On Agile

Guest was Maritza van den Heuvel

Sponsored by

lean marketing lab
sales and marketing learning community dedicated to the user experience.

main   media   lean marketing system   lean engagement team   tools

We are CONNECTING!

Related Podcast:

Should your Processes be cast in Stone?

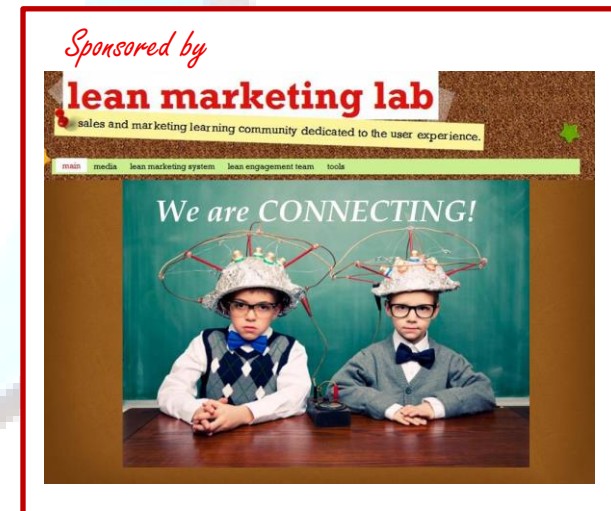# Business901   *Podcast Transcription*

Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Beyond Agile: Tales of Continuous Improvement is the latest publication of <u>Modus Cooperandi</u>. Co-author Maritza van den Heuvel is my guest on the podcast. Beyond Agile examines 10 companies, mostly in the tech world, but also in innovative automotive and business consulting that have actively evolved their processes. Using tools from Lean, Agile and other schools of management thought, these companies have actively engaged in continuous improvement. Beyond Agile other authors are Jim Benson and Joanne Ho.

Maritza is also the author of the <u>Becoming an Agile Family</u> blog where she writes about the ways her family uses Personal Kanban to navigate work and life. You can also find Maritza on Twitter (@maritzavdh). Maritiza also appeared in another Business901 Podcast, <u>Becoming an Agile Family thru Kanban</u>. A written excerpt of the blog appeared last week, <u>Life does not stand still Work does not stand still</u>.

Maritza van den Heuvel spent six years doing research in computational linguistics after completing a Postgraduate degree in Linguistics. She eventually left academia for the software industry where she cut her teeth on Agile and Scrum as a Scrum Master and Product Owner, helping teams to evolve from waterfall to Scrum. Along the way, her unquenchable thirst for knowledge led her to Kanban and Lean systems thinking. Since then, she has become a passionate proponent of the power of constraints and visual controls to transform the world of work in the 21st century.

Business901   *Podcast Transcription*

Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Transcription of Podcast

Joe: Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of The Business 901 Podcast. With me, today is Maritza van den Heuvel. She has spent six years doing research in computational linguistics after completing a Postgraduate degree in Linguistics. She eventually left the academy for the software industry where she cut her teeth on Agile and Scrum as a Scrum Master and Product Owner, helping teams to evolve from waterfall to Scrum. Along the way, her unquenchable thirst for knowledge led her to Kanban and Lean systems thinking. She is the author of the Becoming an Agile Family blog where she writes about the ways her family uses Personal Kanban to navigate work and life. In addition, Maritza has recently co-authored a book with Jim Benson and Joanne Ho called Beyond Agile, Tales of Continuous Improvement. I would like to welcome you and could you start out and tell me about the premise of Beyond Agile, and why you wrote the book?

Maritza: Thanks, Joe. I'm always glad to be here and talk to you about being in Kanban and all things Agile. Beyond Agile book started out as a tweet, of all things. Jim Benson and I had been chatting about personal Kanban for a while, and I'd really learned a lot from him about how they've trained other people to use personal Kanban and he just put a thought out there saying that he wanted to write a book with case studies on real implementations of combinations of Scrum and Kanban and various flavors, specifically to express the reality of what teams do with the principles of Agile and Lean, rather than focusing on the theory. I eagerly said I'd love to contribute a story or a case study if you are interested in contributions. The next thing I knew, he was asking me if I wanted to project

manage the whole thing.

Joe: You volunteered?

Maritza: I volunteered to write a story and the rest, as they say, is history.

Joe: I forgot to mention in the introduction that you were a former podcast guest of mine, when personal Kanban was released, and you told a few of your stories on how you used personal Kanban at home.

Maritza: Yes. I remember that conversation well. The Scrum family blog where I write about our experiments is still going strong. In fact, in recent weeks we've seen a major upsurge in interest, in Agile families. The Wall Street Journal actually sighted a piece on that a few weeks ago, and the interest and these approaches to family management have skyrocketed since then.

Joe: I think it only makes sense in the way that Kanban, of course, is used along with Agile it is with that thinking that we're living in a much more complex world and that it is much more learn by doing type of approach because we have to go in not thinking that we have the answers any more.

Maritza: I think also that people in all walks of life, not just work environments but personally experience an intense pressure in our modern society of trying to keep up with so many different contexts. Now you're at work, then you're at

home, and you have family expectations and work expectations and also personal plans and dreams that you want to take forward, and it becomes increasingly difficult to manage all the head space that takes up for you and I think Personal Kanban and Agile gives a practical, pragmatic framework that people can use, and it's simple enough without feeling like a ton of rules that you have to follow.

Joe: You don't have to sit there and spend three months studying how to do it.

Maritza: Especially with Kanban and personal Kanban, I think, because the principles are the foundation that you build on it doesn't prescribe a certain way of work. It doesn't describe a certain process. You mold it. You adapt to how you are working and whether your team, whether that's a family or work team chooses to implement it, that's the way it works for you and that's the process you find, and Kanban and Agile help you find it.

Joe: I think that is so true; because when you look at most methodologies, the methodologies take over what you're trying to accomplish, but in using Kanban you realize that it's what you get accomplished is more important than the methodology.

Maritza: I think that is certainly one of the principles that we expressed in Beyond Agile. We obviously, Jim, Jan and I, coming from a background of using Lean and Kanban, we have a strong interest in that particular approach and

methodologies of Lean and Systems thinking, and we specifically mentioned a couple of times, and you see it in the stories in the book, as well that there is no one size fits all. In Lean and Kanban in particular, we present, in the introduction to the book we specifically present eight principles of continuous improvement that you can apply to work, but we don't say these are the ultimate eight principles. They're eight principles. Ones that we found to be effective, that really add value to your work, and if you choose to follow these, well, here are some stories that show you how you can do that, but it's not a holy writ. It is not gospel. It is ultimately up to you how you apply them.

Joe: I have to tell you I thought that was the best introduction section I ever read in a book, and so many times you look at the introduction and you kind of glance through it. I would tell someone if they picked up the book to read the introduction two or three times before they start.

Maritza: I think it is a pretty dense introduction. I think there's a lot of meat around what we mean with principles, and potentially if you're new to Kanban you may find some of that a bit daunting on a first read, but I think it is key for us that we set a stage there that these stories don't exist in a vacuum. These aren't just teams that have picked at random some techniques that they thought would work. They're actually predicated on specific principles of human behavior and psychology.

Joe: How many different stories are there in the book?

Maritza: There are officially ten. Those are the ones that we wrote up and co-authored with a number of contributors. There is an eleventh story in the book. That is one that we don't write about in the introduction or in much of the marketing material because it's kind of like an Easter egg. It's a surprise. That's because it's our story. We have included the story of how we wrote the book as the eleventh story.

Joe: I thought it was interesting. One, they're all real life stories, of course, but you even list a failure in it which I thought, now that's someone that has a lot of confidence and faith in their process.

Maritza: Yes. I will admit that that particular story that you refer to was one we had some angst about because it is difficult for people to write about failure, but we thought it was important to do that because learning from failure is a key component to Kanban and Lean and the feedback loops that we strongly believe in as Agile thinkers. How could we not show a failure in some way?

Joe: I wanted to commend you on that because I thought that was interesting that you did that and I learned a great deal. In fact, it was the first story I read.

Maritza: I think there's also bravery on the part of contributors to that specific story. Ultimately it is their company that we write about. It is their story that we're telling, and I think they were extremely brave to allow us to write that story in

the way that we did because we did quite exclusively write about some of the things that we think went wrong, but I think the key win here for everybody, their team and the company concerned was from that failure arose a new company and lessons learned and all of that perceived failure was actually rich learning that helped them to do it better the next time.

Joe: Remember you're talking to someone sometime after I was down on a business that I had started in years back and he said, "Is this the first business?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You always fail at your first business." Kind of renewed my confidence that it was OK. It's a learning process. It's a journey. You don't have to stop here. You learn and you move forward.

Maritza: I think that is such a key component of what we try to express in the book. We specifically wanted to include the phrase "continuous improvement" in the title, and you'll read it throughout the book in various contexts, but it's inherent in each and every one of those stories that nobody gets it right the first time. You define a process. You pick certain methodologies and techniques and you implement them, you observe them, and you adapt as needed and to continually improve what you're doing. Life doesn't stand still. Work doesn't stand still. Why should our processes be cast in stone?

Joe: Reviewing the stories, did you come away with a favorite?

Maritza: That's very difficult. I'm going to follow the cop out approach here and say that I

do like our own story. Maybe, it is because I learned so much from doing this. We went in with a specific idea, a vague idea initially, of exactly how we wanted to tell these stories; and the amazing thing that happened while we wrote the book was that we designed the book, the structure of the book and exactly how the stories flow as we did it. There was no fixed design. It emerged as we wrote and there was a lot of personal learning for all of us involved in that because we were not only writing about these principles and other people's stories and other people's companies, but we were actually living them and practicing them while we were writing the book. We made our own mistakes to, and we write about those, as well. I think it's that honesty that I appreciated being able to share with the world.

When it comes to some of the other stories, I do have a favorite and I think for me that would probably be the social text story. I am a big supporter of using social collaboration in the workplace. In fact, the company where I work has a social network embedded into the fabric of collaboration in the organization, and it was part of why I chose to be with this company and the social text story takes that to a new level. They not only embraced principles of continuous improvement in how they developed their software, but they used transparency, open communication and engagement with everybody across the organization to continually drive that improvement. It was not just one team in a corner saying, "We're doing Kanban." It was this organizational involvement and visibility and that resonated with me.

Joe: Was there a constant theme that you think that was delivered from all of them?

Maritza: I think the first thing that comes to mind for me when I step out like that is, just get on with it. It's to say to teams that, here are some principles. Go out and use them and don't be afraid to get around. Just get in and start because it's only once you start working with your processes and start observing them and interrogating whether they're working for or against you, it's only then that you start finding answers. We tend to get stuck on the theory quite a lot and design processes and workflows and by the time we actually get around to doing them sometimes the nature of the works changed again. I think for me it is to say, "There is no recipe but here are some tools. Go out. Get stuck and use them."

Joe: Was there a particular problem that most of them encountered?

Maritza: There were some common themes and challenges but to add onto your previous question about a common message, I think the commonality was actually in the differences in that no organization has exactly the same challenges. We all have different markets, different competitors, different products and different people in our businesses; and the mistake I believe many companies make is trying to take a process and shoe horn it into how you work. I think what we saw in these stories is that each of these teams took their unique set of challenges and found solutions to their own problems. They didn't try to take an off the shelf mold and try to fit that to their organization, and I think, this was a core part of the theme for me as well is that ownership, that embracing of the responsibility you have to

critically look at how you work and improve it because doing the work is as much about improving it for yourself and for others as it is about getting the job done.

Joe: Since you've been immersed in this book and doing it I'm sure you've learned quite a few things and how are you approaching Kanban differently as a result of the book?

Maritza: Even before I started writing the book I thought that it would be an ideal opportunity, perhaps, to look at Kanban as a way to create organization wide visibility and transparency of those projects that we have in the company and by writing the book I think I, in a personal capacity experienced some of the lessons that I need to consider before I went and presented Kanban as an organization wide solution because I saw from the stories that other teams had shared with us how important it is to get the right people involved at the right time, and it made me rethink how I was planning to go about that.

Joe: You're still working in a Scrum discipline, I think. Is there still merit in that process or in using both?

Maritza: Very certainly. I think, again, back to the point of no one size fits all, I think what you will see in the book as well that many of the stories reflect an approach where a team is evolving from Scrum to Kanban or sometimes using both at the same time. Each of the approaches has their merits. I personally have a specific tendency and preference towards Kanban for ongoing work, for work that is not

easily time boxed and where a time box could create its own share of problems because it is an artificial boundary in many cases of how work is delivered to a customer. I think for me they don't exclude each other. You can easily use Kanban and apply concepts and roles from Scrum in your environment. You can even have an organization wide enterprise level Kanban with specific teams running Scrum because they're working on specific defined projects. I think it is about which one of those works best for you with Lean and Kanban potentially as an organizational wrapper that gives you the visibility and the workflow clarity that you need.

Joe: I thought in the introduction that a lot of credit was given to Corey Ladas, who I always think is the forgotten person in Kanban. He seemed like he was the one that provided the Agile, Scrum Bridge over to Kanban in his book Scrumban. Is that book still worthwhile reading?

Maritza: I think Corey Ladas's Scrumban is certainly a seminal work that you should read if you are at all involved in using Scrum or Kanban. For a while we used Scrumban to, as the working title for this book, however, as it evolved we came to the conclusion that Scrumban in particular as a term, possibly become contaminated somewhat in the industry because people had interpreted it to mean a conflation, a hybrid of Scrum and Kanban and actually it was never intended that way. It was more about showing a migration, an evolution from Scrum to Kanban and how the one naturally could lead to the other, and I think we lent heavily on the principles that Corey wrote about. Many of the principles

that we write about in the book regarding encouraging craftsmanship, encouraging ownership of the work process, implementing visibility and a clear value chain approach to mapping your work. All of those concepts and principles are derived from Scrumban as written by Corey Ladas.

Joe: Is the book available now?

Maritza: Yes, it is. It is available in Kindle format at the moment. We specifically decided to get it out on Kindle before we put out the print copy because again, in the spirit of continuous improvement we thought that it would give us a few weeks to respond to any specific improvements that we may need to make as any software developer knows that a first release of anything may have a glitch or two, and we have received some feedback from our first readers already, which we're grateful for, and you can expect a print copy by mid to end April.

Joe: How can someone learn more about the book and is there a webpage for it?

Maritza: There is. Jim Benson has also blogged about the key concepts and the stories that we have included in Beyond Agile at the of <u>Modus Cooperandi</u> blog, and if you wanted to get an overview of what the book was about and what you could gain from reading that book, that would be a good place to start. More than welcomes to connect with me or Jim or Joanne, our other co-author, if you want to take up any of the conversations from the book once you have read it.

Joe: What would you hope someone would take away from the book?

Maritza: The core for me as a take away is we envisaged somebody picking up this book, somebody who perhaps doesn't even know about Scrum or Kanban from a software perspective and that it would inspire them to go and try this in their own organization. We specifically included some theoretic definitions and terminologies for people who are new to Agile and Lean, hoping that they would be able to take this to a manager, to an executive in their own organization and say, 'Look at what these teams got. Can we try this to?'

Joe: Maritza I would like to thank you for the conversation. I wish you the best of luck with your book. This podcast will be available in the Business 901 iTunes store and the Business 901 Blog site, so thanks again.
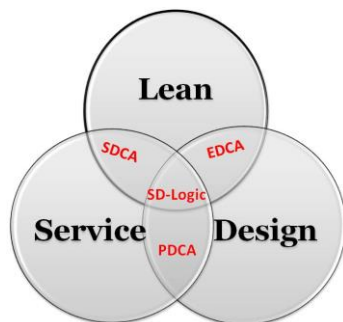
Joseph T. Dager

Business901

Phone: 260-918-0438

Skype: Biz901

Fax: 260-818-2022

Email: jtdager@business901.com

Business901   *Podcast Transcription*

Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Joe Dager is president of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

Visit the Lean Marketing Lab: Being part of this community will allow you to interact with like-minded individuals and organizations, purchase related tools, use some free ones and receive feedback from your peers.

Business901 Training Content