

EPISODE 26

[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]

[00:00:35.3] CS: Hey all, this is Christina Scalera and I'm here with Reina Pomeroy and our very special guest today is Melissa Cales. Melissa is the brand designer, the graphic designer and the brains and the beauty behind Brand Sweet Co. and most recently, The White Desk Sessions with Laura Watson, a photographer in Georgia as well.

We're super excited to talk with her today because this episode is a little bit different. We're taking a more mentorship based approach to our questions and we're really excited to talk to Melissa about scaling her business, growing her business on a budget and some other topics that are probably pretty applicable to you as you're starting out and figuring this entrepreneurship thing out.

So with that being said, Melissa why don't you just introduce us and give us a little bit of a background on Brand Sweet Co. and the white desk sessions and let us know where each of those businesses at?

[00:01:26.6] MC: Okay, so Brand Sweet Co. is a brand strategy and design company where I focus on working with female creative entrepreneurs to really figure out how to tell their brand story, both visually and in their marketing efforts and that is a company that has kind of been on my heart to create for a little over a year and a half.

This is my fourth business in about 12 years and the first three totally failed and so I'm combining just basically everything that I have learned there and in past corporate world experience to try and help other people go from struggling to thriving and just get there a little bit faster and not hit so many speed bumps along the way.

Then the White Desk Sessions is a brand photography venture that was I started with Laura Watson, who actually Christina connected the two of us and we've become biz besties and the purpose of that is to help creatives tell their brand story through their branding photos and really get their brand across and just have really great brand of photos that work for social media, their website, give them some styled side that work with their brand as well.

[00:02:34.8] RP: Love that, so let's jump right in. What question can we help you answer or what's happening in your business that we can help you speed up your process?

[00:02:45.9] MC: Yeah, so one of the biggest challenges that I've faced is actually a good problem to have. I launched Brand Sweet Co. actually on Valentine's Day so not really that long ago and it has taken off much faster than I ever hope for or anticipated for and so one of the struggles that I'm really having right now is how do I scale everything when the growth is happening so rapidly?

[00:03:11.0] RP: I love that question. Christina do you want to go first?

[00:03:13.4] CS: Yeah, honestly this is something that I am struggling with as well but unlike Melissa, I didn't have the brand in place to start and the key is really outsourcing and more than anything I've learned this from you Reina but my method has always been to always hire before the need is there and so now, I'm kind of playing catch up because that's what I've been doing in the past is hiring before the need for the work was there.

So I had a VA, retained her for 10 hours of work a month and didn't have 10 hours a month for her to fulfill but once that started happening, I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have that VA there to format my contracts and just send the e-mails and do different things like that and so that was really helpful. The other thing that a lot of, like where you're at in your business now and this can be really scary, I think Reina can talk a little bit about this more than I can.

But making the investments in your business now so that you don't have to scramble later and that often looks like spending an upfront cost that may be more than you're comfortable spending and so it's really the only way that I see businesses grow. The other option is to do it all yourself and kind of come out with that big launch and survive off of that big launch while you're building because in my opinion, it's not as sustainable to try to do everything all at once.

It's much easier to have that big launch, whatever that means to you, maybe that's a couple thousand dollars, maybe that's \$10,000, maybe you do a big push of clients for a while and then things kind of go quiet while you reassess, rehire and start to build up the team on the backend, the strategy on the backend and then the next launch plan on the backend to make it quadruple the launch that you had before.

[00:04:57.2] RP: Melissa I have a question for you. So do you have anyone on your team or had you had anyone on your team yet?

[00:05:04.0] MC: So I have some areas where I have been outsourcing and getting some help and areas where I started interviewing and trying to find the right people. I wouldn't say I have a solid team or really great go-to resources but it's something that I'm working on and I know that I definitely need in order to kind of sustain the moment that I've got right now. I guess where I'm struggling is what are the biggest areas where I can spend some money now to get the most bang for my buck in the long run?

[00:05:33.9] RP: Yeah, so what I would recommend, and this is such a simple exercise but brain dumping literally every single thing in your business that you do from doing your financials to writing your blog post, to posting your social media or whatever it is, literally writing all of those things down and color coding them.

So for me, it was red, yellow and green, very simple linear a thinker here. Red is, "I don't want to do them, I want to get rid of that right now." Yellow was, "Okay, I could maybe go on for a little bit doing this." And Green was, "I love this and I cannot outsource this, or I want to continue to grow that one and might need help in it but right now, I don't want to let that go."

So just doing that and categorizing it and all those red things became a job posting, a job description essentially and I did not hire a “VA” to start but what I really wanted was somebody to fulfill all of the things that I was looking for. So if that VA didn’t have those skills that was the minimum qualification. If you didn’t want to do these things that I was asking you to take off my plate, I wasn’t going to give you the job. I really wanted somebody who was eager to do those and to continue to learn.

So I love what Christina said about doing it before you feel like you’re ready and taking it slow. I think you have to find the right fit of person. So you can’t just dump everything on them and then trust that or they haven’t earned your trust yet so I think you can give them piece by piece, show them what your company culture is, what you expect of them and to be able to fold them in gently rather than being like, “Here you go,” dump them into the ocean and then I’m out, I like expect you to know everything, because that’s just not how it is. So does that resonate for you?

[00:07:23.7] MC: Yeah, I think that that’s actually a really good way of thinking it because the way that I have approached it so far has been “what are the quickest, easiest things that I can outsource?” And it’s been a lot of little fragments and things that I’m having to put a lot of time into really writing out the introductions correctly.

With that red, yellow, green line of thinking, my first red flag is I don’t want to do books and that’s the one thing that I’ve been kind of putting off, outsourcing that’s probably the first thing that I need to outsource is really getting these financials in order so that I even know how much I do have to put towards the team.

[00:07:59.8] RP: I have somebody for you.

[00:08:03.4] CS: Melissa what are you outsourcing right now and this might not be — I don’t want you to think about outsourcing in the traditional sense of, “Oh I have to hire.” I want you to think of it as lead pages or MailChimp, who is taking care or what tools are you using that are taking care of somethings for you possibly even automated like through MailChimp if you have an automated series or something?

[00:08:24.7] MC: Yeah, the one thing that I think was to my advantage with how much time I put into planning this company before I actually really did the work of creating it was I wanted things to be as automated as possible because that was one of the areas where I always failed in past businesses.

So I have Xavier Connections all over the place to automate things. I use HoneyBook for all of my contracts and initial client questionnaires that whole process, the peanut process because it automates them when it's time to pay HoneyBooks. I also SumoMe for a lot of my e-mail list building. I pay for that, the list builder pro, which is worth every penny.

I use ConvertKits, Asana — Asana is my project management tool, which literally saves my life. So those are the core of my systems and then as far as outsourcing, right now I have somebody that is helping me taking my content and crafting my e-mail series for different opt in offers because that's an area where I know the strategy of it inside and out but I tend to obsess and spend eight hours writing one three paragraph e-mail.

So I just realized done is better than perfect. They know kind of the directions to go, they know the strategy and I just need to hand it to someone else that can get that done in an hour or two. So I am outsourcing that. I am using CoSchedule and Buffer for all my social media and Later for Instagram and I am outsourcing a little bit of my production work.

So when I am done designing things for clients, there's a few hours of different file types and changing colors and exporting things a dozen different ways that's three or four hours' worth of work per person that is a much better use of my time elsewhere. So I am outsourcing a lot of that as well.

[00:10:08.6] CS: That's great.

[00:10:09.0] RP: Good for you. It sounds like you're already doing a lot of outsourcing.

[BREAK]

[00:10:12.3] 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]

[00:10:28.4] MC: I'm trying to. Most of it so far is systems. The production stuff and some of the e-mail writing is very new. It's just been within the last month because 18 hours days and forgetting to eat meals and that type of life is just not fun. So I realized pretty quickly that it was not sustainable, it is not good for my health and I just need to start somewhere.

[00:10:51.2] CS: Yeah. If you had a dream team member that you could hire right now and like what Reina was talking about, who would this dream team member would be?

[00:10:59.6] MC: Oh my gosh, it would be somebody that really got the intentions behind my brand and the culture and my goals for my brand and what I want to achieve when I talk to people and could help me actually write some content, because that's the one area that I feel like right now that I need to hold onto. Most of what I talk about and share is not just simple cut and dry branding, it's a lot more than that and so that's a piece where I feel like I'm going to have to hold onto for a while.

It would be somebody that understood that and can very closely mimic my tone and style and totally understand marketing and social media and all of these online tools that we use and could really help take a lot off that off my plate because I think that's where I spend almost as much time as I spend actually working on projects for clients.

[00:11:50.2] RP: That's so interesting because I don't see a lot of copywriting type VA's, right? People who are wanting to do Instagram captions and blog posts and I don't know what else you might need but I don't see a lot of that.

[00:12:05.6] MC: Yeah, I don't either. One thing I have found that is very new is the person that's helping me with my e-mails is actually going through my Instagram because it's kind of my "micro blog" if you will, and she's pulling things from there and figuring out how can we take this one caption and expand it into a blog post or an e-mail series or things along that nature? So she's helping but not actually doing all of the work.

[00:12:32.0] RP: Yeah, that content marketing stuff can be really time consuming and it takes a lot of brain power to do that especially if you aren't trained in it.

[00:12:42.4] MC: Absolutely.

[00:12:43.4] RP: That's definitely a need in the market. We're creating job descriptions right now.

[00:12:49.4] MC: So can I just pitch right now if there's anybody that has that skill set that you will just email me?

[00:12:54.5] RP: Yeah, do it. Go find Melissa if you have these skills and if you're interested in this job right?

[00:13:02.1] MC: Yes absolutely.

[00:13:04.0] RP: Yeah, we have the power to connect you with people right now, this is cool. So what else can we answer for you about stealing your business or outsourcing or growing on a budget?

[00:13:14.5] MC: So I think the next area that I'm trying to tackle and figure out is creating passive income streams and sort of where do you start and how to build that out? Because there are so many different ways that you can do it. There's courses and there's products and there's a dozen different options and I want to figure out how to start small and then grow bigger and that's the big scary object to me right now.

[00:13:39.9] RP: Christina?

[00:13:40.9] CS: Yeah, I love passive income and passive income streams, which are anything but passive. But well, for one, Melissa and I have talked off air about one thing that she could do. So I do know that she knows about that. I have been trying to get her to make something for me for a while but yeah.

[00:13:55.6] MC: It's going to happen.

[00:13:56.8] CS: I think generally, you need to put something out there. My first digital product ever was like a \$2 download on Etsy and it was literally I gave you a list of all the tools and resources that I used in that business that I had then, that blog and so that was really helpful for a lot of people because it was something that I would have used when I first starting.

I had no idea what the difference between WordPress and Squarespace is and when we get further along in our business, we forget that there is that starting point for people. Something even as simple as that, anything that I give away as a freebie is something that I could have made into digital content as a workbook or worksheet or something like that.

So just getting something out there and knowing that it's probably going to suck and in six months you'll have other products that don't suck but it's really like jumping in the water and I know that that's a really cliché analogy but once you're in the water, you're like, "Oh okay, this isn't as cold as I thought." But just putting it out there and figuring out who the product is for.

Then I'm a big fan of making the minimum viable product possible, launching it into a beta audience, so maybe it's just your newsletter subscribers maybe it's not even public and then trying it out from there, expanding on it from there and making the graphics better from there, making the content better from there, adding supplementary offers from there. So do you think that there's like a course or a digital product or something like that that you have in mind other than the one we discussed like off air? Sorry guys.

[00:15:31.1] MC: Yeah, there are a few. There's a couple of opportunities I have coming up to talk about branding and telling your brand story on Instagram and not really the strategy and the hashtags and the timing and all of that, but more just the story and the look and the feel and the

vibe that it gives people and so I thought of actually turning that into kind of a lower priced e-book with worksheets or something along those lines, potentially.

[00:15:58.9] CS: Yeah, do you have any blog posts right now that are very long formed?

[00:16:04.4] MC: No. So speaking of minimally viable product that's actually what my website was because I did the entire thing and launched it all in about five days. So my blog wasn't actually even live on my website until about a week ago.

[00:16:16.3] CS: Okay. Yeah so I mean one of the things that a lot of very successful bloggers have done, because our time is limited, is they will take — they will basically curate their blog post or they'll take a long form blog post and make a course out of it or something like that because they already have the outline. They already have the content and so it sounds like you have that with your Instagram.

So figuring out a way to curate the content you already have into a product might be a good first product that doesn't take much extra time, if you are just looking at something out there and try it out. What do you think Reina?

[00:16:50.0] RP: Yeah, I have a couple thoughts and I was thinking about how to ask this but I want to ask the question, what problem do you want to help people solved?

[00:17:01.5] MC: I think the biggest problem — oh, I'm sorry.

[00:17:03.9] RP: No, go ahead.

[00:17:05.9] MC: The biggest problem that I feel like I want to help people solved is just really how to make their overall brand really cohesive. Not just how it looks but how you say things and how you talk about things and making sure that the content that you're putting out there is true to the purpose of your brands and doing it in the most efficient way possible without hitting every road bump along the way.

[00:17:31.2] RP: Yeah and how that serves people, right? Because the reason why we do that is so that it's consistent and that people can trust us and all of that goodness. So I guess my question for you would be, what specific problem would you solve with each course or each product that you want to create? And that's what I would like to challenge you to think about.

What are the problems that you're seeing out there? What are the pain points that you're hearing from your audience? Whether it's on Instagram or it's in Facebook groups or just in your local community of people that you work with.

I think just as we collect blog topics or social media topics that we write about, listening to those folks helps you to create that minimum viable product because we're taking in that information from our ideal clients. Whether I'm saying, "Oh I want to create this thing and I think it's going to be awesome but I have no idea if it will take off."

[00:18:26.8] MC: No, that's a great point and I've had a lot of conversations about it and I'm also a big fan of trying to find the holes in the market. If there is an area that 900 people are all covering but there's an adjacent area that nobody is talking about, I kind of want to talk about that adjacent area. I feel like currently that's part of that gap that's happening right now as far as really succeeding on Instagram.

[00:18:54.4] RP: Love that. So how can we hold you accountable to this goal of a passive income product?

[00:19:01.7] MC: So it's actually that specific product is actually on my 90 day goals. I am focusing on 90 day goals at a time. So 90 days from today, it better be live, out there in the world.

[00:19:15.6] RP: Love that. Awesome, well thank you so much for joining us, how can everyone find you and all the cool things that you're up to?

[00:19:22.2] MC: I am @BrandSweetCo on just about everything, Instagram, Facebook, Periscope, Twitter and my website is Brandsweet.co.

[00:19:33.3] **RP:** Cool, well thank you so much for joining us and we were pumped to have you.

[00:19:37.8] **CS:** Yeah, thank you Melissa.

[00:19:38.6] **MC:** Thank you for having me. It's been awesome, thank you very much.

[00:19:42.2] **RP:** Awesome.

[00:19:42.9] **CS:** Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:19:45] **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.

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