going. And we all know we're going to have to see what happens and how we do it. NICA has done a lot of work on gathering people and having everyone wear a mask, and had a successful season in Utah. And so we are learning a

little bit more about how to gather outside and stay safe. So we think that we'll be looking at those models and seeing how those went and what can learn from that.

Kristin: I have Steve Matous lined up for an interview later this week.

Ashley: Oh, great. Okay. Awesome.

Kristin: Yeah. So we can get a little more intel on that for the Channel Mastery community. But just so everybody knows, all the dates and everything can be found at outerbike.com, and they will be also in the show notes. But I would like to say, Duluth, South Lake Tahoe, and I think Bentonville, and even Killington because the Northeast is a pretty easy driving distance package-wise. But those are all not terribly far from public, like major urban areas. You all had planned that prior to COVID. But now that we are in COVID and we're seeing this incredible influx of consumers, it's going to be even more interesting to see how all of that unfolds, and the actual platform that you're building with Outerbike and your friend in the bike business tied into these urban centers. I'm really excited to see how that all goes. And with that, let's talk a little bit, before we wrap up here today, Ashley, because you're such a great resource. Tell us about what you're seeing in terms of major questions that are coming in right now for your other company, the nonprofit Public Land Solutions.

Ashley: What we're seeing at Public Land Solutions right now, is we've got communities that are looking to manage too many people on the trails. And also people looking to welcome more people to their trails. So we're working at it from both ends. Public Land Solutions was originally created to work on communities that are transitioning from oil and gas and coal, and to the recreation economy, and using outdoor access as part of their economic strategy to promote quality of life through access to the outdoors. So these are communities that are lucky enough to have public land, but historically their public lands have been used more for resource extraction, like oil and gas and coal, than for recreation.

So they may not have all the trails or trail heads really sorted out yet. And we're working with them to figure out where to invest, where to build trail, and how it fits into their strategies. But in the last couple months we're getting contacted by communities whose problem is, suddenly there are vans in every possible dispersed camping site within 20 miles of the town. It's huge. And a lot of newcomers don't always know the etiquette and the leave no trace principles, and so it's gotten a little hectic out there. But I think most communities are just looking to figure out how they could balance, how they could meet people's needs. Moab has been really successful in developing a product mix that does provide a good experience. We're meeting people's expectations. And I think some of these other communities are just a little bit behind in that, and we're working with them on that issue. But either way, I just see that this trend was already happening. If COVID had suddenly driven all these people out doors, okay, maybe it would be a blip. But that's not what we're seeing at all. We were already really engaged in this trend and working with lots of communities and this just has accelerated it. So I don't see it going away at all.

Kristin: Me either. Well, and I would love to have you back on the show just to talk about

solutions around that. And I know tomorrow, you probably have this on your calendar too, but the Outdoor Rec Roundtable is releasing its new numbers, which I'm really excited about. So that takes place Tuesday, November 10th. And we will be doing some content around that too. This show will be released a few days after that. But I'll put the link to any kind of replay or any data in our show notes for that as well. Because you'll be able to see firsthand, I'm imagining a lot of different hockey sticks.

Ashley: Yeah. It's crazy. Or yeah, just that steep, all of a sudden the line got really steep.

Kristin: Yep.

Ashley: But the trend is really, really there. And a lot of elected officials across the country are looking at it. So it won't stay this steep forever, but it's going to keep going up.

Kristin: Yep. For sure. Well, I just want to say thank you so much. First for your partnership, but for your brain for coming up with this great idea. And once again, just like you did with Outerbike, you've really created a path forward for us in this. I can't wait for people to discover it. Go to outerbike.com, right at the top of the website. Very easy to see there's basically a tab right there that you can click on and experience this tool for yourself. This is something that, I mean, tell me if you agree, any IBD, independent bicycle dealer. Any brand, anybody who has a friend or a family member who's interested in looking at a new bike can go to this tool. It is free. It's there for you.

Ashley: Yeah, totally. And we're looking to build on it. We have lots of ideas to add to it. And we'll be interested in everyone's feedback because we really want to make sure that we're really supporting folks as they're working to learn. Which is totally different from reviews. This is just like understanding why you want this feature, kind of thing. Which is really helpful because otherwise what we don't want is people to get confused, frustrated, and not be able to move forward in the community. And we really hope this will, it looks like we'll be able to help them quite a bit.

Kristin: Absolutely. Well, thank you again to you and everybody over there at Outerbike. And we will be catching up with you here soon more about Public Land Solutions.

Ashley: Awesome. Well, thanks so much. Talk to you soon.