

EPISODE 33

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:04.1] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the Creative Empire Podcast. Each week, Reina Pomeroy, the life and biz success coach and Christina Scalera, the attorney for creatives are taking you up close and personal with successful influencers in the creative community and tackling your biggest business hurdles. Their mission is to help you, creative entrepreneurs, think beyond your daily biz so you can make the brave decisions that build your Creative Empire.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:36.8] CS: Welcome back everybody to another episode of the creative empire podcast. I am Christina Scalera and I am here with Reina Pomeroy.

[0:00:42.8] RP: Hey there.

[0:00:42.4] CS: How's it going?

[0:00:45.2] RP: It's good.

[0:00:46.6] CS: Awesome. I am also here today, our guest today Irene Hardy — I almost said Fairmont. She just got married, and Irene is the creative director and owner of Magnolia House Creative, which is an all comprehensive design firm. You are also a brand designer and you are also kind of a strategist in a way. I'm really excited to dig in to your work today and to talk to you today about what that's like for you. You guys have definitely seen Irene's work, she has had some very big successes in the creative world, one of her clients is Heather Crabtree, so you probably seen Heather's websites.

So without further ado, hey Irene.

[0:01:29.1] IH: Hey, thanks for having me.

[0:01:30.2] CS: Yeah, of course.

[0:01:30.4] RP: We're so excited to talk to you.

[0:01:33.2] CS: Yeah. So give us a little bit of a background, tell us how did you go from entering the creative world to where you are today?

[0:01:42.9] IH: Yeah, so I actually, I think for me it's really important to go back even before I entered the creative world. So one of the things that a lot of people don't know about me is that I actually didn't have — I don't have a design background, I didn't get a design degree in college. I am going into college in for the first few years of college, I was hell bent on going to medical school.

I actually, my undergraduate degree is in economics, I took every single medical school pre rec, I took the MCAT, I did everything and then at the moment where I had everything finished I was almost ready to apply, I was like, "You know what? I don't think I want to do this." So at that point I really did start to kind of soul search of what did I actually want to do if I didn't want to go to medical school and throughout college I had been freelancing as a graphic designer just kind of on the side, I never took it seriously.

And from there I kind of took that passion and a few kind of corporate marketing jobs, worked for a lot of fun startups, I worked for a wedding magazine for a while and then just really settled into my own style and my own groove and that's when Magnolia House Creative was born. So yeah, it was definitely like a very winding, very halter path but it's been great, I've been so lucky to end up with some amazing clients to get to do some really fun, really exciting work.

[0:03:06.3] RP: That is so cool. I think I knew that about you but I didn't put the pieces together that you hadn't gone to get training in graphic design. You have such a great eye. The first time I met you was your website and that picture — you know what I'm talking about.

[0:03:25.3] IH: I know.

[0:03:26.0] CS: Can you describe it for our audience?

[0:03:29.0] IH: Okay, it's this photo and people are always like, "Oh my god, how did you get that?" Literally you all that is a shutter stock photo. That is not something I had customer designed, I was digging deep in there and I found that image and that just resonates, it's so what my brand is all about. It's those gorgeous shot of some really fun citrus, I think there was pomegranate and all that on a marble table top.

I did find it, it was like a couple of years ago, so it was a little bit before the whole marble explosion. So it was really exciting, it was definitely very fresh and unique. I just always love citrus, I think I even had something on Instagram today about like I love citrus for like eating it, for drinking it in the form of margarita's or whatever else you want to put in there and just looking at it, it's just so beautiful and it's so fun.

[0:04:26.0] RP: You draw a lot of inspiration from it, that's cool.

[0:04:28.1] IH: I do, I definitely do. As I've evolved as a business, my whole brand has really become built around citrus and especially that, just clean, classic black and white with those fun pops of color. So yeah, that's definitely become a big part of the brand.

[0:04:46.7] CS: Yeah, thanks Irene. Speaking of your branding, you've recently launched an email campaign that did pretty well, we were talking about it before we came on the air and you said something really interesting also before we came on and you said that, "I am the worst person at email marketing, I am not good at email marketing at all," and I think the results will beg to differ. So can you tell us a little bit about how you did your most recent email campaign and how it was in line with that citrusy fun, fruity, fresh brand that you have?

[0:05:20.0] IH: Yeah, and I will still stand by that. I have no idea what I'm doing when it comes to email. All I can try to do is just dump some citrus fun into people's inboxes and everything that I do in my brand, I really try to focus on inspiring and delighting my audience. So if I'm inspiring and delighting, I'm doing it whether I sell anything or not, that's what the goal is there.

So yeah, recently we did have a really fun series a couple of weeks ago, this was back in June that we were looking at it, it was kind of a summer school themed series and we had a really fun

time with my readers kind of breaking down some of the myths about sales and kind of breaking down, what — if you're doing it right, how can your brand be selling for you?

A lot of my clients that I work with, I do primarily brand styling and website design. So a lot of clients come to me and say, "Okay, I need a new brand, I'm not getting the clients that I want," and I think there's this big mystery of, "Okay, I need a brand, I need to do all this over here and then how can — I meanwhile, how do I start selling my services?" And I think that especially for entrepreneurs starting out, I know for myself it was this way, that's scary.

How are you supposed to sell yourself to people? I was like, "Okay, what am I, like a Chinese restaurant?" Like do I go put flyers under people's doors and be like, "Hey, anybody want a website?" I don't know? Do you have to put on like a pair of heels and go to a chamber of commerce event and like hang out with sweaty car sales man? I don't know.

So I think that for me is, with my clients, that's what I try to leave them with and that's really what this whole series was about was how do we use your brand? This thing that is so critical to your business and just so big and whole and robust? How can you use that to make sales easy for you? That was kind of the content of that, it worked out to be really fun over the week, just working with a lot of different creative entrepreneurs in all different walks of life with figuring out how do we take you from the amazing work that you're doing, layer on the brand and then get those sales coming in.

[0:07:40.4] RP: Yeah, before we kind of dive in to that, I wouldn't like for you to break that down for us. What email system do you use? Do you use Mail Chimp? Do you use ConvertKit?

[0:07:50.1] IH: I am brand new to ConvertKit, I will tell you that in like the first two or three years of my business, I had Mail Chimp and I probably sent out like 12 emails total. Because I was spending so much time trying to make them look beautiful and I don't know, it just didn't really work for me.

But I have, I've recently switched to ConvertKit and I probably sent double the amount of people just with ConvertKit that I have previously. One other things that's been really helpful with that switch is ConvertKit will let you tag subscribers. I let all my subscribers now and they subscribe

to my list. They have to identify themselves. So they have to say like, “I’m in this tier for like the citrus porn, I’m a wedding vendor, I’m a service provider, I sell products.” We’ve got this categories that we can break it down and that makes it so much easier because then instead of just writing to this big mythical Magnolia House reader, I can segment all the emails and actually talk to specific people about like specific problems that I know I can help them solve.

[0:08:57.3] RP: Beautiful. So Irene, tell us a little bit about how it is that you build a brand that sells for you, can you break down the steps for us?

[0:09:05.1] IH: Yeah, absolutely. So surprisingly, the first step doesn’t involve beautiful mood boards and color pallets and logos and typography. It’s really important the first step to building your brand that sells is starting with your actual products and services. This is one of the most important things and I really work with my clients on this because we don’t work with businesses who are the kind of businesses that throw up a sales page, expect to sell a thousand seats in a course and then kind of under deliver, or deliver a lacklustre course.

That this kind of sales and this kind of branding works for businesses who are really selling their hearts out, who are delivering something that’s so valuable and so wonderful to their clients. You have to start from that spot, you have to know that what you’re offering your clients is important and valuable and it’s priced appropriately. So that’s really the first step is to build that foundation. From there the second step then is all about communication and this is where the brand styling comes in as a component and it’s a really important component.

A lot of our clients are in kind of visual industries, whether that’s weddings, whether that’s creative entrepreneurship, or coaching, or consulting. This is the point where now it’s time to communicate all that value and what I like to tell my clients is, you know, if you’ve done your homework in the first step, when you start to get to the point in your brand and where you start to get to the point where you’re starting to communicate what you’re doing, the more that your clients learn about you, the more they’re going to fall in love with you.

If you know that you got your services nailed down and you know who you’re serving rock solid with this then it’s not a question — you don’t need any sneaky sales tactics, you don’t need long sales pages or tricky emails or cold calls or any of that nonsense. You just need to just share

and just express, communicate what you're delivering, communicate that value and your customers are going to stand up and identify themselves.

So that's what we're doing in that second part and this is probably the most time and labor intensive, this starts with beautiful branding that feels authentic to you, so it's something that it works with you and with your message to tell your story and it's just all about having those clients fall in love with you.

So there's the visual components to that, which we love working with on clients. There's the website and there's definitely "this is an opportunity to just show a level of professionalism and to put your clients at ease". We're doing that and then at the same time it's also you deciding the intangibles of your brand, what are your values? What will you commit to doing and what will you commit to never doing on behalf of your clients?

That's a huge part of pairing this visual side of things with the intangible kind of the core messaging part. So that's kind of this like magic thing and when that happens, if you've got services that you know people need, if you know who you're offering them to, if you price them appropriately and if you've communicated at all with your brand messaging and your brand visuals, you're going to sell like crazy. It doesn't have to be this hard, it's not that complicated.

[0:12:39.3] RP: Yeah, it's like hello wait list right?

[0:12:41.5] IH: Right, it's just like, "Hey guys, I have this amazing thing, let me explain to you, let me communicate to you why it's what you need and what you want," and there's nothing sleazy about it. You know, first time entrepreneurs are always scared of the pitch, they don't want to sound sales-y and it feels really inauthentic but if you're selling, if you know that your products rock, you're helping people by telling them about them and helping people by communicating that.

So that's all this marketing is, it's just a way of communicating that story. Those are kind of the first two steps and those are heavy, those are hard work but it doesn't have to be super complicated and it's definitely, wherever you are in your business, there are ways to make it happen for you. So it doesn't have to be a huge branding package. Maybe it's just some great

style typography in a fit cotton business card. There's a lot of ways to make it happen no matter where you are.

[0:13:38.5] RP: Okay, I have a quick question. So are there any exercises or activities they can get to the bottom of, if they're kind of DIY-ing it, right? If they are doing this on their own and don't have the thousands of dollars to invest in a brand style as you call them, what would you suggest they kind of take a look at or journal about or think about?

[0:14:00.2] IH: Yeah, that's a great question. One of the things and this is not like I'm not breaking any ground here but really, sitting down and figuring out your ideal client can really unlock a lot of your brand. Sitting down and giving your ideal client a name and talking about what she likes and what she doesn't like and make a Pinterest board full of her style, what if she looked like, that can really help you untangle a lot of the visual side of really what you're looking for in your brand.

Other resources, you know, if you're DIY-ing it, keeping it as simple as possible so anybody can put together a great color pallet, it doesn't require an expensive designer. Picking fabulous font and jumping into Canva and just really working on making sure all the letters align beautifully and just putting together something really simple is great. Squarespace is a great resource, we love Squarespace websites for our clients and they're easy to make something that's pretty professional.

A small well designed website that doesn't have any broken links and doesn't have any missing images is so much more impactful than a crazy complicated WordPress website that only works half the time and on half the browsers. So there's definitely, if you're starting from a place of "this is my ideal client and this is what she and I have in common and this is what we both love in terms of visuals", it's definitely possible to make a lot of progress on your own.

[0:15:36.6] CS: Yeah, I agree, one hack that I like and that I've used in the past, and let me know what you think about this Irene. I love to look at websites that have a huge budget, something like Anthropology or Sephora and look at the way that they're designing or the colors that they're using or not necessarily copying them, but getting inspiration from them and doing the things that they're doing because they do have the resources for tons of brand directors and

art directors and graphic designers and so just kind of looking at what they're doing and then making it your own.

[0:16:08.4] IH: Absolutely. This is something I tell my clients just over and over again, "It's just not that complicated." There are amazing designers out there that do crazy things that I can't even dream of, but putting together just like a beautiful brand, it doesn't have to be that hard. You're not copying if you're going to a site like Anthropology that you love and you're looking at their color pallets and you're looking at your typography.

A lot of these things are classic combinations for a reason and then taking those foundations or those building bricks that resonate with you and then applying them to your unique brand, that's a great way to go. I love that tip.

[0:16:54.6] CS: Yeah, I heard you say two things that I think are huge myths in the industry. So thank you for bringing them up. One of them is that, as you were talking earlier, you said that sharing is really important and I think that a lot of creatives that I've met feel like they should hold back and that they should not share everything that they should save the best stuff for their paid content because they don't want to rip off the buyers or whatever, they don't want to give away too much or give away their secrets or something like that.

I do think there is a fine line of the community over competition movement versus giving away all of your trade secrets. But the sharing aspect of it, I feel like we've been in discussions, I know — Irene and I actually met at the Illume Retreat and we were in discussions that seriously could have taken four days nonstop. I felt like we shared a lot but then really, it's limited by the amount of time that you have. So I love that you gave so freely of yourself in your email newsletters. Could you just kind of hit on that? I think it's a myth but I don't know, what do you think? Is sharing good, bad, different, whatever?

[BREAK]

[00:18:02.3] ANNOUNCER: Are you enjoying the show? It would mean so much to Reina and Christina if you take two minutes and head to our iTunes and leave a review. It doesn't take much time but it helps them bring you more value packed content.

Back to the convo ladies.

[BACK TO INTERVIEW]

[0:18:18.2] IH: Yeah, I mean I think a lot of it goes back, we were talking about figuring out like what are your products and services and just really thinking about, “Okay, what is the unique way that I’m helping people?” That doesn’t have to change. That might be, if you’re selling products, that might be your trade secret of your amazing printer that nobody else knows about and that you’ve tested a thousand printers and found the one person that can do this right. That’s a trade secret. That is like, you are under no obligation to share that information.

But just generally, for me I think, if it’s not something that’s integral to what I’m selling, it’s just helpful to share and it’s great, you can really help somebody out. One thing that I think also makes a really big difference to you is if you know who your ideal client is, your ideal client is going to hire you anyway whether you’ve shared it or not. Typically we work with larger brands, we work with people that have been in business for a few years, you have kind of a larger budget and are looking for something really custom when it comes to their brand.

So working through how I work and some tips for DIY-ing it, that’s not taking away from my business at all, that’s just sharing knowledge that I built up over the years that might be helpful to somebody else and it really, it’s not a zero sum game. So I think that’s really important to remember. Another thing I do like to think about to you, especially in my email and newsletter is think about the information that, or a lot of what I like to do is try to kind of train my clients to be good clients.

When I’m thinking about the content and information that I want to share, I’m not just thinking about what are all the things that I know that somebody might want to learn from me, but also, what do I want my clients to know? Because as this whole process of just trying to inspire and delight them through Instagram, through my email newsletter as they get to know me, I also have this opportunity to teach them the things that will make them amazing clients for me. So it’s really is doing myself a favor to share a lot of this information rather than hold it all back and then dump it all on a brand new client.

[0:20:38.7] RP: I totally agree with you and I think this plays out in a couple of different ways and the one that I'm specifically thinking about is the many threads that I see in the Rising Tide Society and some other groups where people are complaining about their clients and they say, "Oh well it was in my contract, they should respect me or respect that part of the contract."

Here is the thing that I notice is that, I'll read a contract but I don't memorize every single piece, and so it's our responsibility as business owners to educate our clients. Train them on how to be good clients and what they're actually...

[0:21:11.7] IH: Absolutely. Yeah.

[0:21:13.7] RP: Do you guys ever have this? I feel like that's such a good point that you're making and I love what you're saying.

[0:21:20.7] CS: Yeah.

[0:21:20.9] IH: That's a big one for me and my best tip for that is a welcome guide. I tell my clients all the time, your problem clients are probably not problem clients. They're probably dream clients, they're just scared or nervous or confused.

[0:21:37.1] RP: Yeah, they just have to be reassured.

[0:21:38.7] IH: Yeah, so if you don't answer their email for a week, of course they're scared and even though your contract might say, "Well expect four to six weeks for you to get your wedding photos back," if you haven't reminded that to them, they're wondering where you went with their wedding photos and it's not because they don't trust you, it's just because they've never done this before and they're investing a ton of money in you.

[0:22:04.1] CS: I I mean I totally agree. My dad, he was in sales and I mean, he is the king of this. He repeats things over and over again and it's because if you are working in sales, you have to repeat things at least three times for someone to even hear you. So when people aren't

even hearing you, when we have this virtual clients that we're not even meeting face to face, it's going to take a lot more than three times of you're saying something.

So I think the client magazine is brilliant. I love intro videos, Reina, you're great at this just for laying down the rules and kind of introducing people to the content, and I love what you guys are saying. By the time this podcast comes out, I will have a course for my trademark application clients because I find that they all have the same kinds of fears and concerns and so I'm just going to address that and give them a resource that they can reference at any time that's just a little more interactive. But Irene, you're so good at this with the client magazines and things.

[0:23:04.3] IH: Thank you, I mean, I think one of the magazine is a great — whether it's a PDF or a physical magazine, I think it's a really great thing, especially if you make it beautiful because people can hold on to it and they can come back for it. A lot of what's in my welcome magazine that I send my clients is stuff we've said on the phone or stuff that's listed on the website but if they have this touch point, they can go back, they can answer their own questions and just keep the process moving more smoothly.

[0:23:33.3] RP: I was that kid in college or before freshman orientation I got that entire packet and I literally read every single line and highlighted things whereas some people probably just like threw it in the corner or something.

[0:23:45.1] IH: Yeah.

[0:23:46.5] RP: So I want to know all of that stuff. Even if you publish it, it's nice to have it in front of you and be like okay, this is what I can expect and this is what I need to know. I think it does a favor for you as a vendor but also puts the clients at ease. So I think that's brilliant. Just a quick question, I think we were talking about how to build that brand that sells for you, and you said have that — number one was built that foundation, number two was communication. Were there other steps to that? Did I miss that?

[0:24:15.1] IH: yeah, there's just one last step. The last step is definitely the easiest and it's the most fun step. But basically it's just making introduction. So this is the part I think where people

get scared and this is also the part I think people start with, not knowing how to have their foundation built. So you have to have your foundation built, you have to have your great products and services and you have to have a way of communicating your brand story.

Once you've done that, that's when you can start just introducing yourself with abandon. That looks like so many different things, that looks like posting in Facebook groups, it looks like creating your own Facebook group. It's introducing yourself to people on Instagram and this isn't like an introduction in the form of like, "Hey, I'm a brand stylist, do you want me to do your brand?"

This is like pretend you're at a cocktail party, be normal and just like, "Hey girl, I like your shoes," that's all this is. Once you've introduced yourself to people then keep inspiring and keep delighting them and then occasionally, you'll make calls and say, "Hey, I'm booking clients for this or just a heads up, I only have four wedding spaces left for 2018. If you think that we're a great fit, give me a holler," and that's all it takes. Your clients, if you've done your first two steps right, your clients are going to raise their hands and identify themselves and be jumping to work with you.

[0:25:45.8] RP: I think people get scared. People get scared when they don't do those first two steps that they've outlined and they feel like they need to jump into three and say, "Look at me, look at me and buy my things," and people are like, "Who are you?" What words of encouragement would you give to somebody who feels a little bit nervous like I haven't gotten a sales to actually follow your methodology?

[0:26:11.8] IH: Yeah, I mean I would say, the first thing is that it's just, it doesn't have to be hard, it doesn't have to be scary and it doesn't have to be that serious. I'll say this, my husband is an emergency room doctor. He comes home sometimes and I can't put his scrubs in the wash because there's like body part on them, okay? What he does all day is really serious. If you're an entrepreneur, you are allowed to have fun and it doesn't have to be super scary or super serious.

So definitely take a deep breath, pour yourself a margarita and start just introducing yourself to people on Instagram and just relax, have fun and really let your personality shine through. So

that's kind of my first piece of advice is just like, take a deep breath, let go of the panic, this is supposed to be fun, this is supposed to be exciting and so just let yourself enjoy that part of it.

[0:27:05.8] RP: What a great perspective. Yeah, this is not life or death. Yes, we want to pay the bills, we want to make it as entrepreneurs but nobody is dying by not making the sale today.

[0:27:18.0] IH: Yeah, absolutely. I'll be the first to admit, I'm a huge perfectionist when it comes to my work. But sometimes you have to step back and you're like, "You know what? That didn't quite right from ZMYK to RGB, it's a little off and you know what? I'm just going to go to bed. It's okay. Most people aren't going to notice, it still looks great." So yeah, just remember that this is supposed to be fun and if it's not fun then it's time to figure out something else to do.

So that would be my first piece of advice, and then as far as kind of getting started with those steps, just sitting down with a blank sheet of paper and just sketching out what you want your life to look like. Who are the clients that you want to be working with in six months or in a year, and where are those clients, and how can you serve them? And just figuring out as soon as you figure out the way that you can serve clients in a way that nobody else can or in a way that other people are already doing, you don't have to be completely unique all the time.

But just find a way where you can really add value to people's lives and to people's businesses. Then zero in on that and then just explore it with confidence. I think the confidence, it all comes from that first step of knowing what you're doing is important, knowing it's important, knowing you're adding value to people's lives and once you've got that confidence, it's going to radiate from you and you're going to be excited to tell people about what you're doing.

[0:28:53.0] RP: I love the two words that you keep using and I don't think I've heard a lot of people talk about it this way, but it's all about the inspire and the delight and that's such a cool combo of words.

[0:29:05.4] IH: Yeah, I want people to know you can do this. Four years ago — I'm trying to think, what year is it? Like five years ago, I was wearing Nike shorts and sneakers and sitting in biology classes in college. You can do this. There is such an amazing opportunity right now for people to become entrepreneurs and to live a life following their passions and doing work that

really, really fires the map. It's more accessible than ever. So just getting out there and making a mess and then learning along the way, you know, it's great.

[0:29:41.6] CS: Yeah. So Irene, what is one actionable step that someone could take today to start to build their own creative empire?

[0:29:49.3] IH: Great question. So what I would say is, the first thing to do is to take a really good look at your core, look at what you're offering people and make sure that you are giving them crazy amounts of value for what you're asking in return.

With that, that will be your light post or your north star of where do you need to go next is once you know you're delivering something that's amazing then you'll know what to do from there. You'll be able to kind of follow all of the different information that's either so much information that's available online, different ways to market yourself and brand yourself and all of that. Once you know your unique core, once you've got that based, then you're ready to start building a brand around it.

[0:30:39.7] CS: I love that, thank you so much for sharing so much actionable, wonderful advice today Irene. Where can people go and find you and get more great tips?

[0:30:48.8] IH: My pleasure. Well people can find us over at Magnoliahousecreative.com and there's links there, you can sign up for our email newsletter where sometimes it's just cocktail recipes and sometimes its big business tips. Another exciting thing, we are just about to launch, by the time this episode airs as we should have launched, a library of downloadable templates.

So if you're not at the point where for whatever reason you don't want to work with the designer on something, we're going to have resources for you, for things like those welcome magazines your pricing templates. Even your Squarespace templates that don't look like they're just typical square space templates. So you can hop on over again at Magnoliahousecreative.com and check those out, download whatever you need and yeah, while you're there, the blog is there full of great resources and sign up for our email list.

[0:31:38.3] CS: Oh my gosh, I'm so excited, you guys can't see it.

[0:31:39.9] RP: I am too.

[0:31:41.5] CS: I'm like literally jumping up and down in my seat because I have been asking Irene for this.

[0:31:45.2] IH: I know, this is...

[0:31:48.5] CS: This is so awesome. I'm so glad you're doing that. Okay awesome.

[0:31:50.4] RP: Take my money, right? Take my money. You can have it. Sweet, thank you.

[0:31:55.6] CS: Oh my gosh, I am so excited. I can't wait to jump off and talk to you more about that later. Thank you so much for joining us today and I know that this is going to be a huge valuable resource for everybody. Please go to her website and check it out. I'm so excited to share this with everybody.

[0:32:11.8] RP: Thanks for coming on the show Irene.

[0:32:14.8] IH: Yeah, thanks so much for having me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:32:19] ANNOUNCER: Are you ready to build your own empire? For more information, show notes, downloads and tips on how to do it, head to www.creativeempire.co where you can find out more about this week's episode and the two lovely ladies behind it all, encouraging you to build your own creative empire.

If you enjoyed this week's show, it would mean so much to Reina and Christina if you could take two minutes to go to iTunes and leave a review. It's a little thing that makes a big difference for the show.

[END]