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Podcast Transcription
Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



Branding Your Startup

Guest was Laura Busche

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Transcription of the Podcast

Joe Dager: *With me today is Laura Busche. She is the author of Lean Branding, a practical toolkit to help you build your own robust dynamic brands to generate conversion without having to hire an agency. Laura, I would like to welcome you and excited about your book and tell me, is this your first book?*

Laura Busche: *Hi Joe, thanks for having me. Yes, this is my first book. It was just published a few weeks ago.*

Joe: *What made you want to write a book? Is it sort of you know a lot of consultants do it to kind of have a signature calling card or something like that but what was the motivation?*

Laura: *For me it was more of a I needed the tool to solve the problem that people kept coming to me with, so it was more of a problem-solving thing. I was working with a lot of early stage tech entrepreneurs and they kept on having the same issues as they tried to build their brands. I mean they were all competing with larger, more established and very*

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well funded companies and here we were, we were unfunded, we had no time and these teams are generally very small, so how on earth would they be able to compete with those larger brands? And that's sort of when the idea of Lean Branding was born, out of like a need to hack branding specifically.

Joe: *It's very much different than what we'd say a Kotler book on marketing or the more traditional marketing branding books.*

Laura: I've read the Kotler books. They are actually...it's how you start, so principles of marketing, marketing management, all these concepts. The real challenge for me was to bring these concepts to a level where anyone can use them to grow their startups. So it's more of a tactical book, I'd like to think of it as a handbook. It has more than 100 tactics, it has case studies, examples, templates, checklists, all the kind of thing that you want to have when you're just getting started and it's definitely not the kind of book that's here to introduce complicated theories, it's rather here to show you how they can be applied. It's also different from your traditional marketing book because I'm bringing in some insights from design; I'm bringing in some insights from psychology which is my background. I'm a business major and then I did some design management work and now I'm doing research in psychology, so it's bringing together all of these disciplines and I like to think that that's exactly what entrepreneurs need to use these tactics.

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Joe: Well I think you bring some interesting concepts there because so much of marketing today is influencing behaviors that's let's say in changing behavioral pattern to develop some sustainability, some use in the product anymore.

Laura: Exactly. Marketing is so influenced by consumer psychology, it's almost entirely an application of consumer behavior principles but there's also some interesting things happening from the design end. Designers are starting to use more agile research methods, so rather than just doing all these old focused groups that nobody seems to like or use anymore, it's becoming this environment where we can explore with ethnography, and we can do interviews, and we can discover consumers that way and it's just so interesting and that's one of the largest principles behind the book.

Joe: Would you say then it's more qualitative type of work rather than quantitative?

Laura: Oh there's quantitative. I mean on the metrics end of things, we do introduce a lot of ways and processes that startup founders can use to measure the performance of different sides of the branding process, but when you're starting to know your customer like at the very beginning when you're just discovering them, it's the word we use, you want to have a good amount of qualitative information that lets you build your buyer personas, that lets you truly understand the motivations behind these people. You don't want to be exclusively quantitative because you miss out on some of the details, on some

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of the psychographic information that ends up guiding your marketing strategy. So it's because we're in this environment of entrepreneurs and Lean Startups that I want to introduce the idea of, hey why don't we leave focus groups aside for a minute and questionnaires aside for a minute and why don't we sit down with our customer, do some in-depth interviews and figure out what it is that's on their minds and how we can better cater to their needs, so that's sort of how it works.

Joe: You mentioned *Lean Startup*, in your book that's called *Lean Branding*, is it based on *Lean Startup* principles?

Laura: Yes. The way the book was formed was I was working for a government agency that was using the Lean Startup and Customer Development Principles as their base and they wanted basically to take a group of startups from zero to growth in eight weeks, so it was a huge challenge and we had the Lean Startup methodology as a base. So when I started doing brand development with them, I mean I had to adapt all of these die-hard branding principles that I was educated with and that we've all been educated with, you know the Kotler books and everything and I had started to adapt all of these principles to a Lean environment where things needed to happen, they needed to happen now, they needed to happen for less money, and they needed to happen with a small team. So it was a lot of challenges at the same time and we ended up basing the entire methodology, the entire Lean Branding methodology on the Build-Measure-Learn cycle that is proposed in the

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Lean Startup. So the book, the Lean Branding book is also divided into a Build-Measure-Learn sort of framework.

Joe: *Well you know when I first think of a startup and I think of branding, I'm thinking a brand kind of evolves. How does branding work for a startup?*

Laura: Well that's actually a very interesting question because entrepreneurs are always wondering whether they should start working on branding from day one and the answer to that is, your brand is relevant from day one. A brand and product don't compete, that's something that we hear a lot. Whenever you've created something that is addressing consumer needs or aspirations, you have already begun to tell your story, your brand story to an audience; so whether you want to take action or not, your brand is already out there. If you are absent from the conversation, you will have to prepare for damage control later on and if you decide to pay attention to branding from the start, you will resonate much better with your target audience and you will be able to grow your product with a clear story, a set of visual symbols and a better communication strategy; so it's just smart to do it at the beginning.

Joe: *Especially at Lean Startup, we've always heard that famous word, the pivot. What happens if I pivot, does all my branding go to waste?*

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Laura: That's a question that I hear a lot and it's normal. I mean it's natural to think that all of your work is going to go to waste if you need to change something in your business model, if you need to change something in the way your brand is being presented. A pivot is a necessary change in direction and the idea of building a dynamic brand is precisely to be able to adapt to these changes very quickly. So as long as you've been listening and engaging with your audience, none of what you do is a waste of time. Iterating on your visual symbols, or changing your value story, or opening up new channels to communicate will not ruin the relationship that you already have built with your customers, that is of course if the pivot came out of customers themselves. So the whole point here is to continuously monitor your consumers' conversations so that every pivot that you decide to make is already validated with evidence and that sort of saves you a lot of time, it saves you a lot of resources, and it takes the whole "does my work go to waste" out of the question.

Joe: *I look at the book and I'm thinking, okay here you're talking about these toolkits, there's so many tools in it, is it just putting tools into practice or do I really have...I'm reading this story about it or how to apply the tools or is it just a description of tools?*

Laura: Okay the way I've built the book is there's consumer psychology theory, there's design theory, there's marketing theory, but none of that is alone. Whenever I introduce a new concept about what story telling is or what a brand partnership should look like, I

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always try to give you right after you're introduced to the important parts of the theory, I try to give you a good robust list of tools that you can use to actually put this into practice and there's also a good amount of cases and best practices so that you jump right in to the action. So the book is a combination of standing still in reading and then going back outside and actually putting it into practice.

Joe: *And if I read it cover to cover, I mean do they just jump in and grab what they need and pull it out of it?*

Laura: It's actually funny that you asked because O'Reilly which is the publishing house for the book, they have this...it's not a rule, something they do is in the preface, they always introduce readers to different ways in which the book can be read and there's usually one or two ways to read the book but this book looks like hopscotch. Like if you wanted to read it in five different ways, there are actually five different ways in which you can do it. For example, if you have built already a set of brand components, like you've built your logo, you've built your typographic scheme, you've built a story, you've built your landing page; if you have something already, you can jump to the second section, to the measure section and just start collecting the important data that's going to allow you to make decisions about whether these elements are working or not to generate traction and conversion. So that's one of the ways to do it; you can also just read it from zero to 300 and that's one of the most uncommon ways to do it because we're all busy nowadays.

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But it's definitely a flexible book in the sense that if you're missing something that you've...if you go to Chapter 7 and you're missing something from a previous chapter, then you can always go back and read the definition of whatever it is that you're missing and keep going, and I wrote something that people would actually keep on their desks and go back to.

Joe: *Are these common tools that are recognized in just you're showing how to apply them more in a startup type of mentality?*

Laura: Most of these tools exist. There are a couple of new tools that the book introduces. We have a lot of templates that are unique to the book that you won't find anywhere else, but we're also using frameworks that have been used in other areas before like positioning templates, we're using ethnography, we're using methods that already exist but we're sort of adapting them to startup marketing needs so that the book is as practical as possible.

Joe: *What's your favorite part of the book? Was it the Learn section, the Build section, or what did you really enjoy, the part that you really dug into?*

Laura: I really enjoyed the Build section. It reminded me a lot of the process that we had lived with the startups that inspired the book. There's just so much that can be improved

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in the way that startups are building their brands that I just really, really enjoyed bringing together all of these insights from psychology and design and just providing entrepreneurs with an easy way out, with hacks, with shortcuts that they can use.

Joe: *How much is the customer playing a role in developing the brand? How much is this externally in maybe outside looking in versus the inside looking out?*

Laura: The customer is central to Lean Branding. The whole point of the book is to say that in order to create dynamic brands that can truly generate conversions, brands need to listen and react. What we used to think in the past was that if I built a brand today and I built my brand around a series of insights that I collected from my consumers today, we used to think that that should work or would work in five or 10 years. And what we know now is that consumers' aspirations and their ideas of who they are and who they want to be are constantly changing, so the insights that we discovered today may not reflect the brand identity that we should be presenting in a couple of years. So the key is to always put the consumer at the center of your learning process and definitely guide your brand story, symbols and strategy to adapt them to consumers' changes; that's one of the central ideas behind the book.

Joe: *If you could give one bit of advice to someone about branding, what would it be?*

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Laura: A couple of bits of advice that are in the book, a couple of quotes that I'd like to highlight and that reflect this very solid advice that I would like to give to entrepreneurs or intrapreneurs that are trying to build their brands are, on one side we have this bit of advice, "People relate to people and if your brand feels like people, they'll relate to you too." And the point behind that is that brands need to be humane and they need to react to people's aspirations and they also need to build personalities that allow them to relate back to these people. So that's sort of not very intuitive but once you start getting a hold of how other brands have done it which is something that the book does, you understand how important it is to be humane as a brand.

And then the second bit of advice which is also a quote from the book is that, "Successful brands have a compelling answer whenever consumers ask, what's in it for me?" So the "What's in it for me..." question is something that you need to address. It's simple, if you want to write it down in front of you, if you want to write it on your walls, if you want to print it somewhere, that's something you should do because this is the essential question behind your relationship with your buyers. It's, "What's in it for me..." and it's something that the book highlights a lot. Whenever you've reached resonance which is what we call in branding, when your message is really being listened to by your consumer and understood, whenever that happens, it's because you've provided a very good answer for their what's in it for me question.

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Joe: *What's the difference if someone between a value proposition and the branding, should they resonate and tie together or kind of define that, what I'd be working differently on?*

Laura: Sure. Like I spoke a little bit about before, the brand has sort of three sides. The book starts out saying that brands are the story that consumers recall whenever they think about you, about your product, about your service and this story actually has three parts. So the first part is a value creation story and that's where your value proposition is, and that's where you tell consumers what it is that you're doing for them. And then you have a set of visual symbols and those are the ones that represent your story graphically, and then you have a strong growth strategy that can actually communicate the story using the symbols. So it's this very integral view on a brand and it contains your value proposition.

Joe: *So really the start of your book in the Build section is developing that value proposition and putting it into context and action.*

Laura: Exactly. It's sort of grabbing your value proposition and making it part of a brand story, making it part of this series of events and this series of experiences and touch points that you can then sell in the marketplace. Authors like of course Alexander Osterwalder and others have created specific tools so that you can design your value proposition. The goal of Lean Branding is to use your value proposition as an asset to create a dynamic

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brand for you, so it's integrated, it's integrated.

Joe: *What would you like to add maybe that I didn't ask about the book?*

Laura: Well some of the specific things maybe that the book will teach you how to do. I know that some of us have a very concrete problem in our heads right now and we just want to know if reading this will help us solve it or not, so I just wanted to maybe list a few of things that you'll find in the book. You'll learn how to name your brand, you'll create an engaging brand story, you'll also learn how to design a visual identity - that means logo, color scheme, typography - build a brand personality, you'll develop a voice to conquer your audience. The book also introduces Lean research methods like ethnography so that you can learn about your consumers' needs and aspirations. And then you have an entire section on designing landing pages, videos, press releases, ad campaigns, decks, and other essential brand assets; so it's really a very complete handbook to brand building. What I wanted to point out, maybe you have one of these issues, maybe you are trying to resolve your brand journey or you're trying to measure the impact of your social media marketing or build your content strategy and the book really does touch on all of these needs and it's a great resource.

Joe: *If I have a more mature company, I can certainly use this as a rebranding effort then maybe?*

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Laura: Sure. I mean I've heard from companies that are in every industry, I've heard from government agencies and even people that are working on their personal brands. It seems like everyone finds tools and tips that resonate with them and it surely can help an established brand and sort of start out on the measure section and just go forward with the learning process and rebrand; that's also a way to use the book.

Joe: *Where can I find out more about the book and connect with you?*

Laura: So we've created a companion Website that's actually being constantly updated with new tools and articles and you can find that over at leanbranding.com. You can also connect using social media, on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Google and in all of those, we are as @leanbranding, so that's easy. And if you ever want to ask me anything, I'm always at laurabusche on Twitter or my email is laura@laurabusche.com.

Joe: *Well that sounds pretty simple to get that. One other thing is the book is I don't want to say it's a difficult read but it's not a light read. I mean it's 200 some pages, 250 pages is it not?*

Laura: It is. It's about 300 pages.

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Joe: *Is this more product orientated or is this for professional services also?*

Laura: Because of the way it was created, the book was created sort of inspired on these text startups that were building apps and software and these kinds of products, there is a tendency to go and address some topics that these startups might be interested in but definitely if you are developing a service, all of the tools that are in this book will help you and you'll just find a couple of things that you didn't know and sometimes you'll even think of ways in which your service is also working as a product in certain environments, so it's interesting. And as I've told you before, I've heard it from people that are building from cities to an app or from a book, people that are writing books to people that are just trying to sell themselves as consultants, so it's very interesting where this is going.

Joe: *Laura I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to interview you and I highly recommend the book.*

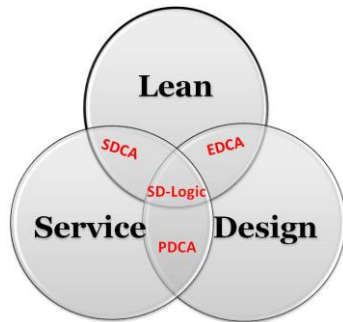
Laura: Well thanks for inviting me Joe and best of luck in the podcast. I'll be listening in to a lot of your interviews. I find it very interesting, so good luck to you.

Joe: *Well thank you again. This podcast will be available on the Business901 iTunes Store and the Business901 Blog Site. Thanks everyone for listening.*

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