



channel mastery

174: Holly Fraser, Outsider's Network
ChannelMastery.com

Kristin: Welcome back everyone, to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast. I have a very interesting, awesome guest to share with you today. Meet Holly Frazier. She is the Managing Director of the Outsider's Network, a company she founded with Origins, MJ, Legault and Danielle Kristmanson. Welcome to the show. It's great to have you here, Holly.

Holly: Thanks so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here and talking to you.

Kristin: And so I did a little bit of a interesting thing there. I didn't really say what Outsider's Network is, but I guarantee you, our listeners are like what's that I should know about Outsider's Network. You really should know what Outsider's Network is because here we are in the middle of June, sorry, the middle of 2021. And you've essentially launched a solution to make it a heck of a lot easier to reach authentically and in a really, I think a trusted way, a more diverse, equitable just a very much more inclusive look and feel to your brand. And we're going to discuss the solution that you've created. So can you give us a background on yourself and then talk with us a little bit about how you came up with Outsider's Network and what you're hoping it's going to bring to the outdoor active lifestyle world?

Holly: Yes, absolutely. So my background, I'm only going to go back about a decade. We'll just say freelance producing in the outdoor space is what I've been focused on for the last decade. And in that I would be working with a number of different brands and companies around the world and in places where people are shooting outdoors a lot of times and some really fun and extreme places in the mountains and on the beach and the ocean. And, and that was great.

I was have a standing relationship with the two owners of an agency called Origin Outside or Origin Design and Communications. And we I've been working with them over the years helping them in field production in line producing. And this idea started to germinate years ago, about how based on the challenge of recruiting talent in the outdoor space and the unique uniqueness of that, and the fact that sometimes you needed somebody who is really, really skilled in a particular activity or sport, but didn't necessarily have traditional modeling experience or acting experience, or more often than not.

You just need a regular person, you know, who is an, what we call an avid enthusiast or recreation lists in a range of different outdoor activities. And they're fun and photogenic, but they certainly don't make a living as a, as a model or a person of talent. And this idea sort of formulated around looking at some of the websites that exist in the mainstream space for casting voiceover, things like that. But there was definitely nothing that existed in the outdoor space. So the three of us started to talk about, wow, we would love to tackle that project, but of course we're all busy in our own businesses. And I said if I ever risked to have a baby, that would be a great business to do. Post-Baby and sure enough, that's what happened. And I got pregnant and COVID hit.

And the challenge to two, we'll get to diversity in a moment cause that's really important, but the challenge to have more diverse talent in all spaces, but the outdoor spaces is our world, and in particular, what we're interested in came to the forefront and we decided to create the Outsider's Network, which is a website and online talent marketplace to be able to help people search for short shortlist share and then book talent in all the places where outdoor shoots happened the most across North America.

Kristin: And you created the solution. We're going to get into it in depth, but ultimately I believe that three of you are making it easy for people to not have to fly talent all over the place. And there are so many important reasons for that. So you are offering essentially an opportunity to expand what people can book in terms of like video and imagery, "talent" for marketing assets, activations, et cetera. You want to reinvent the image of people in the outdoors and doing that through enabling brands to easily feature diverse ethnicities, gender identities, and adaptive abilities.

And honestly like that is just such a huge part of it coming out of COVID. We have a huge opportunity with newcomers. Number one, number two, a lot of our marketing VPs are really time strapped right now. They don't have time to do the job they want to do, and their heart wants to do to like procure exactly what you're creating here. And it's a network and a platform really that makes it very easy to find and search for people. Again with that three step process shirt, search shortlist and select talent. So everybody, you can check it out at outsidersnetwork.com. Is it in beta right now? Or is this, is this actually live and ready to go?

Holly: So our, our front end, our website is live. I described the, the phase that we're in right now is the talent recruitment phase and the full launch is going to be happening this summer. So right now I describe our phase as we have a model car. That's what you can see on the website that you can look at right now, but outsidersnetwork.com and the engine is going to get put in place this summer. And that's going to be the robust platform for search functionality. That's going to drive the way this whole site operates to make it really easy for people to use and go through the traditional casting process in an online forum.

Kristin: Awesome. And you're also trying to, I think, reinvent kind of what people think about when they think about procuring talent. So this isn't necessarily like a talent agency, obviously there's a platform there, but you're allowing candidates to kind of self select themselves into this pool. Is that right?

Holly: Yeah, that's absolutely right. We're definitely not a casting. We're not talent managers. We're not talent management. We're not casting agents where we're representing talent. What we're doing is we're providing a platform and like you say, a network. So both the technology behind it in terms of the web-driven but also the networks. So our work is in seeking out all the individuals that would love to be a part of this network. Definitely we'll get again to the diversity component, but so that they can come to the site and they can apply. Everybody is vetted to make sure that they are at the level that they say they are at for the activities and sports that they're wanting to self represent. And then there is the ability for them to create their profiles themselves online. They go through the vetting process and then the network grows. And again, the areas around North America where outdoor shoots happen the most. And as you touched on earlier there's not always the ability to fly talent in and we want to be able to provide the option for for clients to have great local talent to access or fairly local, you know, within their province or state, and also for talent to have a great opportunity to earn some extra money being in front of the camera and doing the activities that they love to do outside.

Kristin: I love that part of it as well. So I want to just give a couple of details here and then talk about some of the measures that you've put in place to ensure that you have an approach that the people who are applying to be featured are feeling comfortable with, because as we know, like we cannot, you know, go ahead and just decide that for them, especially right now. I, one thing that we've learned firsthand with our clients over the past 18 months, specifically through 2020, I guess is just around like making any assumptions around how we're portraying something without asking the audience and asking for help. It's just never been more important to do that. So we're going to talk a little bit about, I believe it's an advisory board that you've put together, but first before we do that, there's three tiers that you're feeling in terms of the talent there's avid recreational lists, as you've already talked about so it's helping companies maybe move away from that sharpen to the spear athlete, only marketing and putting in like everyday people that do actually, you know, fit and feel authentic to the outdoor backdrop.

The second tier is amateurs who still have a day job, might have a talent or an agent themselves. And so they have experiences talent, but they, you know, they're more, I think kind of towing the line between avid recreationalist and pro. And that's also a very interesting space because obviously that's a, I think there's a lot of diversity in there that brands can tap into. And the third tier are pro athletes, models and actors who probably do have agents. So if you could talk a little bit about how this works for those individuals, with agents and then what you're hoping to do in terms of procurement, that would be great because part of why I was hoping to have you on here is to really get the word out about this and have people start sending their, you know, people who they think would be a great fit to this site.

Holly: Yeah. That, that's great. And appreciate it. Thank you so much. There's, we've put in a lot of thought into this and the way that re recruiting talent again, because we aren't reps we are inviting individuals to come onto our site and go through the process. I spoke about a few minutes ago. We're also reaching out to casting directors and casting agents

who have on their rosters talent who love to be outside, whether they're lifestyle models or whether, you know, their, their day job is as a fashion model, but perhaps they're really an avid mountain biker or a skier. And so we, we can work in, in both ways we can work with individuals and we can work with the agents as well. And the whole idea is to get as many people as possible seen on this platform and also to cater to clients, to give them the opportunity to meet their briefs and everything was built around that.

Having been a producer in the outdoor space and knowing the challenges, the unique challenges of having to hire sometimes you're needing, you know, that person that just lives around the corner, but is a trail runner and fabulous in front of the camera. And sometimes you're needing that really, really high level of skilled kayaker or a mountain biker or what be it. And that's a unique thing. That's something that exists only in the outdoor space and our platform will identify and use really robust tags and search functionality to allow clients to be able to go in and put in the criteria of their specific job, brief everything kind of revolves around that job brief, where do they, where do you want to shoot? What are the different talent that you need? Because you might need a variety of talent with different levels within those sort of three tiers, and you'll have lists pull up for you to have a look at,

Kristin: I have tell you Holly, in a very past life, I was an editor at Shape Magazine, and I handled like the outdoor gear and footwear for them for, gosh, I think it was eight years and I used to have to go on shoots and they would procure these amazing, beautiful models who would literally like, not even know how to like stand over a mountain bike. And sometimes like they would pull like the people who are helping with production would put like the handlebars on backwards and different things like that. So that was a very long time ago, but I don't think it's like something that is totally gone away. And so there is actually like, this has broad market opportunity as well. And I think all of you know, that everybody like larger brands, nonprofits, and obviously our space everybody's looking for the outdoor backdrop right now.

And they also want to create a look and feel that that promotes a welcoming vibe, if you will, to, to bring more people in who look different than what's always been portrayed. We know that that's been, you know, pretty vanilla. I'm just going to say it. And I think that that was one of the things that really sparked you to become passionate about this. And actually, I know you said you had a baby and that's really, you know, one of the reasons you did it, but I also know you mentioned to me just how passionate, passionate you become about this, because you were getting requests and seeing kind of the changing tone in the, in the nature of creative briefs, around companies wanting to do the right thing, but asking for things that might even border on tokenism. Can you talk a little bit about that because that's a really important problem to solve. It's almost more of that internal problem. Like we have an external need to fill, but there's an internal, psychological fear in there, you know?

Holly: Absolutely. That is the driving passion behind our business. And when I say the passion, you know, it's, it's the part that's motivating the three of us because we, we know that it's a mandate now for it to, to showcase diversity in outdoor, in marketing in general, but certainly in an outdoor space. And quite frankly, we often are tasked with the

impossible, you know it has to be local talent and the people that are wanting the clients are wanting to showcase don't, it's not that they don't exist in that space, that's that we need to find them and we need to help also provide accessibility. And that's, we have a sort of, we know that this is not a quick fix, and we know that this is a really big task that we're taking on, but we have done a few things to help facilitate that.

One is what you mentioned required an advisory committee. I paid an advisory committee of four individuals to start off with, and each of them representing the different groups that we are trying to focus on in terms of marginalized community it's in diversity. And we'll be guided by them having very honest conversations to make sure that, like you said, we are asking the right questions, that we are making our talent comfortable, that we're working with them on initiatives that they're passionate about is also very important to us. And, and then also that we are working with our clients and our partners to give them an opportunity to increase that accessibility as well, because it's something that's gonna take time. And I think the opportunity here is that with the work that we're doing, we know that we can there's a lot of amazing people out there that just need to be tapped on the shoulder just to say, you know, Hey you would be great talent to, you know, you don't have to be the traditional model and you're absolutely right.

And I've been in that experience many times where we, you know, our casting agent will present us with a person who's, who's beautiful and wonderful in front of the camera, but they're just not comfortable when they put on skis or, you know, and it's not just talent be hot in front of the camera. It's talent behind the camera as well. And that's why we're starting to, to showcase hair and makeup and wardrobe and eventually camera crew as well, that are also comfortable in the elements. And yeah, so there's a lot of work to be done. That's the long story short, and we have a multi-tiered approach to how we're taking it on.

Kristin:

I love all of this and I know it was a big push to get it going. So congratulations to the three of you. I want to just point out, if it's okay with you, I'd love to share just sort of the profile of the people who are comprising your board. So a first nations individual, an LGBTQ+ individual, a JDEI specialist, a Bipoc individual, as well as somebody are still on the hunt for which is an adaptive specialist. So keep that in mind, everybody, and we'll have a way to reach out and get ahold of Holly if you have anybody in mind. But of course, also to share the website with anybody you think who would be a great fit for this and keep in mind, this is also a way to give back to rural communities. So one of the things that I think has become really prevalent and top of mind for marketers through COVID, and even prior to that, with the great work that was being done by Len Necefer, and his team at NativesOutdoors, for example, is really enabling the consumer to understand the meaning behind the landscapes that are depicted in a lot of the catalogs and a lot of the assets that we're creating catalogs can be digital obviously today.

And so that's also another thing is that you're connecting people who are local to bring almost like a local dialectic and a local feel and a deeper authenticity to the, to the content you're creating, but it also puts revenue back into the community, which I think is awesome. So talk a little bit about a success story or two in that regard.

Holly: Yeah, well, we were in the earliest stages of recruitment. The form is live on the site, but it's been really exciting to see some of the people that have been coming through initially in terms of diversity and inference, like you said, rural communities, and most importantly you know, on our website, on our form, we ask what are the organizations that our talent are passionate about? Which organizations would they like to partner together with to help further that accessibility into the outdoor space. And we've had really, really good response that way from talent.

So I'm just really thrilled that the people that are, that are coming on board so far are as diverse as they are, are from different walks of life, in different communities with that common thread of loving the outdoors. And some of the skillsets, you know, some of the skills that they have in the outdoors are really remarkable. And I think what's really exciting from a creative standpoint is that now I think there's an opportunity to create stories around real people, rather than the reverse where a story is fabricated. And then we try and cast according to that somewhat fictional story, which is often how it happens. I think through our profiles, people are going to be able to look through and see some really remarkable individuals and their experiences in the outdoors and be really excited by telling their stories, which are coming through our inboxes right now.

Kristin: That's amazing. It must be such an exciting time, especially with kind of, it seems like in North America, anyway, things are coming back around in terms of like people wanting to get back outside, but honestly you just cannot create enough content right now. That's still the case. It was definitely the case through COVID for obvious reasons. We were really just attached to connection that way, but I feel like that's definitely carrying forward and, and brands are going to have to really continue to double down on that visual storytelling. And this is a great way for them to open the portal and invite more people in. So do you have anything else that you wanted to add in terms of like a give back or a cause that's a goal around Outsider's network?

Holly: Yes. For sure. We are putting in place a more formal way for our clients to contribute through the fees associated on the site. We'll be matching those as well. That will all be outlined when we launch officially in summertime. But our main objective is again to be asking our talent themselves, who, you know, what are the organizations that you're affiliated with that you want to be seeing to have some support through the network. And we see that we'll have a more formal giveback program on the site, but we'll have a more informal one by leveraging the network and the people that rehab, whether it be, you know, if there's an outdoor group that really needs gear for instance, and we'll have a lot of pro athletes and, and just people that have a lot of gear on our site and we'll hopefully be able to funnel that down, to help with that accessibility for other people who are needing it in order to, to participate. So I think there's a lot of opportunity.

Kristin: That's great. Is there anything else that you want to add before we wrap up here today? I mean, I want you to definitely share the URL the timing, and again, just really what we're hoping to make this, you know, in terms of a turnkey solution with I think coverage and what I mean by that is you're going the extra mile to look around the corners and make sure that what you're offering truly is going to break through, like anything that could possibly be considered tokenism. You're really trying to build in like such an

authentic way to invite in a more diverse group of outdoor enthusiasts. And hopefully they'll have, you know, an impact where they can, you know, where they can see it, they can be at right. Like I've, I've said that so many times on the podcast and it truly is like, it's a thing, especially with social media.

Holly: Yeah, absolutely. I think that what we would love people to do right now is just encourage them to come and check us out on the site. If you think that you might be great, an outsider, we call them, if you think you might be an outsider and an outdoor talent, don't hesitate to get a hold of us. I think that it's just a bit of a shift for some people to think of themselves in front of the camera, but we're more interested in your comfort level outside and you know, what you do outside and what your levels are outdoors. And we can work with people to help bring them into the, into the forefront, through our network. And yeah, just to stay tuned. We have communications going out regularly leading up to the launch this summer, and we're just really excited to get to know people coming through.

Kristin: That's awesome. Thank you so much. And we'll be helping you get the word out you know, on the podcast, but also just in network. And I just want to invite everybody who's listening here today. If this is something that made you think of an individual or somebody you've worked with in the past and keep in mind, pro athletes can definitely enroll in this as well. Please go to the website and fill out the form. We need to really make this a robust solution in order for it to make change as quickly as possible, but this is something that we all need desperately. And I'm just so grateful that you and MJ and Danielle have banded together to launch this. Thank you so much, Holly. It's awesome to have you on the show.

Holly: Awesome to be here. I really appreciate it. Thank you.