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## Nonprofit Storytelling that doesnt stinklaws - Transcript

[Speaker 1]

Welcome to Charity Therapy, a podcast from Birken Law about building better nonprofits. I'm your host, Jess Birken. Hello and welcome to this episode of Charity Therapy.

Today I'm joined by Erica Hanna. Erica is a creative predator, public speaker, and owner of Puke Rainbows LLC. She's an Emmy-winning video content creator.

So, like we're in the big time now here with the Emmy Award winners. And she's also a creative strategist. Erica, thank you so much for being here.

[Speaker 2]

Thanks, Jess. It's so awesome to connect and I'm just really happy to be here on this scorching hot day.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, Lord. It is legit like 100 degrees and it's way too early for that. And I was just out of town and my neighbor very sweetly cut the grass for me while I was gone.

But they like don't set their mower high and it's 100 degrees outside. So now my lawn looks half dead and I'm like, I'm happy. I'm happy you were nice to me, aren't I?

Right? Right. Oh, no.

The complicated life I live in suburbia. Okay, so before we jump in, I've got to know, I think we're all wondering, why is your business called Puke Rainbows?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, so it's twofold and I'll try to make it quick. One, when I first joined social media, Twitter specifically, I was that super annoying person that just posted like positive quotes all the time. And I had this kid that was following me from New York City, and he was like, I like following you and I like all your quotes, but I don't understand half of them.

So, like, what do they mean? And I go, oh, it's basically when it boils down to it, when life gives you rain, puke a effing rainbow, you know? And he was like, oh, I can remember that.

That's great. So, every time he made like a positive decision in his life, he would do hashtag puke rainbows. And so, I started doing it too and this was probably 12 years ago.

And then other people started doing it and they started calling me the puke rainbows girl when they would see me at events because they couldn't remember my name.

[Speaker 1]

Right. It was just totally fine.

[Speaker 2]

And then the second part of that was right before I launched my actual LLC of my business, I had an encounter or I mean, I guess I directed a shoot with Prince. And I... Yeah.

It was super fun. And I was about two seconds away from throwing up on him. I was so nervous.

So that's like a story that I tell a lot that like, I thought he was going to kick me out of his house. I just, I thought that he was going to hate me. And I was sitting there.

[Speaker 1]

He could not barf on Prince at Paisley Park. Not allowed.

[Speaker 2]

I was just sitting there like... Yeah, exactly. Right.

And just watching him watch my footage and he was shaking his head back and forth like, no, this isn't good. And so, I thought that it was going to be terrible. And then suddenly he looked at me and he's like, this isn't video.

This is art, you know? And then I wanted to puke for like a different reason.

Triple fold.

[Speaker 1]

Puke rainbows. I love it. And happy belated birthday to our dearly departed Prince.

Well, I love that answer. That's great. And that solves the mystery for me. Are you ready to dig into some questions?

[Speaker 2]

Let's do it. I'm so excited. Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. Awesome. Here we go.

Our first question. I'm the board president of a small nonprofit organization that funds medical research for a rare form of cancer. We've been around for six years now, and most of our money has come in from doctors and researchers deeply involved in the work.

We've been working on reaching out to new groups of people to tell them about our mission, but it seems like they just don't get what we're doing here since they're not doctors. How can we convey how important our work is to folks outside the inner circle? I like that question.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, it's a great question. And, you know, I think that this question is so relevant for so many types of verticals, like even outside of charity work, like anything, you know. And I have to say it's simplify, simplify, simplify, you know, just remembering your core mission and what that is.

And you know, especially when they're working with something so important as, you know, cancer and it's like, everyone's been touched by that. So, there is a thread there already that exists, that if you touch that in somebody, they're going to want to help. And people, that's the thing, it's like people want to help, people want to give.

So many times, and you know this, it's like people just don't know where to start or like how to get started at all. And I think one thing to remember when it comes to working with doctors and research and complicated topics, it's that I had a boss once tell me, when you get done with a project, you need to look at your project, no matter what it is, video, a report, whatever it is. And then you need to take out a few things like at the end, because you're the one that's so close to it.

And you've done so much of that research yourself, that you think, I have to include everything because everything's important. And really, it's like, that's your job. Your job is to pare things down and make it easy to understand just a few sentences for somebody.

And that's the work you do as somebody who's helping raise money for this organization, you know, is to really, really just pare it down for them and make it easy. And think about the fact that the message you're giving that person that you want to give money to you, that's the message. If it's simple enough, they'll pass it along to somebody else if they understand it.

And that's the big thing.

[Speaker 1]

I wonder, I wonder also if what's embedded in this question, they say most of our money has come in from doctors and researchers, and they don't say whether that's grant funding.

[Speaker 2]

Sure.

[Speaker 1]

But I wonder if those folks are bringing grants to the table, and that's a different beast than individual giving, right? And telling your story through like, a grant proposal to like a place that cares about your medical research and the quality of the research and all the science names and the parts and things and the methods. Like, that's a totally different story than talking to a regular person about what your organization does to impact the people's lives, right?

[Speaker 2]

That's so true. That's such a good point, Jess. And just remember, too, that storytelling in general hits a different part of the brain.

You know, when you're listening to it, your chances of retaining it are, I don't even remember what the stat is, but like 100 times more, you know? And so, to remember, whether it's a grant or it's individual fundraising, that talking in senses is going to help activate different parts of the brain. So that's kind of a...

[Speaker 1]

What's an example of that, talking in senses? Yeah, yeah. So, an example of that would be...

[Speaker 2]

So, I make a lot of culture videos for people, right? Like, they're like, I want to show my culture, my business. And I think the mistake with that is that a lot of people put out these videos that are like, I like working here because people are nice and because this is whatever.

And you're like, yes, that's great. But your competitor could put their logo on this, and it would mean the same thing. And there's nothing unique about it.

And there's nothing that's bringing me into your day or your life or your culture. And so, when I ask people questions, when I sit down and I'm producing those shoots, usually instead of saying like, what do you like about it here? I'll say, describe the first day that you worked here and why you knew it was the place for you.

Tell me what you saw, what you smelled when you walked in, which sounds silly, but it works. What you felt, what emotions you felt, and even what you felt physically. Because when you tell those emotions, I know at the beginning of the podcast, when you and I were talking about puke rainbows, the word puke, I mean...

It's a miserable word. People know what that feels like, right? Totally.

Like when I said I was two seconds away from puking, people know. Hey, the acid is bubbling up in my throat. You know what I mean?

They know what that means.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

So, it's memorable. And so, to hear somebody say, instead of like, for example, I like working here because people are nice, like I said before. The first day that I walked in the doors, I could smell coffee brewing.

I could hear people laughing. And I saw a dog run up to me and I picked him up. And he's now my best friend.

He sits on my lap when I work. That's such a different experience for someone listening.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Because you're using those five. So, think about those senses, all your senses when you're describing things, like how things make you feel. Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

That's such a great tip. That's so awesome. Yeah.

All right. Should we dig into the second one? Yeah, that sounds awesome.



Let's do it. Okay. I am in the marketing department of a nonprofit that works in international aid.

We're gearing up for a big campaign about getting COVID-19 vaccines to the countries we work in. That's cool. The department head wants to create a series of appeal videos to get the word out, but she seems to think we'll be able to create everything on our own.

How can I convince her to set aside some money in the budget to hire a professional? Or if there's really no money to be had, what do I need to know to make videos that don't stink?

[Speaker 2]

I love that. Man, I wish so many more people would ask this question before they start something.

[Speaker 1]

We're starting off strong because they care about not making bad video, number one. Absolutely.

[Speaker 2]

So obviously, the question is twofold, and I'll dive into this a little bit here. So, one thing to think about is cost. And obviously, people sometimes look at video and they go, no way, are you kidding me?

That's so expensive. And we could never justify that. And I understand that.

I get that. People have budgets and that's life. That's just how it goes.

But also, I think when we're factoring in cost, the important thing that people don't factor in is that if you're having your staff work on it, you're losing them for doing their actual job. Oh, preach, girl, preach.

[Speaker 1]

This is like my pet peeve. It's like, well, the fundraiser was free because we had staff do it. No, your program didn't get delivered for two months for 10 hours a week because staff did it.

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely. So, it's like, take that person's hourly rate and calculate that into your budget. All the people that are going to be working on it, all the people that are going to be involved in it, because it's not going to be just one person.

One person is going to be asking somebody else questions. And they're also going to be burnt out and not doing their job as well, unless they're superhuman somehow, you know?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, which is another thing we always like to think our people are in the non-profit sector, right? Well, you can be a video producer, no problem. Yeah, right.

[Speaker 2]

And to also realize that there are happy mediums that can be helpful. So happy mediums that can be helpful, that could look something like, hey, I mean, is there an art college in town or college in town that has a senior that needs to do a senior project, and they could at least shoot

the video for you, you know, so that it looks more professional, you know, and they could hand it off to you for the edit. Or the other way around, you could shoot it and give it to somebody to do the edit.

So that cuts the cost for you, you know, that keeps costs down. There's also things like, I do something called video coaching, which is basically just guiding people through the process and doing like weekly check-ins of like, hey, here's the benchmark. This is where you should be right now.

If you're planning your shoot, here's your checklist of things you actually need to do so that you don't forget, you know, like, and have to redo it again. Here's the equipment you probably need.

[Speaker 1]

Those are great shortcuts too, because then you're not burning all of your time trying to research what's the best camera and how do you do the lighting and what do you need, you know, it's like, that's a huge time saver.

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely. And I think sometimes, I mean, I think, you know, higher ups or higher ups, if you'd call them that, you know, people who are in that C-suite or executive directors or what have you. Or your board, whoever it is.

Yep. Dealing with the money stuff. I think that it's always assumed that there won't be a budget for things.

And sometimes all it takes is some convincing numbers to tell them about it. So, like, I usually give people a case study. And obviously, you know, the case study that I just did isn't non-profit related, but it's fundraising related.

And it was a Kickstarter that I did for somebody. And, you know, this Kickstarter that I did was for a band, and they were looking to raise money to do an album. And the last time they did a Kickstarter was four years ago.

And it took them three months to raise the \$10,000 they needed to do an album, right? With their Kickstarter video, they raised \$10,000 in like five days.

[Speaker 1]

That's amazing.

[Speaker 2]

And then they just went on to make even more money, you know, like to kind of like bank more money for future projects because they had a more professional video.

[Speaker 1]

Right. Well, I love the... So, this is something that I feel like the non-profit sector struggles with is we kind of cut off our nose to spite our face, right?

Sure, yeah. We're going to do a low-budget DIY video that's amateur hour. And then guess what?

The campaign, not going to be very compelling, not going to drive a bunch of donations in the door. Sure. That didn't work.

Now we just think, oh, video is not an effective medium for whatever, right. There's like this negative downward cycle that we can get into because we're not starting out strong on the front side. So that's huge, I think.

[Speaker 2]

And to also, yeah, to also remember that video isn't just... I think people, a lot of times they look at video and they think it's just technology, right? It's just a matter of lighting.

And like you said, lighting and sound and getting the setup right. But the thing, the feedback that I get most of the time from my clients is not necessarily about the technical stuff. It's about, wow, like when you were interviewing people, you know, we put this person on camera.

I thought they'd be terrible. And by the end of the interview, you had them crying and telling these personal stories that I just had no idea that they had even experienced at our company. You know, it's like, that's where it is.

You know, that's where... Oh, totally.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I mean, just look at like all of the like low grade video content. That's right. Like these people with Facebook lives or this like super bad lighting on the Tic Tacs or whatever it is, right?

It's not about, yes, it should be well lit. Yes, you should have nice audio. Those are good things to think about.

But if the content sucks and you aren't telling a good story, it can be shiny, and everyone can be glowing and sound amazing. Absolutely. And your audience has already clicked away.

[Speaker 2]

Oh my gosh, yes.

[Speaker 1]

And isn't even watching it anymore.

[Speaker 2]

Yes, I've seen that happen. I mean, I worked in TV news for 15 years and I've seen it happen there because Minneapolis is one of the best markets in the country to be for news. And I've seen photographers that are brilliant, but that don't know how to ask questions.

And so they'll be doing an interview with somebody and like the shot is like, it's reflecting in the rear view mirror. And like, you know, it's like all artsy and crazy, but it's so distracting and it took so long to set up that by the time it's time for them to ask questions, like they don't have time to get to know the person. And it just is like, well, there goes that idea.

[Speaker 1]

So, for the people who really like just don't have a budget. Sure. I'm thinking like a lot of my very smallest clients, you know, they don't even necessarily have staff.

Like maybe they're all volunteer and they really truly are on a shoestring. Are there any resources that you point to or things they should consider? Because I think that's harder than it looks to tell the story and to produce.

I mean, this is why there are professional fundraisers and professional videographers and all of that. Where would you start if you were just trying to get started on your own and do something so you could maybe generate a small budget to grow from there? Yeah, absolutely.

[Speaker 2]

Where would you say people should start? Yeah. So, I definitely...

There's tons of free resources out there or even just inexpensive resources, you know. So free resources like Wistia.com or Vimeo Video School, or if you want to pay a little bit of money, but not a lot, Lynda.com, which I think now is married with LinkedIn. And but again, with stuff like that, platforms like that, you're also going to invest time because you're going to be like sifting through so many videos trying to find what you really, really want.

There's also folks that offer classes. You know, I offer classes. So, I offer...

Oh, there you go. Yeah. So, it's like I offer...

My most popular workshop right now as a public speaker is a DIY smartphone video workshop. So, people can just use their phones, Android or Apple, whatever it is, and capture content. And it's like a three-hour long little boot camp that I do.

And I let people have access to me through my inbox, you know, to ask questions and follow up questions, that kind of thing afterward.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, I love that. I didn't even know that was a thing that you do. And that's like the perfect tip.

I mean, you should... Where's this? Slide me the 100 bucks across the table right now.

That's a great promo for Erica's course because that sounds amazing. I'm like, it's three hours and you're going to learn from Erica how to do some stuff. And we have fun.

It's not boring either. Oh, yeah. No, y'all can't see Erica, but she's super fun.

She has like teal glasses and she's just sparkling like a little rainbow bright character.

[Speaker 2]

She's awesome.

[Speaker 1]

Thank you.

[Speaker 2]



I love that.

[Speaker 1]

That's such a great resource, though, because you do... I work with a lot of small nonprofits, and they do like need to just... It's like, you know, same with my business, right?

Like I started out just... I do everything.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And then as it grew, I could get to a place where I'm like, OK, now I can get somebody to help me with that. But sometimes you do have to just start out on your own. And I love that little...

You've got that bite-sized resource that's like, OK, I'll get you started. And then you can go from there.

[Speaker 2]

So, I love that. I like that because it's like... I'm pretty honest about this on social media that I grew up a super poor kid.

You know, it's like we just didn't have any money. And I never want money to be the accessibility factor for somebody, you know? It's like I want it to be open and accessible to everybody.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

And that's why anytime I'm giving a workshop, I'm always like, hey, if you can't afford this, if it's a couple hundred bucks or whatever, shoot me a note and we'll talk about a possible scholarship. Or if you can write me a letter about how you're going to use this information, like that kind of thing. It's really important.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, that's great. You make that available. But everybody that's listening here should be paying you because nonprofits need to pay for stuff.

[Speaker 2]

You know, it's so funny because it's a common thing with nonprofits, actually, that it sounds weird because it sounds like I'm almost talking them out of paying me money to do a video for them. But this has happened a few different times where I'll get a call from a nonprofit and they'll be like, we need our end of the year fundraising video, right? And we've got this much money.

And I'll be like, okay, that's cool. Do you know what kind of content your audience really likes and resonates with them?

[Speaker 1]

No, Erica, you're just going to wave your magic wand as the Emmy-winning videographer and make it happen. That's us outsourcing our fundraising. Thank you very much for waving your magic wand.

[Speaker 2]

Right, right.

[Speaker 1]

My consultant friends are nodding in the background right now going, ah, yes, yes. I know that nonprofit.

[Speaker 2]

Oh my gosh, right? And so sometimes I'll just say, how about instead of you paying me to do a big video, why don't I give you a workshop? You can test content for the next six months and send out weekly or monthly videos and see which ones really do well.

And then whichever content is really resonating with your people, we'll make a really killer video in six months. I love it. Just better use of money.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, that's so great. See, this is why we get along because we're like, okay, this is what's best for you. And it's not just dumping all of your money on me.

There you go. I love that. So, I'm kind of getting a couple of takeaways from these questions.

And the first one that jumps out to me was like, you need to tell a story. And sometimes our missions can be very technical or very involved, or like we're deep in the weeds, but don't forget to tell a story. And that people remember stories more.

And especially if you use sensory language, what you heard, what you saw, what you felt, what you smelled, that can really be compelling. And then I think the other takeaway is don't assume that there isn't a budget for the work you need. You kind of said that and like, we sort of glossed over that.

But I think that's an important takeaway here that don't assume that the C-suite or the management or the board doesn't have a budget for you. Sometimes that's part of our toxic culture that we can get into, right? We just assume that we can't.

But if you are running up against a roadblock there, remember the real costs, right? You mentioned staff time, like tally up the hours that everybody's going to work on this and use that as a real, like, this is the budget. And are you prepared to pay this for a bunch of amateurs to do it?

Right?

[Speaker 2]

Why not just use that for professionals instead and let everybody else do their jobs?

[Speaker 1]

Yes. And you know, if you really are starting out on your own, there are some really great ways to just train yourself, get a little bit of expertise with a workshop like what you do. And I think

for the bootstrappers out there who are just really trying to pull themselves up from nothing, that is like a fabulous way to start.

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely. And like, do it, do it scared. Even if you're scared, do it, you know?

[Speaker 1]

Yes. Right? Like, you can go look at my YouTube videos.

I mean, some of them are just absolutely the worst, like the lighting, the sound, there's like a cloud going over and my face goes dark, whatever. But just do it, right? Just like, put it out there, just start and you will continue.

Because starting is often the hardest part, and you can't make a mistake until you start. And once you start, you'll make mistakes and that's okay. Then you get better after you keep going.

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely.

[Speaker 1]

Erica, I think people can get to you at pukerainbows.com. Is that right?

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely. That would be awesome, I would love to talk to people.

[Speaker 1]

And you're on the Twitters.

[Speaker 2]

On the Twitters. Meet Erica, M-E-E-T-E-R-I-C-A.

[Speaker 1]

Right on, look her up. Look her up on LinkedIn. Erica, Erica Hanna.

Thank you so much for being here today.

[Speaker 2]

Thanks for having me.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, it was awesome.

You're great. You're just a gem and I just want to hang out with your sparkly personality more. Let's do it.

[Speaker 2]

Let's go watch some Packer football one of these days. Busted, sitting in Minnesota, but I'm a Packer fan. Right?

[Speaker 2]

I'm from Iowa originally, so that's okay.

[Speaker 1]

There you go. I'm a Hawkeye, so. We won't hold it against you.

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## About the Author



**Hi, I'm Jess Birken.**

I'm the owner of Birken Law Office, I help nonprofits solve problems so they can quit worrying and get back to what matters most – The Mission. I'm not like most attorneys, I actually have an outgoing personality, and – like you – I like to think outside the box. Most of my clients are passionate and have an entrepreneurial spirit. I'm like that too. My goal is to help you crush it. Getting bogged down in the minutia sucks the joy out of the important stuff. My clients want to do the work – not the paperwork.

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