



SEASON 3

EPISODE 05

[INTRO]

[0:00:05.8] ANNOUNCER: Welcome back to Happy Porch Radio. The podcast for progressive agency owners and web professionals. Season three is focused on the growing number of agencies who are making the world a better place.

We explore what this even means, why is it different from any other agency and how can it be reconciled with the real-world challenges of running a profitable agency? Join your host, Barry O’Kane as he speaks to leaders of agencies who are driven by verify use to positively impact the world around them.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:43.8] BOK: In previous seasons of this podcast, we touched on the importance of clarity for marketing your agency services and that building trust and long term relationships with your clients is key to building a successful agency. My guest this week is an excellent example of how doing this in a way that is driven by your own personal values and passions can bring huge benefits to your agency.

Kerstin has a huge amount of experience in marketing and in working in and running digital marketing agencies. But this year, she decided to launch a new agency that is totally focused on nonprofits in her adopted home of western Canada.

Let’s hear the details in her own words.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:34.6] KH: I'm from Germany and my name is Kerstin Heuer but since I'm in Canada, people pronounce my name Kerstin Heuer. When I introduce myself, I never know if I should say Kerstin Heuer or Kerstin Heuer.

Anyway, my name is Kerstin Heuer, I am the agency owner of Non-Profit Today and HeuerDesign. We are based in Red Deer, Alberta and we help nonprofit organizations to achieve their mission with digital marketing, branding and graphic design.

[0:02:05.6] BOK: Brilliant, thank you. Tell me a little bit about where or what was the genesis of Non-Profit Today? What led you to set that up as a separate entity?

[0:02:16.3] KH: Yes, with HeuerDesign, we have been serving our clients for about 10 years now but our focus was always nonprofit. That the beginning was, I just started the business on the side and one of the nonprofit agencies here approached me if I could help them with their branding. Because I was working with an architectural firm here in town, so I got in contact with them because the architecture was doing some pro bono work and was helping their organization with building a school in Kenya.

So he approached me and then I started on the side with that and during the next couple of years, I did some more work for nonprofit and I really liked it and then we started HeuerDesign and other clients came on and I would say, during the last two years, we found that there was really a need for a nonprofit organizations in terms of marketing and as our clients were already like almost 90% nonprofit we decided, "Okay, let's just focus on that," and – but in the first we didn't really advertise. We were just broad in our messaging and then like I would say, six months ago we decided, "Okay, we need to go on a different alley and just focus on that and really communicate it too."

That's what we started and then about three months ago, so it's really fresh, we launched Non-Profit Today and really started out at the same time, I had a presentation at the social media breakfast here in Red Deer, so that's where we launched officially. The feedback was really good. I got – afterwards, I was contacted from existing clients and they were really excited and then like other people that I didn't know contacted me saying, "You know what? That is such a great idea, how can we help you?" I was a little bit overwhelmed and surprised with it because I

really felt like there's a need and it really, because usually, what I found is nonprofits like there is so much need but because of missing funding, they usually don't have the opportunity to work with agencies that are experienced.

So a lot of the time, lots of times there is startup company that say, "You know what? We have nonprofit because for them it's good entry." But there is so much more that nonprofit, yeah, that they need to market themselves because it's just – there are so many out there and you really need to say who you are and what the purpose is that you serve.

[0:04:46.9] BOK: That's even almost a tougher challenge for nonprofits that way to articulate exactly who they are.

[0:04:52.0] KH: Yeah, totally. The main issue that I have found is that they are not able to communicate their purpose. They have their mission and that's what they put on the front page of their website, but no one really gets what it is. Then you wait through and you find all kinds of stuff and it's confusing. But still, they have to do a sales job, right? But they don't have the team or the capacity for that.

[0:05:18.5] BOK: Yeah. When you said you identified the need to sort of more clearly articulate who you were and the nonprofit and then you have this awesome reaction. What led you to deciding that that was what you needed to do?

[0:05:31.3] KH: In the past — so back in Germany, I was partner in a creative agency too and I worked for a lot of corporate clients and so it was quite different than working here in Canada because of course you have more competition and I had the feeling that something is missing, you know, you do work for these great clients like Mercedes Benz, Alpha Romeo and they are like 150% and you need to be on top of everything. But at the end, I ask myself, what did I change.

What is it like, "Can I do marketing? What can I do to make this world a better place?" And then, coming to Canada, "You know what? This whole marketing and advertising, I don't want you to have – I don't want to have anything to do with it." I go to Canada and work in the national park and save, help to save animals. That didn't work out that well, but I found, you can

change the world with marketing because you can influence people to do specific things. When I came here, I thought, “So what can I do?” I found out marketing is still my passion and so I thought, “What can I do?”

Through the contact of this first nonprofit organization, I really felt, “Yeah, there is need and I want to help them to make a better job helping people,” and I think that was the reason why I started with it. Then I started connecting with other organizations in that field and I really felt, “Yeah, this is what I want to do, I want to make a difference with my talents.”

[0:07:03.9] BOK: Yeah, what does it look like now at this point? You said it was about three years. Six months ago, you started the process really of clarifying three months ago that you launched. What does it look like now, three months in?

[0:07:14.2] KH: Yeah, how does it look like? We have been really active on social media and reaching out, building strategic alliances and we have been like the major need right now, I would say is in social media. We have been getting a lot of new leads, expect through us through social media marketing and then also, that’s one of the first things that they think they have to do. We do social media training and develop marketing concept and social media concepts with them and that’s often like the entry point to more.

Ideally, we would like to help them with their overall branding and then creating that conversion funnel through their website to reach more donors, to attract more funding and to deliver better programs and I feel that we have a good start with that because we got new leads, people that we haven’t worked with before. Like also other existing clients that are referring and coming back and asking, so what do you do now? What do you do different and how can you help us?

[0:08:20.2] BOK: Yeah. You found that you already had a sort of an established business, am I right in saying that?

[0:08:28.4] KH: Yeah.

[0:08:29.8] BOK: What does your team look like now within the Non-Profit Today?

[0:08:34.6] KH: yeah, we're a team of five, it's myself, I do many strategic development and client competition. Then, I have one partner who does more the technical side and then we have one project manager and he also does social media for us and then we have one web designer and developer and one graphic designer.

[0:08:57.5] BOK: Cool. So a really strong little team. What about, you mentioned you're getting these leads and people coming to you looking for specific needs. Is that something that's happened just sort of organically or is there – you actively searching, how are you actively searching for the leads and the work that you're bringing in?

[0:09:14.3] KH: Yeah, it's both, of course the nice thing with nonprofit is that if you do a good job, they refer you and I have the feeling that Alberta is really a nonprofit hub. I think specifically Red Deer, has the most volunteers in whole Canada. It's really crazy, you can't really do anything without volunteers and there are nonprofit organizations everywhere and so, when we started with Non-Profit Today, of course we had to look active into generating new leads. What has worked really well is, I work with LinkedIn. I changed my profile to be really focused on nonprofit organizations and then I look actively like who is in this area and then I connect with them and introduce our services.

We also use to better and to find nonprofit organizations and then I cross link it. If I see someone where I think that's interesting, I connect with them on LinkedIn and I also had like situations where I found someone on LinkedIn and on Twitter and then I connected with them over LinkedIn and I had the presentation and they came to me and said, "Hey, that was really cool. I just wanted to introduce myself, and we are connected through LinkedIn."

It really works like, it's the cross linking. I look here and then I connect there. We also started with actively with facebook marketing and so we do one facebook live a week, we call it like a five minute nonprofit marketing tip. We do that every Tuesday and then we market that and promote the live feed afterwards.

That's mainly what we do. We also started building our email list with existing clients and of course we updated our website and created a lead funnel and email automation system. That is all set, we all did that within the last two months. It was quite a lot of work.

[0:11:09.9] BOK: Yeah, that sounds really – both really comprehensive and really well organized. Is that different? What is different about that? For that process that you're going through there and when you're targeting nonprofits versus maybe a new other agency or another agency who is focusing in a different sector?

[0:11:27.4] KH: I think that differences that with nonprofits, you can't really – you only can do soft sell. If I connect with them over LinkedIn, it's really about the purpose and not really about like how do you attract more leads for your website. You really have to be purpose minded and go, when I connect with them, I really say, "You know what? I'm really passionate about nonprofit, I see that you are in this field too, I would like to connect with you."

But usually, then, there is no – you can't really promote your business too much, you really have to go through the purpose alley I would say.

[0:12:04.0] BOK: Yeah, and connect with their purpose before you can workout whether there's an opportunity to work together, I see, yeah. That is obviously something which ties back to when you were talking about the – why you setup the agency and your personal desires to work in this values based way.

Do you think that is – do you think that do you find it easier because to have these kinds of conversations because it's very genuine. Or do you think that's something that would come naturally anyway?

[0:12:33.1] KH: I think it's easy for me because that's what I'm passionate about. If you are passionate about something and your heart is with it, you're just in it. If I talk to my clients or a prospect, I ask them questions, I'm really interested in the organizations and what they do. Then they start talking and usually, what then happens, it sparks ideas in my head and I communicate it right away and it feels like a firework sometimes.

Then they get excited and so this is – I think that's the difference. Like if you are passionate about something, it's really easy to connect, yeah, and help them and then of course, there's

always the issue with the funding but my experience is that they can find a way if they believe that it really helps them.

[0:13:18.8] BOK: Yeah, that is interesting. That is one of the questions I wanted to ask you is if you find it, is if you see a conflict between the purpose driven passion that you're talking about there and the need to have financial security for your agency?

[0:13:32.4] KH: There's definitely different nonprofit agencies, they are the ones that really start – that start out or they don't have enough funding but they still try hard. Then there are others that they have enough funding and they can do things.

So it's always – I would say, of course you want to help all of them and sometimes it's the case, you know what? It's not that they don't have money but it comes in – you can't really plan when it comes. Sometimes there are cases, I get a phone call, "You know what? We just got funding for \$15,000 and we need to do something with it and we have to spend it next week."

So that's one thing and then in other cases, you work towards a project, you know they need a website, you have worked with them towards that and then it takes two years until they get the funding. Being sustainable, you really have to be out there and you have to really look strategically, who is it that you can connect with?

Yeah, also, we do a lot of pro bono too. I have a big heart, if I see there is a nonprofit agency that really appreciates what we do, I also help them. But of course, that is not really sustainable, you need the other clients too. Yeah, it is a little bit challenging but I think there's enough opportunity to make it work.

[0:14:52.1] BOK: Would you say that was the biggest single challenge you face as an agency?

[0:14:56.9] KH: You mean financially?

[0:14:57.7] BOK: No, I mean that challenge — yeah, I guess you do mean financially with that challenge of you know, within the nonprofit space, exactly the challenge you described of some

of them very – running on a very tight budget and being driven by funding, which is often, you don't have control over.

[0:15:13.4] KH: I don't think that's the only challenge. I think of course, one challenge is the funding, the other challenge is they don't just know enough about marketing because most of them are volunteer driven and then they have – if they have a marketing team, it's a small team. They often don't have the knowledge and the expertise to do that job well. So they really need a lot of education in that field. This is – I think these are the two things, like the missing knowledge, and then they don't have the capacity stuff wise. Yeah, of course the funding.

You need – that's why we started with a lot of educating through facebook as well and through our email marketing. Just to open up that, because they don't know a lot of things. Not because they don't want to, they just don't have the time that come from different fields. They've joined their nonprofit organization because they are passionate about it, not necessarily that they have the expertise in the job and often times, they start as a volunteer and then they become one full time staff but their background is just not there. They grow with the organization and they need the educational, the further development in that field.

[0:16:30.1] BOK: Is that – I was about to ask how you tackle that educational challenge but you've kind of half answered that I think when you talk about tying it back to email marketing and the facebook videos and so when you're doing. When you're working or when you started working directly with a nonprofit, is there anything you do to overcome or to help with that educational part of the process?

[0:16:53.6] KH: What I do or what we do is when we start to work with a new nonprofit organizations, we do an in depth discovery sessions. So we meet with them, it's usually a session of four meetings and then we find out what are their needs and then this also explains a lot of how we work. So we do, for example, we create — we ask about their audience and then we create a persona of our task and that is the first time, which is an eye opener for them because they usually think we want to reach a really broad audience and they want to reach the whole community.

And then they say, “Well if you want to reach everyone, you won’t reach anybody because you need to be really specific with your messaging because everyone has a specific need and if you don’t meet the need then you can’t connect with them.” So this is the first eye opener and then they start thinking of this direction and ask questions. So this is usually the best, for me, I think it’s the best way to start like really digging deep and then they experience themselves what is missing and then we can dive in and say, “See this is where we have to work on and as long as we don’t have identified your target audience, you can’t really build an effective marketing strategy.” So we start there and then they are with us in the boat and they discover really what they need and then they get it.

[0:18:12.4] BOK: And do you ever find, I mean, this is something that I think isn’t unique to non-profits but do you find a client that needs to be pulled back from where they think they are in the process in order to be able to ask and think about these sorts of things that you are describing there?

[0:18:26.3] KH: Well often time, a lot of inquiries come because they think they need a new website and then I have to tell them, well of course we can build in your website but this website doesn’t really help you if you don’t have a funnel and a system in place to capture the leads and to find out who is visiting your website and you can’t really write content if you don’t know who your audience is. So I really come from the content side and after that we develop the design because if you know who your audience is to them it is easy to develop everything else.

[0:19:00.1] BOK: And then how often or how do you work with your clients then after that stage? Is there an ongoing long term relationship? Do you work on a project by project basis? How does it actually work out or is there a consistent way that works out with your clients?

[0:19:15.1] KH: Yeah, so with most of our clients, we work on a continuous base, but it is on a project base. So we have – I don’t think we have lost any clients in the non-profit sector. Like the first client we started with nine years ago, he is still our client and we have been working through two branding and he just started a new non-profit organization. But it’s not – so usually there is a bigger project like a website and then we help them maintaining it.

They usually want to take over the website and update it themselves and we help them with it but we also take care that the website still looks consistent and looks good. So we do the maintenance and help them by tweaking things. Otherwise, we work on a project base. But I also check in. We always check in and I think this is something that you have to do. Don't stop with a project and I don't wait for them to come and ask because it's not that they don't want to work with me.

They just don't know there's anything else to do. That they need anything else so when I have an idea where I come across something where I think what they really need this, so I phone them and say, "Hey I have an idea, can we just talk?" And then I explain to them and usually they are excited and they see the need and we'd start working on a new project that of course and sometimes it has something to do with funding too, but this is the way how we work.

So we think like our clients and from their shoes and try to find out what is it that they need and what is out there that we can offer them to make their life easier.

[0:20:52.2] BOK: Yeah, so how do you measure as you're doing that and building those relationships, how do you measure the success both of your work and the agency overall?

[0:21:02.5] KH: So with our work, we started with this as I said just a couple of months ago. But I really feel that there is a need here in Western Canada. I haven't really found anyone that is focused on non-profit marketing. So our goal for the next few years is we want to become the number one for our non-profit marketing. So how do we measure that? We have our yearly goal and then we break it down to monthly goals.

We say, "Okay we want to reach 4,000 likes on our Facebook page, and then we also want to generate a specific amount of leads per month, and then reciting from there that we want, I don't know let's say three new clients a month with a specific amount of revenue." So yeah, we try to break it down from our overall goal and then break it down to measurable rocks and milestones and then we do within our team we have – So I work mainly on the LinkedIn side and our staff for social media, he works on Facebook and on Twitter and then once a week, we meet and say, "Okay what have we done? How far are we? Did we reach our likes? How was the engagement?" and then from there, to how many leads came out of that and then of course, we

measure our website. We look through our Google analytics and see who came from where and then we try to streamline and find out where do the leads come from and what worked best.

[0:22:32.3] BOK: Yeah which is very closely tied to what you said at the start by the process of lead generation, brilliant. What do you think – I want to look back a little bit on something that we touched on earlier about the challenges but on the flipside of that coin, what are the real advantages or strengths for, now that you've done this refocusing for three to six months, and what have been the positives on focusing on non-profits?

[0:23:00.3] KH: I think the positive is if you do something very passionate like you have suddenly more ideas, you are suddenly more energetic and that reflects in your daily work and so with working with non-profits, I find the big difference is that they really appreciate what you do and it's not for us. It's not about the money, of course we all need to pay our bills too but if you work with a client and you have an idea and you get an email back, "You know what? This felt so good, I learned so much and I'm so excited that we can do this now." So that really gives you a drive to do more of it because they had just think a little bit different. That is I think the main thing that is different since we have focused on non-profit. Yeah, so I think that is the major thing.

[0:23:53.8] BOK: Yeah, so if you, if you could, what would you have changed about the journey you've been through because you have been running and working in the industry for a long time, a lot of experience and then now you are in this new step of the journey with Non-Profit Today. If you had that magic wand to change the past what would you change?

[0:24:13.2] KH: I think I would have started earlier with it. So I feel like doing some research they are more purposed focused agency out there now. I always feel like in everyone over here a little bit behind so I think it is a good timing to do it now. Looking back yeah, the only think I could say is I would have started I think I would have started earlier and I really would go more to the purpose-driven direction and follow my passion. So I think that is the main thing I would say.

[0:24:43.9] BOK: You sound like you are actually quite happy. I mean you sound like you are happy with where it is now and where you're going in the future of it.

[0:24:49.7] KH: Yeah, I think that — you know what? I was really surprised by the feedback that I got within the last, so I had this presentation at the social media breakfast that was three weeks ago and that was also when I had the chance to promote Non-Profit Today and so a week after the work, another couple, some other events that I attended and there is a social media agency here in Red Deer that I know but I haven't really been in contact with them.

So at this event, the owner came forward to me and said, "You know what? What you do is awesome, how can I help you?" and I was so surprised and then I got another email saying, "This is a really great idea." I just met with five entrepreneurs that want to start a non-profit organization. They will be ready for their marketing in January, can I say to them towards you?" So two as too usual it was like I have the feeling that if you are more focused and communicate it and you have pick your niche then it draws people towards your cross. They know what you stand for and so I think now, here I am the non-profit girl. So I think that is pretty interesting.

[0:26:00.7] BOK: Yeah and really powerful. I mean that is the best advice you always hear is to really have a focus and a clear niche to become the, as you say, the person for that niche and I know we touched on this already but do you think there is other than the fact that you feel really passionate, interested and care about this niche, do you think there is something different about the non-profit as a niche to focus on?

You mentioned the fact that there is more agencies, and that's kind of I guess why I am doing this season of the episode is, I mean the season of the podcast is that I am seeing more and more people putting this purpose or values or social impact led at the front of their agencies. So do you think there is something that is inherently different about this, this leading more people to do this kind of work?

[0:26:55.3] KH: What do you mean with more different? So I feel like with working — like the younger generation is more conscious about what they do and what impacts their actions have and I think if you want to be attractive to your employees, you need to be more conscious with your work and being a purpose-driven agency really helps with that and same with non-profit like the younger generation knows that money can't fix it.

And that is — this is really important when you run a fund raising campaign because you really need to be about the purpose and not just about, “Well we need money for this and that.” They really want to know more. So you really need to dig in deep in order to feed that need. I don’t know if that answers your question?

[0:27:43.7] BOK: I think it does. I think it’s interesting you say that there this, as you say, younger people more generally but there is a general awareness of this as a topic. You mentioned employment there, is that something that is important or was important to building your team?

[0:27:59.5] KH: So when we started, my partner and I, when we started looking for employees, we sat down and wrote down our values and because you find it’s really important, if you grow the values are important for your culture and if you can’t communicate it then you can’t really direct where you go as an organization. So this was the first thing that we did and then we wrote down how our employees should look like or what values that we want them to have, and when we got them vacations, we match that.

So one of our last hire, we really looked into — so I checked his social profiles and I found out that he is an outdoor person that he wants to make a difference with the work that he does. That he is looking for a job where he can do something that changes the world. So I thought this was a perfect fit although he was still pretty new in this area, he just finished his school but I thought we can teach — You know it’s the values that are more important. You can teach the skills but if the person doesn’t fit then it doesn’t really have a future.

So the fit is first and then the rest will come and we do a lot of online education. We signed up with Digital Marketers and we try to find for our employees, we help them to find their passion. So he started to help with project management but he is also a really good writer and we encouraged him to try different things and then we encouraged him to do some further classes and to have some additional certifications. So I think he is now going in the direction that really likes working with social media and he’s a good writer. So he might at one point not to do project management anymore but go in a different direction and rehire someone else for project management.

So we really try to the value fit is first then the expertise we can help them with that and teach. Then we also want to help them to find their passion because I want people that are excited to come to work. I want people that want to build the agency with us and be passionate about non-profit, obviously.

[0:30:19.7] BOK: Yeah, that sounds like imagining being someone who's looking for work or looking for a team to be a part of, that's really valuable. Like them being able to say connected with my values but also then work with the team that really genuinely cares about their, as you say, connecting to their passion rather than fitting them into a specified pre-defined role.

[0:30:41.8] KH: Yeah and because we ask more team length, we have the opportunity to try different things. We're flexible with our hours like if he wants, he can work from home. So yeah, it's just we want to make it fun and I want them to come to work and say, "Hey what can we do today?"

[0:31:00.2] BOK: Brilliant, yeah inspiring. Okay, so I'd love to keep talking but we are beginning to run out of time. So I've got one final question; looking forward to the future, for the future of Non-Profit Today, what do you see as the opportunities and the direction that you would like to go in?

[0:31:16.9] KH: So do you mean as an agency like growth wise or?

[0:31:20.5] BOK: Yeah as an agency whether that is growth wise or anything or any other — what is the vision?

[0:31:26.6] KH: Yeah, so I think our vision is to be market leader in the non-profit marketing sector for Western Canada within the next few years and of course if we want to grow our team. We still want a small team and I would prefer having a small team here and then work with virtual assistants. So just to keep the head cost down as well and to be flexible and also because we are from an international background, we are open. I think diversity is important.

Diversity is important to us and we try to implement that into our daily work and in Canada, we have a lot of different nationalities like in Red Deer. Red Deer is a small town. We only have a

100,000 citizens but if you go outside and you see Filipinos, you see people from Mexico, from Sweden, from Germany. It's like a big melting pot and I really enjoy that and I think this gives us strength and yeah, I think we want to be a really diverse creative agency and leader in our field for Western Canada.

[0:32:34.8] BOK: Outstanding. Thank you so much for joining me here and for sharing so much. I really appreciate that and appreciate your time.

[0:32:41.8] KH: You're welcome.

[0:32:43.3] BOK: Just to finish up, anybody who's listening who wants to find out a little bit more about you and the agency, where can we point them to?

[0:32:50.2] KH: The best way is to go to our website, Non-Profit Today, and you can connect with me through LinkedIn and you can also find me on Twitter and Facebook.

[0:32:59.9] BOK: Great and as usual, we'll put the links on the show notes on happyporchradio.com. Thanks again Kerstin.

[0:33:05.2] KH: Thank you Barry.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:33:12.3] BOK: You can get all the links and notes from this episode on happyporchradio.com where you can also find out how to send us questions, feedback and get involved in the conversation about this series. If you enjoyed the show please share with anyone else who might enjoy it too. Thanks for listening.

[END]