



Introduction to We-Commerce

Guest was Billee Howard

[How to Create, Collaborate, and Succeed in the Sharing Economy](#)

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Transcription of Interview

Joe Dager: *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 Podcast. With me today is Billee Howard. Billee is the Founder and Chief Engagement Officer of Brandthropologie, a cutting edge communications consulting firm specializing in helping organizations and individuals to produce innovative, creative and passionate dialogues with target communities, consumers, and employees. She is the author of a new book, We-commerce, which takes the understanding of the Sharing Economy to a new level of understanding. Thanks Billee for joining me and can you clean up the introduction a little bit to Brandthropologie and also the tie in with Mojo Risin?*

Billee Howard: Sure. Thanks for having me, Joe. I'm Billee Howard, and I lead Brandthropologie as you just said. Brandthropologie is what I'd like to call a collective artist consultancy that is focused on really studying the intersection of culture and commerce and working with our clients to position themselves appropriately in the new environment. Mojo Risin is our production arm that's focused on producing branded content as one of our offerings that we give to our clients to, you know, communicate with their key constituents.

Joe: *Okay. Well, the title sets me back a little bit when I first grabbed it, We-commerce,*

because I immediately go to E-commerce at first. How'd you pick the title and maybe what is the meaning of it?

Billee: Sure. Well, I'm glad that it sets you back a minute because that was my intention. E-commerce is, it is certainly something that everybody knows about, but it's quite dated and we're really living in a new world of sharing and moving away from ownership, and I really thought that the name We-commerce really encapsulated this new era of business and consumerism that we are in. It really aims to discuss the movement towards collaboration and sharing and community to the benefit of us all.

Joe: *Your book is not your traditional strategy book as I read it. You challenge companies right up front to collaborate not only with their customers but within their communities. So, I take that meaning a few competitors even. Can you tell us what you mean by communities then or is it the company ecosystem that they work in or what is it?*

Billee: The term 'sharing economy', people often think that it's just about apps like Uber and companies like Airbnb but really the era that we are entering in right now embodies this idea of moving from the 'me' to the 'we' and that's both at the individual level as well as at the level of a big business. So, when I talk about moving forward with the sense of community and a spirit of collaboration, I mean that in the broadest sense of the word. I mean that by the cultures that companies need to create internally with their employees that ideas and innovations can come from anywhere at any level and it's a spirit of entrepreneurialism and shared approaches to innovation that are really going to set apart the winners from the losers. I feel that in the new world, business is taking a much greater role outside of just the private sector and stepping into the public sector there's this idea of branded government where businesses really need to think about profiting with purpose and really serving the communities that they operate within, more than just thinking about

the products and services that they offer. It's really a big picture approach that applies to everyone, be they big or small or an individual or a corporation.

Joe: *You're saying that I can have a brick and mortar store and kind of be in that We-commerce even though I'm at the local corner.*

Billee: Of course, I mean that's why we're also seeing a return to mom and pop shop type of businesses that are flourishing. I mean that's the whole bespoke movement that we're seeing. You have the bespoke movement hitting everything from cupcakes to alcohol to coffee, and these types of bespoke offerings are really happening at the ground level, grassroots level with entrepreneurs that are of all shapes and sizes and basically are found in every single corner of the globe.

Joe: *I came from the construction industry, I mean years back here and we had consortiums. And, would that be something similar to what we'll experience now in the we-commerce?*

Billee: I don't think it's really about a specific type of infrastructure. I think it's really about a shift in mindset. It's about understanding that technology has been the great equalizer. It's been a force of democratization over the last decade or so and basically what it's enabled to have happen is we have for the first time ever a global middle class and as a result of that, we have technology and access to capital that wasn't present in the past has enabled everyone the opportunity to be an entrepreneur and the internet just gives us a platform to hear about these entrepreneurs and the innovations that they're producing which can be found, as I said anywhere in the world. So, whether you're a big business, or you're an individual, or you fell somewhere in between, the idea is to really shift your mindset to embrace the changes of our new world because I believe that there is

an opportunity for everyone, which really wasn't the case in the past.

Joe: *Does the We-commerce in the sharing economy, is that kind of the rise of the middle class back to maybe taking control instead of being squeezed?*

Billee: Well, I'm not an economist, so I don't necessarily know if I want to comment on the question. But, I do feel that we can see kind of what you're talking about or eluding to happening right here in the U.S.A. I've called it a new 'made in the U.S.A.' movement and what I mean by that is that for many years when manufacturing was outsourced to other countries, we were pressed to figure out how to make our economy competitive. With the loss of many industries and jobs here, recently, we've seen this sharing economy movement, this ability to leverage technology to re-imagine and re-invent things that didn't exist before, popping up and in pockets across the country and regions re-imagine themselves as new hotbeds of innovation. What I mean by that is if you look at Dallas which is now known as Silicon Prairie, it's become one of the hottest areas for innovation in the gaming space. You would think that Dallas is known for oil, and you wouldn't necessarily think that it's really focused on gaming innovation. You wouldn't necessarily realize that Oregon, which is now known as Silicon Forrest, is known as one of the top places in the world to produce semiconductor chips which is one of the most critical components of any piece of technology. So, it's that kind of thinking that is enabling new opportunities to be entrepreneurial, to be innovative, not just happen at the very, very top but the opportunity is that we're really moving from this idea from 'me' to 'we', we really moved to the notion that we're really being powered forward by the many and not the few. So, your point is definitely one that I think might actually have some merit to it.

Joe: *What sort of skills do I need to develop as a company or an entrepreneur to*

participate. Is there a set of skills I need?

Billee: Well, I think that it really goes back to understanding the environment that we're in. I think that people make a mistake by thinking that maybe the sharing economy is a blip or a phenomenon or can be boiled down to an app like Uber or Airbnb when in reality our entire society is moving away from the model of ownership. So, if we're moving away from the model of ownership, and we're moving towards the idea of doing a community of building businesses, building infrastructures that are really based on the notion of trust and collaboration, I think that's probably the most critical thing that one can do to even begin to compete because I think you really need to understand how vastly different the landscape is. I think you also really need to understand this idea that culture and commerce are really not 2 separate areas anymore. That's why I talk about this new era of the artist in business in my book because creativity is no longer a function of optics designed to make something look pretty, it's really a critical component of business strategy. So is technology. Technology is no longer just this agent of infrastructure building so that we can connect. I mean that was the last 20 years. But, technology today is also another critical component of business strategy. I think if you really study and understand the core drivers that are fueling the economy forward and driving successful business and leadership then you probably will be equipped to compete and compete well.

Joe: *You talk about that participation in the economy in that social and cultural environmental responsibility that you need to be part of it. Is that all part of this trust thing? How does all that connect? I mean is it important that we have to be social and environmentally responsible?*

Billee: Well, I don't necessarily think that it's just environmentally responsible. I think that what happened. Post the 2008 global financial meltdown, as I say it in my book, it's like

the world pressed this massive reset button and we got to basically start over. I think that one of the most critical outcomes of the 2008 crisis was that there was an enormous degree of mistrust that people had in big business and in government and as a result of that, people have taken matters into their own hands and have really worked to build their own businesses from the ground up and really, you know, make entrepreneurialism a thing that is available to the masses. That being said, for big business and for government to compete, they have to understand that the trust that was lost and really, really work hard to demonstrate that they want to be part of this amazingly transformative period in history and want to do so in a way that helps everyone, not just themselves and their shareholders.

Joe: *I want to ask you something you mentioned in the book. It's about the Golden Rules. Could you mention a couple of them and tell me what those are about?*

Billee: The Golden Rules really are about embracing the idea of change, embracing the idea of disruption. I think that one of the reasons that lead us to our 2008 crisis was this general sense of complacency that things were the way they were and that they should remain as such. There was no sense of urgency to change, to re-imagine and to make things better and I think that the greatest thing that came out of the crisis is the need to do so. To push one's self to a place of discomfort as often as possible so that you're in a position to constantly work to make yourself and those around you or your corporation better.

I think that another Golden Rule of importance is to 'think big but act small' and what that means is really having the ability to understand that in today's market, agility is key and in order to be agile, you have to have a flattened organization where decisions can be made quickly, where ideas can come from all regions of the world and at all levels, no

bureaucracy and, I think you have to have a, as I said, you have to be able to have a small operating mentality for that agility with an eye on still acting global. I think that being able to tear something down and start from scratch and re-imagine again, those are all critical things that are required succeed in our new we-economy.

Joe: *Well, can companies just do it? I mean, or will they fall flat on their face? Do they have to prep themselves and start laying out a plan of "Oh gee, we need to do this a little bit or this a little bit." How do you go about participating in 'sharing economy'?*

Billee: Well, I mean, I think there're many different ways of doing it. I think what it starts with is embracing an approach of collaboration and sharing into your business strategy to figure out how to work with consumers as closely as possible the communities that you operate in so that innovation is a two-way process. I also think that it's critically important to build a culture inside an organization that is built upon the idea of as I said, collaboration and shared approaches to entrepreneurialism. Today, the most vital asset of any company is its people and everything that possibly can be done should be done to treat that resource as the most valuable commodity it can be because building a culture where the people operate on the philosophy that are driving the economy forward is clearly something that's going to make someone successful or potentially not.

Joe: *Who was your book meant for? Is it meant for the CEO or is it meant for mid-level or anyone?*

Billee: My clients are primarily, people in the C-Suite, CEOs, Chief Marketing Officers, Chief Technology Officers but I really believe that we're in this era of where anyone can be an entrepreneur and whether you're graduating from school and figuring out how to start a career, or you're midcareer and trying to figure out what's the next step, what is the

appropriate pivot point or if you're sitting in the C-Suite of a Fortune 500 company. What I write about in this book, I feel is relevant to just about anyone.

Joe: *Is it more just that high-level type thought?*

Billee: Well, listen a lot of the ideas in the book are very big and what we try to do was make them accessible to everybody. I think it's big ideas that are broken down into simple easily understandable language and basically like a playbook of how and what you need to succeed in the new world. So yeah, I guess you could consider it a handbook of big thoughtful ideas.

Joe: *I think that's a great way to put it. You eluded to earlier is that it's not as big or here's this 4 big goals for the year that we're going to plan, go out and do. Instead, we might paint a vision but there's a lot of little ideas that we expect to get from everyone to build towards that vision.*

Billee: That's exactly right. I mean it's no different than what happened during the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution changed everything about how we work, whether it was from the standpoint of automation and heightened sense of technology or it was the fact that people left their homes for the first time to go to work. All of these things have massive implications, and people had to respond at the corporations to adjust to a new environment. That's what I think is what's going on now. I think we've had one of the greatest transformative periods in history underway and I think a lot of people are aware of the changes that are going on but I don't think that they can necessarily make sense of them or figure out where they fit into them, and that was one of the major reasons that I chose to write this book.

Joe: *The House of We, I saw that on your website when I was browsing for some background information on the podcast.*

Billee: The House of We, one of the things that I do is I forecast trends and the House of We is an area of Brandthropologie that's dedicated to tracking the issues and trends that are going to have the most critical impact on business and consumerism. So, it's really a venue for people to come and understand what our new world is about and what the experiences are that are making it up.

Joe: *And, what's on the horizon for you and your company?*

Billee: There are a lot of different ideas in the book on how to be successful but what I do best and where I'm heading Brandthropologie, the direction I'm heading Brandthropologie in is continuing to focus on making very high level branded content for companies. I truly believe that brands have the opportunity to be the studios of tomorrow, and I think that's one very important change that's going to continue to occur as a result of this new world that we've been talking about.

That's something that I am very passionate about, and my team is passionate about, and that's what we'll be focused on along with of course advising senior executives and leaders on how to transform their communications function into vehicles of not just generating awareness but really generating true innovation.

Joe: *What's the best way for someone to find out more about the book and contact you?*

Billee: Well, you can go to our website, Brandthropologie.com, where you can find out everything about me, my philosophy, my team and the types of approaches that we use to

help clients compete more aggressively in today's environment.

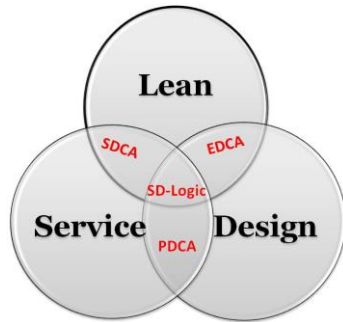
Joe: *Okay and the book will be released on?*

Billee: The book, We-commerce, is out on December 1st in bookstores, and it's available online currently on all your major book supplier sites.

Joe: *Okay. Well, I would like to thank you very much, Billee, for the time you spent here and I look forward to hearing more about your book as time goes on here. So, thank you very much for your participation.*

Billee: Well, Joe, thank you so much for having me on and for taking the time to read the book and the thoughtful questions that allowed me to expound on, the things that I'm most passionate about so thanks so much.

Joe: *Okay. This podcast will be available on the Business901 blog site and the Business901 iTunes store. So, thanks, everyone.*



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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.

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