

EPISODE 32

[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]

[00:00:35.4] CS1: Hello, welcome back for another episode of the Creative Empire Podcast. I'm Christina Scalera and I'm here with Reina Pomeroy.

[00:00:40.7] RP: Hello everybody.

[00:00:41.6] CS1: And today's guest is Courtney Slazinik. Courtney has Click It Up a Notch, which is clickitupanotch.com, where she teaches photographers how to kill it with their business. So I am going to let Courtney introduce herself and is that correct, they can find you at clickitupanotch.com?

[00:00:57.7] CS2: Yep, that's it.

[00:00:58.8] CS1: Perfect and how did you get into this? Give us a little bit of your background.

[00:01:02.0] CS2: So my background is actually in teaching. I went to college, I was an elementary school teacher for a couple of years and after I got married and had kids, my husband's job requires us to move around. So even when I was teaching, I taught in two different states and after we had children, I decided I'm going to stay home, I'm going to raise kids, it's going to be amazing and then after a couple of years, I realized, "Oh man, I need something for me," and I didn't realize that was going to happen.

I think that was a common theme for a lot of stay at home moms and I've gotten into photography because my husband accidentally broke my fancy DSLR about 10 minutes before my second daughter was born. He was nervous and moved a chair and then the camera broke and it was a thing and being the understanding wife that I am, the very next day, I was like, "You are buying me a DSLR camera," and so I'm in the hospital with my brand new baby and my camera.

I just had a friend who taught me how to get into photography and we then have moved to Japan and I started a photography project where I took a picture a day and my friends in the states kept asking me, "Well wait a minute, your pictures are getting better. What are you doing?" And then I realized, I had this epiphany moment like, "I can combine my love of teaching and my love of photography and do something for myself." I was like, "I'm just going to start this blog and teach people photography and that was six years ago and it just turned into this amazing business. It has blessed our family and I have since moved twice starting at and being able to have something that moves with me is pretty incredible.

[00:02:30.6] RP: I love that. Well, thanks for being on the show.

[00:02:32.9] CS2: Yeah, thank you for having me.

[00:02:34.8] RP: Absolutely. So one of the things that you said was so resonant for me. I left my full-time job to become a stay at home mom and realized that I really suck at that. So needing something for myself was something that resonated when you said that and I love that you'd moved around and that was something that you've done and built a business around. The flexibility that you needed for your family.

[00:02:56.9] CS2: I know.

[00:02:57.4] CS1: You guys are both military spouses.

[00:02:58.7] RP: Yay.

[00:02:58.7] CS2: Yay.

[00:03:01.4] RP: I figured as much, she said Japan.

[00:03:03.4] CS2: Yeah, who doesn't just go to Japan for fun?

[00:03:06.2] RP: Right, right. Very cool. So can you tell us a little bit about how your business has evolved since you started that blog?

[00:03:14.4] CS2: Sure, yeah. So when I started, I kind of had this dream of, "You know what will be really awesome? Is if I can get enough people to read it that I could put like two ads on the sidebar and I could make \$50 bucks a month. Wouldn't that be incredible?" And my husband was like, "That would be insane," and I'm like, "I know," and so I worked really hard that first year and just for anyone out there who is starting, I think that first year is really hard and you're putting in a lot of time and you're not getting back any return.

I remember having a conversation with my husband where he was like, "You are putting in a lot of time on this and it's all you talk about but nothing is happening, you see no traction," and I just knew like, "No, I know if I can make it to my third year because everyone says you just have to make it to your third year and that's when things change," and so that helped me to get my husband on board because it is hard when you're doing something that takes up all your free time at night because you've got two little ones at home during the day.

But I just knew it's going to be worth it and so after a couple of years, I was able to build a following and I was able to build up a Facebook page and I have an e-mail list and I started selling e-books and then I sold an online course and it's just sort of evolved in this business now and it was a hard transition to go from telling people "I have a blog", to "I have a business", and so that's been kind of fun.

[00:04:35.5] RP: That's awesome. A lot of photographers they feel like do the one on one shooting for other families or shooting weddings and then once they "make it" they'll start teaching. But for you, it sounds like that was part of the early part of your journey that you knew that you wanted to integrate photography plus the teaching component pretty early on.

[00:04:56.3] CS2: Yeah, I had tried to do taking pictures for families. I tried to do newborns which oh my gosh, you should see those pictures, they're terrible and I just realized that wasn't where my heart was. I didn't get excited about that but if I got really excited when I would go to the park and some mom was like, "Oh you're taking pictures?" And I'm like, "Sit here, I will teach you how to do it," you know? And it also helped me because I think there are several ways to have a business. I remember learning a while ago that one of the ways to have a business is to bring your people along with you on your journey and that's what I did.

Because I definitely started my blog way before I should have taught anybody photography. I definitely did not know what I was doing but they came along with me and I taught them as I went and I'm still learning stuff and we're still teaching and everything but I think it's one of those things if you have a desire to, especially if it's like an educational based business, you don't have to know everything to start it. You can just start sharing your story and people love that. They connect with you and then they come along with you and you learn together.

[00:05:59.8] RP: I think that's so important. I see that in my industry as well as others that you have to look like an expert and know all the things before you can share anything and I think that puts you in a position of vulnerability but it's also very scary because you're like, "Oh I'm making mistakes and you're here with me as you are witnessing it." So that's really cool.

[00:06:21.7] CS2: Yeah.

[00:06:22.0] CS1: Who do you feel like resonates with you? Who in your audience is someone that you may consider your ideal customer or client at this point?

[00:06:29.8] CS2: So I think I really look back onto who I was when I started and I really try and talk to that person of a mom who wants to take better pictures of their kids because that was ultimately my goal when I started. I had at that time a two-year-old and a brand new newborn and I just wanted nice pictures of my kids. I didn't have the money to hire someone to take our family pictures and I see these people with cameras very similar to mine and their pictures are stunning.

And I'm like, "Why do mine not look like that?" And to be able to learn how to take those pictures of my kids and now, we have these awesome pictures of their everyday lives which obviously right now, at their ages they don't care but I just keep telling myself like, "Someday you're going to really like these pictures I made you take."

[00:07:15.5] CS1: Yeah. I think it's really interesting what you're saying because this is something I see in a lot of business where they think that, for example, a lot of photographers they come up, they like what they're doing but they're usually not making ends meet. They're having a hard time financially and they keep doing weddings even if they don't want to because it pays the bills and then they see the next low-hanging fruit, if you will, is teaching other people and offering mentorship.

But now, everybody is doing that and so a lot of people talk a lot about having a newsletter on your site and so they immediately think, "Oh I will create this newsletter for photographers even though nothing else on my website is geared towards teaching photographers." And you've just thrown all that out the window. You're like, "No, my customers and my clients are not businesses. They're not fellow photographers," well I think you do attract some of those.

But for the most part, you're getting really clear on your audience and you're going to meet those people and you've done it in a really amazing way. Would you be comfortable sharing some of the numbers that you have on your e-mail list and how you got there? Because that's something that people just have not figured out how to do yet and it's not their fault, they just don't know.

[00:08:21.1] CS2: Yeah, I think one thing I wish I had done much sooner is start my e-mail list. I don't think I started that until about a year after I'd started my site just because when I was starting six years ago, I mean was reading everything under the sun as I could trying to figure it all out. There's so much when you start like e-mail list, social media, page use, SEO and you're like, "What do I do?" And so I focused on other things that I wish I had started focusing on e-mail list building sooner.

And so that the first year I started, I have this list and it was gathering and I e-mailed them once a month and I didn't understand the power of it and then in 2013 I think it was, I took B-School

with Marie Forleo and she helped me hone in the power of an e-mail list and I really started focusing on that and so at the time my e-mail list was about 16,000 people and I decided to, I created a free opt-in and so what you basically need to do is you can make an e-book, you can make a PDF. You can make a checklist or a resource guide, it doesn't need to be massive.

I, of course, made an e-book because I was like, "Yeah that sounds like a good idea" but I mean you could make something in 10 minutes, write up something, go into Canva and create it and you have something. It just has to be of value to your customer. It has to be a reason for them to be like, "Yes, I do want that. Here's my e-mail address," and then I created a resource guide or the e-book, I'm sorry.

I started putting opt in all around my website. So I had one in my sidebar, I had one at the top of my blog post, I had one at the bottom of my blog post, I had a pop up which I know everybody hates pop-ups. I am right there with you, I hate them too but man oh man, they work you know? It's insane how much they work and so I did those things and in three months, I doubled my e-mail list from 16,000 to 32,000, which is incredible, right?

I haven't done that again since but that just goes to show you the power of really focusing in and that was my focus. I'm going to spend my time figuring out this e-mail list thing, where do I put these opt-in boxes? What copy do I write in the pop-up? Instead of saying, "Hey, grab my free e-book," I was like, "In this e-book, you're going to figure out the number one thing that I do to take great pictures in any light in my house," and then that's intriguing like, "Oh, well what is it?" Instead of just like, "Hey, I'm going to teach you this."

You really have to use interesting copy to tease out whatever it is that you're giving. Maybe it's a checklist like, "How I use this checklist to double my client base", or something like that and then ever since then, I've just continued to really push myself to grow my list. My list is currently at a little over 50,000 but I typically clean it out quarterly and if people are cold and not opening e-mails after six months to a year, then I will delete them.

Because let's be honest, you are paying for this e-mail list and it's expensive, it adds up and I don't want to clutter someone's inbox. They may have moved on from the information I share and that is perfectly fine. If after a year you haven't opened an e-mail from me, you're in a

different spot and that's fine. So I'm just going to go ahead and remove you from the list and if you want to come back, you are welcome anytime and so I think doing that helps you keep a healthy list as well and then that just helps your open rate and click through rate and all that good stuff.

[00:11:36.4] RP: Oh my gosh your number are so inspiring, holy cow. But can we ask you how you even got to 16,000 in the first place? Because I think that that's the first hurdle of people getting to their first couple of thousand and when you're starting a list, 16,000 sounds like going to the moon.

[00:11:54.5] CS2: Yeah, it's still definitely a lot of people. For me, it was creating good content that people wanted to come to my site and then I just had a little thing saying that "If you want to continue to get free photography tips delivered to your inbox sign up here," and I am very respectful of the people on my list. They are my number one people because these people have given me their e-mail address, they have allowed me to come into their inbox, I now e-mail once maybe twice a week on free tips.

So I have changed it up but at the time, I was running and I would entice them by, "Join my e-mail list because I have a theme every month that I put in there that you only have access to on my e-mail list," or something. So if you're at five people, create that opt in and give them a reason to join and then have stuff in your newsletter that they can't get anywhere else. Also, don't call it a newsletter.

[00:12:48.2] CS1: What do you call yours?

[00:12:49.7] CS2: I realized that as I said it, like, "Don't call it that." I think mine is called VIP e-mail list or something like that and also, don't ask people to subscribe and that word is extremely overused and everyone puts the breaks on when they hear that. So ask them to join in, tell them it's exclusive. If you can change your button, don't have it say subscribe. Mine says "yes please" it could say "heck yeah" or "send it to me now" or anything that you want them to read in their head like that subliminal message like, "Yes please, I do want your e-mails in my inbox."

But just taking the time and one tip I heard is reaching out to the friends you have on Facebook and ask them. Just say like, “Hey listen, I started an e-mail list of photography tips, would you like to get on it and if you wouldn’t do you have someone who might? Could you ask one person?” And I think when I ask people to share things in my e-mail list, I’m very specific.

I’m not like, “Hey, just share this.” I’m like, “Do you know one person?” Because if you ask me to find one person, I can think of one person. But if you’re asking me to share this to everyone I know on Facebook or something I might be like, “Well most of my people I don’t know, I don’t know that but I do know that one girl at drop off at school who’s into photography. Maybe she would like this.” So now you are asking them to do one thing.

I actually did that recently. I was launching something and I said, “I understand that this is not right for you but if you know someone that might be, could you send this to one person?” And I had people including me on their e-mails and they’re like CC-ing their friend and so I think asking people to share it and asking them to share it like one or two people will definitely help you build that list.

[BREAK]

[00:14:29.8] CS: Orchestrated Designs had this to say about the podcast. She says, “After listening to these podcasts, I can’t help but feel inspired and excited to get back at it with my own business. These ladies are full of insight in real life making it a joy to tune in and to feel like you’re just getting together over coffee. I always take something away after listening and I am so thankful for their time and effort into putting these out there. Cheers ladies.”

Thank you Orchestrated Designs and thank you all for listening. It means so much to us if you leave a rating or a review on iTunes and we might just read your review and give your business a shout out if you do.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:15:04.4] CS1: Yeah and Courtney, I mean it's one thing to have a great number and we all know why it's important but what are the things that you've been able to do as a result of having this e-mail list?

[00:15:14.1] CS2: So I have been, in fact, I was just talking to my husband recently about it. It's very interesting how when you start something you have no idea where it's going to go. Like I said, I had this dream of putting some ads on my site. Which if you go to my site, there's not a single ad. I don't do that. I actually do make most of my money from my e-mail list and I do by doing webinars. So I will invite my audience to come to a webinar and then we'll sell something on there.

But whatever I sell to my e-mail list, I am extremely picky. I get pitches every day, "Can you just give us a shout out on your e-mail list? Can you do this?" And I'm like, "You know what? I don't think that's something that my audience is going to be interested in and I really value them, like I said my list," and so I want to make sure that it's not a constant pitch to them. If I do pitch something that I believe in, I will go a while where I'll just keep giving free advice.

So even if you're on my list, you never buy anything. You still find value in that but doing affiliate sales is pretty powerful on e-mail lists and then also just driving traffic to your site where you might be mentioning something from Amazon or coaching or mentoring or just having those people on there that you can launch your products to.

[00:16:29.9] CS1: Yeah, one thing that I found recently is I think it's called The Social Bluebook and I think that's what it's called but it allows you to type in the number of people that you have following you on Instagram or on your newsletter list and it actually gives you the estimated value of range of what it is worth for people to then advertise with you or for a sponsored post.

[00:16:53.1] CS2: Oh that's interesting.

[00:16:54.7] CS1: Yeah or some kind of affiliate promotion in a newsletter and it's interesting because once you get to a certain point in your business, people start to pitch you for products and I feel bad. They get really mad when I turn down their \$20 t-shirts for my newsletter list but

at the same time I'm like, "That is costing me so much money and then now I have this proof that it's a couple hundred dollars every time I send out an e-mail."

It's really convincing and I don't have a huge list like that. So even for my little list, it's so much money and so when you can see that and you can see the hard numbers of what you're actually giving up when you just give that out for free, it's really compelling to either decide to do it or not and at least then, you're empowered to know which way you've chosen but yeah, I think it's really interesting. I just did a course launch and I spent a lot of money on Facebook ads.

While I think it helped with my sales, it didn't help in the way that you would think it did because everybody came from my e-mail list. Every single person was on my e-mail list first and then they opted into the webinar and so that's really interesting. How many webinars are you doing on a monthly basis or is it a seasonal thing? I know you did one with the Rising Tide Society earlier this year and that's how we were able to all meet.

[00:18:05.3] CS2: Yeah. So when I go into my own audience, I try not to do more than once a month and sometimes we have a product that would be a good fit for my audience and sometimes I just do them as a gift to my audience like around Christmas time, I did one on how to take better pictures at Christmas time and it's a pitch-free. It's just a gift to my audience, my best friend and I came on and we just had a great time teaching.

So I try not to do once a month. My goal is quarterly but if something comes up that I'm like, "Oh man for my audience — this is perfect." I have one coming up soon that my audience is going to die for, they're so excited and I just did one last month and this one will be the next month. So it's a little sooner than I normally do them but I know that when I surveyed my audience and I ask them what do you want to learn over the next 90 days.

The overwhelming thing was this thing, I reached out, I found someone who could teach that because what they want to know is not something that I can teach and they have this amazing webinar that they're going to put together. Like I said, I am just super picky and I think when you do that your people will value you and they'll still sign up and come because they know that what you're providing is of value.

[00:19:12.3] RP: I love that and I think that it's so important for your audience to know that you are very protective of your list. That you want to provide a certain level of value. It's not just, "Oh Courtney is sitting down and just spewing some information out." It's very deliberate. It's very thoughtful and put together and it's supposed to help them sharpen their skills and their tool kit as you will and so many people do things just to talk or just to provide information and I think that the intentionality of how you're doing it is the reason why your list has grown so quickly I guess and people want to be a part of that, which is really great.

[00:19:49.5] CS1: Courtney, I have a question if you don't have a comment to follow that up.

[00:19:53.0] CS2: Oh no, I was just going to say yeah, I completely agree. It's just protecting your people and I don't like to say sell out your list. I don't like that word but just being like, "These are my people," and I think just reminding yourself that these are my people and you can post a lot of stuff on social media and that's not a big deal but you just have to like, "those are your people".

[00:20:14.1] RP: Totally and I feel the same way about our people too like when people are listening to the Creative Empire, we're really intentional about the people we choose to bring on because we want it to be folks that they want to hear from and that's what you're saying that Christina and I know a lot about different things but we don't know everything and so we bring on guest who can amplify the messages that the audience really wants to hear or people they want to hear from.

So you're pre-validating the things that they want by asking them and saying, "Hey, what is it that you want to learn more about?" And you go and deliver that which is really a crucial part of that process.

[00:20:50.5] CS2: Yeah, if you haven't read the book *Ask*, I think it's Ryan Levesque, I think that's how you say his last name? That is an amazing book and he has a whole process of how he asks his audience and it's his pitch but even if you just read like the first couple of chapters. I listened to a podcast with him and his big thing is asking people like, "What is your number one struggle right now?" Because it is really easy. I used to ask people and I didn't realize that it was such a leading question.

And so asking, “When it comes to photography, what is your number one struggle right now?” And they tell me exactly what they need and then you’re able to take what they needed and provide that to them instead of me just guessing, which is fine if you can relate to your person you can guess and try to figure it out. But as you bring on more people, you do need their advice and to figure out what they’re looking for.

[00:21:39.1] RP: Yeah, totally. Tara Gentile does something similar and she calls it “the living room strategy”. She talks about selling something to a very small specific audience rather than trying to fill an entire stadium like trying things out in a small space rather than trying to fulfill all of peoples' needs. So it’s like pre-validating, making sure that it’s going to sell to a smaller audience and then trying to explode that.

I had a quick question about going back to the newsletter thing and when people are starting their newsletter or their non-newsletter newsletter, whatever they call it right? I call mine sunshine mail but whatever you said. What suggestions do you have about — I guess my question is a lot of the listeners are service based businesses maybe they’re photographers but their audience is different than an audience where they might create a newsletter for and I think that this is what Christina you were talking about at the very beginning, if you have two audiences that you are talking to, how do you position it so that the people who you’re serving with your photography or your graphic design or whatever are different than the people who are actually buying the courses? Does that question make sense?

[00:22:51.0] CS2: Yes, completely and I think that I don’t know how many photographers like you have in your audience but I think that’s a big thing like you were talking about earlier with photographers is you have your clients and then you have your photographers who want to learn from you and so I think having a segmented list, you can either have two separate lists or I use ConvertKit and I’m able to tag people who are interested in certain things.

And so I think being able to tag them like “these are potential clients”. Say you are a wedding photographer, “these are potential brides” and “these are potential photographers who want to learn how to be a better wedding photographers” and maybe e-mailing each list separately because they are looking for two very different things from you.

[00:23:31.6] RP: So Courtney, how do you talk to two different audiences?

[00:23:35.0] CS1: Yes.

[00:23:35.3] CS2: So I was recently talking to a wedding photographer and she was saying that she has 3,000 people on her bride's list, which I think that is incredible because clearly, they can't do 3,000 weddings a year and I even said to her, "That's amazing! Do a lot of them turn into clients?" And she said, "Yeah, we have people who will find us in college, get on our list, sit on it for a while until they find a boyfriend, get engaged and get married," and I was like, "That is incredible!"

[00:24:01.0] RP: That's awesome.

[00:24:02.1] CS2: Isn't that amazing? So I think that there is something to be said when people are like, "Oh well my client doesn't want to be on an e-mail list." That's not true. If they love you and they love what you do, they want to hear your story. They want to see the pictures you're doing, they want to see the behind the scenes and so every email you send out doesn't have to just be a session. Maybe one e-mail is a session, maybe one email is just a behind the scenes fun little quirky about your personality.

Because people hire you no matter what you do because they connect with you especially nowadays is the perfect day to be an entrepreneur but there's so many of us and so people want to relate to you and get to know you so sharing a little bit more about yourself to your clients and then you can e-mail the people who want to learn how to be better wedding photographers and e-mail them tips or they would also love to see the behind the scenes. Maybe pullbacks or business tips or anything like that.

So being able to segment your list, there's nothing wrong with that. I have within my own list, I segment like interest like are you more interested in natural light? Okay, I'm going to make sure I focused. If I have something specifically on that, I'm going to send that to them or these people more interested in building their photography business. And then I even do have some creative

people who follow me who are interested in how to build your e-mail list or how to build your Facebook page and so then I make sure to send that to them.

[00:25:16.0] RP: That's awesome. So our maybe our second to last question is how do you recommend that people build their creative empires as they're getting started?

[00:25:25.2] CS2: So I think one of the biggest things you have to do is just start. I think one of the hardest things is having the ideas and then thinking in your head that it has to be perfect before you do it and so for me, I knew I wanted to start a blog. I got stumped with the name, I felt like I can't move forward. I want my name, I put it on Facebook, I need help coming up with a name, my mom came up with the name, I'm like, "Thanks, mom," and I find myself even with making product or something, I find myself stuck because I'm like, "Well, I want to do a workshop. It's got to be perfect. I need to hire somebody to do that, I need to hire somebody to do this."

So when you could put together a workshop that you probably got to put together in two months and it took me twelve but I'm glad I did it and I love it but I have friends who come to me like, "Okay you've done an online workshop, what do I need to know?" I'm like, "Don't do what I did." I waited until I thought it was perfect and that was a big mistake because one, that's a huge risk because you're investing all these money in something that you don't even know that's going to work and I should have just started.

But I find myself and I talk to other people so I think this is a common thing that you just get stuck and you think, "Well I'm not there yet. I don't have a big enough audience yet. I don't have the e-mail list or I don't know if I have," — just do it. Who cares? Just try it. Who cares if only three people signed up? That's three more people than yesterday. So just getting over that idea that it has to be perfect, your first product doesn't have to be perfectly designed, it doesn't have to have the perfect copy, it doesn't have to be professionally videoed. Put it out there and see if it works and then take that money and reinvest it and build it to be better if you want it to be.

[00:27:01.0] RP: Awesome. Thank you so much for being on the podcast Courtney. Where can people find you on the inter webs?

[00:27:06.2] CS2: So I'm at clickitupanotch.com. Come over and join my e-mail list. There's pop-ups, there're signups everywhere, you can't miss it but yeah, I'm there and I spend a lot of time also on Facebook and that's another place that I actually have a lot of great relationships but it's like a bad boyfriend.

[00:27:24.8] RP: Well I hope it turns into a better boyfriend. Well thank you so much for joining us and for you listeners, we have a shameless plug about our e-mail list and we have a freebie for you that I hope you know all about but it's *The 50 Tips and 50 Ways to Hit the Ground Running When You Are Starting Your Creative Business* and you can find that at bit.ly/ceptrips. So I hope you'll go and find that. Christina and I, we have a lot of different things that we do in our businesses and you can learn all of those there.

So thank you so much for joining us Courtney and thanks for listening and see you on the next episode.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:28:01] 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.

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[END]