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## Screaming into the Void - 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 am so happy to be joined by my tweep, Julia Campbell. Julia is, no shock, I know you on social media and you're a social media consultant for nonprofits and she's the author of two books, the host of the podcast, Nonprofit Nation, and she helps nonprofits and other do-gooders get noticed online. Thanks so much for being here.

[Speaker 2]

Yay, thanks for having me.

[Speaker 1]

I'm excited. I'm super stoked because like meeting people that you only know through Twitter is kind of the best.

[Speaker 2]

I love that. I love it, especially now that things are sort of coming back in person and I've been going to a lot of conferences, meeting people that I've only known on Twitter or LinkedIn has been really great.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, yes. And I wanted you to be here today because like every nonprofit I know is thinking about fundraising, of course, and all the different tactics that they should be trying. So, here's something about social media for nonprofits for you to get us started.

I kind of have a general question for you on this topic, like just why should nonprofits even spend their time on having an online presence?

[Speaker 2]

Well, when you say online presence, I see that to be sort of the whole ecosystem, your website, whether you have a blog or not, and your email marketing and your social media channels. So, I kind of see it as an ecosystem and every part of it should be working in sync with the other parts. So, what I wouldn't do is say, okay, I'm just starting a nonprofit.

I'm only going to have a Facebook page. I think social media doesn't work really well in a vacuum. But the reason to have an online presence is because that's where your audience is.

That's where they're spending their time. That's where they're going to discover you and build a deeper connection with you.

[Speaker 1]

I love that answer because I feel like there are a lot of nonprofits that haven't really even accepted that reality that people are spending a lot of time online.

[Speaker 2]

Which is so bizarre to me because if you think about your daily life, you go online, you check your email, you probably check your bank account online, you buy airline tickets online, you probably get groceries delivered online. There's so much of our daily life, our consumer life that happens online. So why wouldn't it naturally translate over into donor behavior as well?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, totally. And it's not just like nonprofits, right? I'm thinking of the time that Gary Vaynerchuk spoke to a legal conference I was at.

And he was like, you all think that your clients aren't online, and then you turn around and you check Facebook. And you're probably checking Facebook while I'm speaking. Right.

It's just sort of like, stop thinking that your customers, your donors, your constituents aren't using the same damn tools you're using every day. Like, yes, they are. They are.

And yes, you can find them there. It's okay. Absolutely.

[Speaker 2]

And well, I think another point is that we have to now as fundraisers, be cognizant that there are like five or six distinct generations that we need to be connecting with. So, we can't just say, oh, all of our donors are baby boomers, or all of our donors are 70 plus, which by the way, baby boomers and people 70 plus are online as well. But we have to be thinking about the future, and how to be constantly being relevant and connecting with younger generations as well.

So, you know, the good old days of maybe only having one or two segments of donors, that's over. Now we have multiple segments.

[Speaker 1]

Totally. All right. With that in mind, let's dig into our questions.

[Speaker 2]

I'm ready.

[Speaker 1]

All right. Here we go.

Our first question, I'm the social media manager for a midsize organization that raises money for cancer research. We've been doing all the basic things to keep our social channels active, but I don't think they're really doing anything for us. How can I grow these channels so our social campaigns make an impact on our fundraising?

[Speaker 2]

That's a really good question. The key here is the mindset. So, we can't think about social media as what it can do for us.

We really have to think about what we can do to provide value for our audience and our followers. So, what tends to happen is we think about social media as we would traditional advertising channels. So, say we buy an ad in the local newspaper, or we buy a billboard, or even if a TV ad, we tend to think of it as like a broadcast mechanism, and not as a real community building activity.

So, some of the key words here, the basic things, what are those basic things that you're doing? And if you're only keeping your channels active, that's definitely not enough to grow your

community. So, I teach the four pillars of social media management for nonprofits, and you have to be using all of these four pillars in order to get traction.

So, the first one is research and listening. Are you listening? Are you doing research around your audience, around your topic?

Are you actively looking at what are the topics and the industry conversations happening? What's going on in the news? And the second pillar is content creation.

Are you creating unique and relevant content for that particular channel, or are you just kind of rehashing things and kind of throwing spaghetti on the wall to see what sticks? And then the third pillar is community management. Are you going in and answering questions, answering comments?

Are you following other people? Are you actually participating, or are you just posting and leaving? And then the fourth piece is really important, and I think we leave it, we lack this skill as nonprofits, is measurement and analysis.

So constantly looking at your social media channels with an eye towards your goals. So yeah, sure, your ultimate goal is probably fundraising, but social media is a really great place also to build thought leadership, to build your email list. You should always be encouraging people and enticing people to come on over to your email list or to join you at an event or to sign up with a text to give.

So how are you funneling your followers and fans and actually converting them into email subscribers and donors? And how are you being systematic about that? And it's a marathon and not a sprint.

It's like anything else. It really takes time and effort. And the return, it can be measured, but the fundraising return is actually kind of hard to measure unless you're doing active Facebook fundraising or Instagram fundraising.

People might see something online; they might follow you. I followed organizations on Facebook for a year before making a donation. So really just making sure that you have an eye on your goals and what you ultimately want to achieve, and then making sure that all of those four pillars are being taken care of and that you're not just looking at it like a traditional advertising platform.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I see that a lot, a lot with nonprofits, especially, frankly, also for law firms. If your law firm follows me and your account is just a bunch of tiny ads asking people to hire your defense firm, I'm not going to follow you. And I love that because I do think a lot of nonprofits' social media accounts are not doing anything for them.

I can think of one nonprofit that I know where I checked out all their social accounts for one reason or another, and it was literally just like, you're screaming into the void. You're literally posting some update that nobody apparently cares about, and it's like all of their posts had like, no likes, you know, like, it's like, oh, two, because those are like the two board members that are following you or something that that's not doing anything for them. So, I love that this person is even aware that that is a thing and that they're asking, like, how can I do something differently?

Because yeah, it's not it's not an advertising platform. The word social is in there for a reason, right?

[Speaker 2]

You can certainly spend a ton of money and put a bunch of ads on there, but that's not going to help you grow your long-term following. And that's not going to really help you build connections with the people that you really want to reach, you know, reach to the choir.

[Speaker 1]

This is one of those things where I feel like the sort of like business wisdom applies here. A lot of times that gets people get a little like, don't tell nonprofits to be like business. But there is a reality that fundraising is a little bit like sales.

And people need to trust you before they're going to give you, their money. So, the idea that like, you're going to get an ROI of posting an ad that somebody might see once, that's not real. They need to engage with you.

They need to form a relationship with you. And maybe your goal is to convert people to a page on your website and get them into your world or get their email address and not just treat it like, yes, we have social media accounts. Anyway, I think that leads into our next question.

So, let's read this one. I am the president of a small volunteer run organization that puts on events and provides a community for seniors in my area. We've been around for a few years, and we usually charge a small fee to attend the events to cover the cost.

Our goal now is to raise more funds so we can engage people who can't afford the event fees. Love it. My granddaughter is convinced that we need to start a bunch of social media channels, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and a few more.

Is this really the right approach for us? I'm overwhelmed trying to learn all of these different websites.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, great question. First of all, thank you for providing a community for seniors in your area. If you're a small volunteer run organization and fundraising is your goal, I know it can be tempting to try shiny, sexy tools like TikTok or do Instagram Reels and Instagram Stories.

But the reality is if you're trying to raise money for the specific purpose, you can engage people who can't afford event fees, I really would just start either pounding the pavement and going to corporations to see if they would sponsor the event or calling major donors to get some money in the door. So, once you have that money in the door, then maybe you can branch out and hire an intern to help you, you know, maybe launch one channel at a time. But I'd be very cognizant of strategy.

So, thinking strategically about which platforms can help you accomplish your goals and engage the audience that you want to engage. So, if you want to engage more seniors, then TikTok is probably not the place to go. Just saying.

I mean, I work with Boston Public Schools, and we're running a campaign to actually engage high school seniors. And they wanted to start a Facebook campaign. And I had to break it to them that high school seniors are not on Facebook at all.

So, your goal and your audience, they have to match the platform. And also, what is your capacity? What is your bandwidth?

If you are volunteer run, do you have the capacity to manage those four pillars that I talked about? Because that is the only way you're going to be effective on a channel. So honestly, I would really go back to some more traditional fundraising approaches.

And in this case, I would do corporate sponsors, see if you can get local sponsors for each of your event and approach them and say, this is what we're trying to do. We want to make this



more accessible. We want to be able to provide this as a service to the community for free to get more people in the door.

Would you be able to sponsor it? And then once you do get some of those funds rolling in, hopefully, then you could hire maybe someone part time, maybe you could hire a college student, someone to help you evaluate and create a social media plan. But I certainly wouldn't jump into it as a band-aid for fundraising, because I think traditional fundraising in this case would probably be the most effective.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. I mean, also, what do you think is going to happen? You're going to have a TikTok that goes viral.

And then what?

[Speaker 2]

It's not a money faucet, unfortunately.

[Speaker 1]

It's not monetized. And it's not like people give money based on seeing an Instagram reel. That's just not how it works.

You need to focus your efforts on your community. And what I pulled out of this was like, you're doing this in a specific area. So, focus on who's in the area.

Who also cares about seniors in the area? There are probably community groups, Rotary, all the people like, look at a map, draw a map, and then get out your Google Maps and figure out like, what organizations also serve that same geographical area? And like, where do you have shared interests?

Because people give money to things that they value and things that they care about. And having some, you know, great 10 million people saw your thing on TikTok, that doesn't translate to them caring about the seniors in your area necessarily. Maybe they will eventually.

But I love your idea to go a traditional route. And okay, I want to just poke at this a little bit because I do think this is a thing for people. People get really caught up on having to do the ask for fundraising.

And I wonder if there's a little thing in here, maybe not for this particular person, but just in general, that it feels a lot easier to create something on social media where you don't have to interact and be told no by a human being to your face. You're just going to like, have the magical fundraising fairy of the internet help you where you just like, you know, if you build it, they will come. I can just put this into the universe and money will magically appear and I can avoid the pain and the rejection that comes with asking local businesses.

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely.

[Speaker 1]

And I think that's like a thing that happens with social media.

[Speaker 2]

It definitely does. And it's also a tactic a lot of the times that boards use to get out of fundraising. Yeah.

Really? Where they say, oh, let's just do a crowdfunding campaign. Okay.

But you can't do a crowdfunding campaign if you don't actually have people to ask, right? This myth of all of these strangers that are going to randomly see your post. And like you said, give that's a myth, unless it's something in the news, unless it's the Australian bushfires, or it's, you know, Moms Demand Action, or it's something in the news.

Then if you're a local little museum, or a local little food bank, or a local little animal shelter, it's going to be very tough to drum up huge amounts of support from strangers to focus on the people that already know you and love you, see what they can do first before you start, you know, spreading your wings to strangers.

[Speaker 1]

And if they don't already know you and love you, you've got some work to do to build some relationships first. Okay, love it. Here we go with our last question.

A few years ago, I launched an anti-bullying campaign on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. I have a really big following and lots of engagement on everything I post. Woohoo!

I have decided to turn this whole movement into a nonprofit, but I'm not sure what's next. I have this huge audience who cares about this issue, but how do I turn that into money for a nonprofit? And once money starts coming in, I'm not sure what kinds of programs I should do beyond raising awareness online.

There's a lot to unpack here.

[Speaker 2]

This person's not going to like my answer. I'm probably not going to like mine either. But I don't think you should start a nonprofit.

I don't understand why you would go to this effort unless there's some 100% unique thing that you're bringing to the table. There are so many fabulous anti-bullying organizations already out there that need your assistance. They need people to raise money and to raise awareness for them.

So, I guess I would really evaluate whether or not starting your very own 501c3 is worth the time and the effort and the money. I don't think people really understand what it takes to build a nonprofit, to launch it, and how much it takes time and money. You are correct.

I guess I'm struggling because I want you to be able to use this huge captive audience. But if you don't have a program, you're not going to be able to raise money. People give money because they believe in the problem, but they also believe in your solution.

So, if you don't have a solution, then it's going to be very difficult to convince people to give you money. Convincing people to send a tweet is very easy. Convincing people to post on social media is very easy.

But as everyone, I mean, any fundraiser knows, the second you try to turn that into revenue generation, you try to ask for money, engagement goes down. And it's just the nature of the beast. You could have 60% engagement on a post, that's awareness.

And then the second you do fundraising; you get 2% awareness. It's just 2% engagement. That's just the way it goes because people are being asked to do something.

I would keep growing this following. Don't stop what you're doing. It sounds like it's helping a lot of people and it's creating this great community.

But then I would think very strategically about what organization you want to work with that's already doing this work. Or really think long and hard about the kind of programs that you could provide. And how would you fund it?

What's your business model? And does the world really need another 501c3? And maybe they do.

But it seems to me there are a lot of anti-bullying organizations or other organizations you could partner up with and maybe create a new branch of a program.

[Speaker 1]

I'm going to come down hard. No new nonprofit for you, listener. You're doing great.

You are doing great, and you are clearly good at this. So no, you're going to hate your life. You're not going to enjoy the bureaucracy and the administrative aspects that come with running a nonprofit.

So, I'm going to flip this on its head and tell you to, even though you're not a nonprofit, you should still follow Julia's four pillars. You should continue to stay engaged with what is happening in the anti-bullying space, big time. If you're not already following all of the anti-bullying groups out there, you need to get on that.

Start paying attention to what they're doing. Then keep creating unique content like you are and keep engaging your audience. And start focusing more on actively engaging with your community and managing that community as a community.

And then set goals about organizations that you want to feature and support and help them by getting your community to know about those organizations and use your powers for good. Don't use your powers for starting another nonprofit corporation and getting tax exempt status. That does nothing for you, and it will make your life hell.

So just actually keep doing what you're doing and start shining a light on the groups that are delivering the program that your people can hug to death with donations.

[Speaker 2]

Think about your why. What is the purpose? What are you hoping to achieve?

And there are lots of ways to grow your thought leadership and then maybe turn it into a or turn it into a podcast or turn it into a blog, which you can then monetize. It doesn't have to be a nonprofit, but if you have this unique expertise and this audience, then you're poised to create an empire like a content platform that can help a lot more people. So, I would really explore your why.

What, like in five, ten years, where do you want to be? What are you hoping to accomplish? And, you know, where do you see yourself in even just five to ten years?

[Speaker 1]

And, you know, maybe this person, it doesn't say, but maybe this person has been sharing their own story, right? Because that's often super engaging. And maybe you have a future in speaking to schools and donating portions of your speaking fees to these organizations.

I just really, really strongly urge you to abandon the desire to start up 501c3 and start shining a light on the organizations that are already out there that probably don't have good social, that need Julia's help and frankly need your help in helping people find them and helping people support them. So just like use your powers for good.

[Speaker 2]

Sorry, we didn't want to crush your dreams, but.

[Speaker 1]

It's not crushing the dream. It's saying you are doing an amazing job. Yeah, don't make yourself unhappy.

Keep doing what you enjoy.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

OK, so here I've got some like little takeaways. First one is your mindset is everything. Social media is not advertising.

It's social. So, start from thinking, you know, what can I do for my followers? What can we do for our community through this platform?

Second, y'all got to get in line with Julia's four pillars of social. I'm hoping that's that you're about to like pimp a link to where this lives, that you have some article about this because we'll put it in the show notes. Well, I have a whole book.

Well, there you go. OK, so Julia's got a book. You should clearly get that so that you can follow those four pillars.

I mean, those just made perfect sense to me. And I feel like if more nonprofits did that, we'd be so much better off. Frankly, everybody, if you're not even in a non-profit.

[Speaker 2]

No, it's really for anyone that wants to be on social media, do it effectively and not just throw spaghetti on the wall.

[Speaker 1]

And then finally, like remember that social media is a marathon, not a sprint. This is a long process. It's the beginning of the relationship.

It's not the finish line necessarily. So don't treat it as an instant source of cash. It's the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

Julia, you are amazing. I love you. Thank you for being here.



If folks wanted to connect with you, learn more about your book, where can they find you online?

[Speaker 2]

Well, my favorite place to be is my podcast. So just search for Nonprofit Nation wherever you're listening to this podcast. And my website is JCSocialMarketing.com.

You'll find my blog and everything about my books and all the great stuff I'm working on.

[Speaker 1]

All the Julia goodies in one easy place. Folks, if you enjoyed this episode, do me a huge favor, share it with a friend, rate it. Leave me a review.

I need reviews. If you like me right now, go leave me a review, please. And thank you.

[Speaker 2]

They mean a lot. And I think you can review now on Spotify.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, snap. All right. Hot tip, Spotify reviews.

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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.

**Let's connect!**

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