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CTRL+CLICK CAST #89

Niche Identity & Branding with The FlyDuo

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Sherri Johnson: We wanted to create a company that we would want to hire. You know, we go to all these different web companies and they're great, and their portfolios are great and everything, but if they don't speak to you, you're less likely to hand over your dollars or you're less likely to have that complete trust.

[Music]

Reuben Johnson: To put your brand in their hands.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, there's somebody for everybody. And like just about every aspect of life, we figured why can't it be that way with the Internet and web design the same way? Why can't it be the same way? So that's what we did. We created a company we would want to hire.

Lea Alcantara: From [Bright Umbrella](#), this is CTRL+CLICK CAST! We inspect the web for you! Today Sherri and Reuben Johnson join us to talk about niche identity and branding for their agency [Fly Media Productions](#). I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host:

Emily Lewis: Emily Lewis!

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Lea Alcantara: Today's episode is sponsored by [Foster Made](https://fostermade.co), a versatile web development agency specializing in custom application development, content management systems and user experience design. Through partnerships with designers, agencies and organizations, Foster Made is committed to building better digital experiences. Visit fostermade.co to learn more.

Emily Lewis: Our guests today are Sherri and Reuben Johnson who some of you, especially in the ExpressionEngine community, may know as The FlyDuo. We're talking to them today about how they developed the niche brand and identity for their agency, which is a brand centered around unapologetic professionals, tastemakers and nonconformists.

Welcome to the show, Reuben and Sherri.

Reuben Johnson: Hey guys.

Sherri Johnson: Hey guys!

Reuben Johnson: Thanks for having us!

Lea Alcantara: Absolutely. So can you tell our listeners a bit more about yourself? Reuben, let's start with you.

Reuben Johnson: Okay, let me see. I'm a front-end dev primarily, but I'm kind of like all around generalist developer. We're originally from the northeast, outside of Boston, Providence, Rhode Island area and we relocated to Atlanta, Georgia probably like five years ago. We've been in business together for, what?

Sherri Johnson: Sixteen years.

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Reuben Johnson: Seventeen or sixteen years, I think.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Reuben Johnson: Yeah. I consider myself a blue-collar white-collar worker. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Which is interesting space to be in, I like it. I kind of take all of that background and experience and bring it with me to web design/web development-type business. I'm not a designer, obviously, and then just running a business in general.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: And then kind of take a lot of the reality of knowing how difficult it is to run a business and the amount of work and resources people put in to do their small businesses, and we take that and everything we do with websites, we always keep that in mind, realizing that people are putting a lot, they're investing a lot into us and so the risk is real whenever you're investing in anything for your business, and so we always really like put a lot of respect on that. When we're thinking about strategy and ROI and stuff, that comes into play.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: So that's kind of like me in a nutshell, the business side of me at least.

Lea Alcantara: Hooray! How about you, Sherri?

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Sherri Johnson: Well, first and foremost, I am a mama and a wifey. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: And then for our team, I am a design and creative and then personally, I am a pretty simple, pretty laidback. I am a self-proclaimed urban hippie.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: I like bare feet, green grass, the smell of cut grass, water, and on the other side, I like big hoops, big shoes.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Nice.

Sherri Johnson: Nothing fancy.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Oodles.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

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Sherri Johnson: That's pretty much me.

Emily Lewis: So I'm not sure if our listeners realize that you two are married. Have you been working together from the beginning or is that something that evolved after a few years of marriage?

Reuben Johnson: Well, we were married. So we've been married 21 years.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: So when we started the business, we were married like, what, five or six years, I think?

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, about that.

Reuben Johnson: About that.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: Around that. I can't totally remember.

Sherri Johnson: Four or five. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: But we were married for a few years like you said before we started the business. We always wanted to do something together so we're very much like always wanting to do stuff together, and we just kind of like had an opportunity opened up where we could do something like this. We had a mutual friend who was – I think he was the CTO for an agency in the city, and I come from a CADD (computer-aided design and drafting) background, and he kept like trying to get – he's like, "Oh, you've got to get into the web. You've got to get into the web," and I was kind of hesitant. I

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was doing the blue collar stuff in construction and that kind of stuff, and he's like, "Man, you've got to get into the web." So finally, he kind of wore us down and the situation kind of dictated I had to make some changes anyway, so we kind of went in this direction, and long story short, that was kind of the impetus for us making that transition. It didn't happen that simply, but that's kind of it in a nutshell.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, but we have always had an interest in spending as much time together as possible. [Laughs] From like Day 1, we always were like planning our schedules so that we would have like the same work schedule so that we could have as much as we could together.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: So when we had the opportunity to start a business and work together full time, we were really happy about that.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, it worked out really well.

Emily Lewis: So I mentioned in your intro that you guys are known affectionately, especially on Twitter as The FlyDuo. Is that something that was part of your identity from the beginning or is that something that's evolved over time?

Reuben Johnson: That's a really good question. No, it hasn't been part of the identity from the beginning. Interestingly enough or funny enough, depending on how you want to look at it [laughs], it started when we had rebranded in like 2005 maybe. I think it was around there. We needed a new email and we didn't want to just do the norm, so we're trying to think of a name that worked off or played off the company name and that just worked for us, our personality, and we came up with FlyDuo, and we really liked it and then we're like...



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Sherri Johnson: It was also around the time of Twitter and we started Twitter and we jumped on Twitter with the same FlyDuo.

Emily Lewis: Handle.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Mindset, yeah.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: And it just kind of like took off from there.

Sherri Johnson: Took off from there.

Reuben Johnson: But it was kind of like a necessity, mother of invention and all that.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: It just kind of like worked out.

Sherri Johnson: And now most people know us more as The FlyDuo than Fly Media.

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

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Sherri Johnson: They're like, "What's your company again?" Like we've actually had people put FlyDuo on contracts. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: And we're like, "No, it's actually Fly Media Productions." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Which is weird when you've got to go back and say, "Yeah, can you correct that please?" [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: We like it though.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, I mean, yeah.

Sherri Johnson: It's exactly what we wanted. We want that like one-on-one type of relationship with our clients, so it worked out really well. I think it sets the tone for who we are.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, I think it just gone for good, like how we relate with clients too, which is really cool.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

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Lea Alcantara: I feel like that sets us up for our first question really what sets you apart and how you relate to your clients, which is your brand. To me and Emily, it seems a lot different from the norm amongst most web agencies. To us, your brand has a lot of attitude.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: It's very sexy, very edgy.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So I'm curious with that type of direction, especially as you mentioned, you guys kind of started off with like Fly Media Productions and FlyDuo and it was kind of necessity. All of the reflection of your current brand right now, like the sexiness and edginess, they're from the very beginning or was that something that kind of evolved over time, and then on top of that, like has this direction helped you?

Reuben Johnson: That is a really good question. That's a bunch of really good questions that's unpacked.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Okay, so I guess I'll start and I'll let Sherri just jump in and cut me off whenever she's ready to or feels comfortable.



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Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: As you can tell, I'm like the talker and Sherri is the one who's always going to drop like huge gems that are going to by far overshadow anything I've said.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Do you know what I mean?

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: But long story short, no, we are not. That wasn't...

Sherri Johnson: Yes and no.

Reuben Johnson: Yes and no. Yeah, good point. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: So it's funny because in preparation for the interview, we really like kind of did a deep dive like kind of thinking, because as you can tell, a lot of years has gone past so some of the stuff, like I got to think really hard to remember back, because it feels like forever ago sometimes. So when we started, kind of yes, it was like that, just kind of like a little. When we started we got a friend of ours that I've been friends with since I was a kid and we were really tight boys. I helped him



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through some difficult times in his life, so then when we were trying to start the business, he, as a wedding gift, gave us and helped us out with getting the computer equipment and the software to start the business, so he did us like a huge solid, so we started that out and then we wanted to grow beyond that and do some other things. We were trying to work with like the Small Business Administration and some different entities like that, and through that process, they wanted us to tone down our brand like considerably.

Sherri Johnson: They did not get it at all.

Reuben Johnson: They didn't understand it.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: So like we were saying from the beginning, we knew exactly what we wanted to be, but we changed a little bit along the way in the beginning because we needed to get that help and they were not going to give us that help with the way we were. They just were not getting it. They didn't understand. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: And the web, too, was in its infancy as far as...

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: Especially where we were at, because this was like the late 90's, early 2000. Even the person we worked with through the organization, and if I'm remembering correctly, I think

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the closest they had was someone who did like IT hardware or something for like network switches and stuff.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: That was the branch that worked with people. They didn't have anything for web design development, nothing.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: It was just like some far-flung thing off of like telecommunications. So anyway, we had a lot of push back from them and since we were trying to get some funding and stuff, we kind of made that compromise a lot of people do when they're trying to get funding.

Sherri Johnson: Exactly, yeah.

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Reuben Johnson: And which is kind of I guess one of those things with our learning process because through doing it that way and trying to go in a direction that they want us to go in, we realized how much it can be detrimental to your business and how you see your business, if you operate in a way that's not really the way that your gut and your brain and your research is telling you you need to go.

Sherri Johnson: Right.

Reuben Johnson: So we ended up, you know. We course corrected. We brought our brand back to where we wanted to be, and then...

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Sherri Johnson: It took us a while though. It took us a lot of years of being lukewarm as we call it, like somewhere in the middle of not really...

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: People were like super excited about us, but nobody really not loving us either, but lukewarm is not really the best place to be either.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: So we spent a lot of years there. So when we branded two years ago, we were like, "We're going all in or we're going all out," because we weren't happy.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: So we were like, "We're going to speak our language to the people that we're speaking to and not worry about everybody else," and that's what you get when you get us and we pretty much are like our client, you know?

Emily Lewis: If you don't mind, I'd love to understand a little bit more. You said it was a bit of a long process sort of understanding you needed to course correct. What were the signs to let you know it was your brand that needed the shift?

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Reuben Johnson: We weren't happy, I think it was part of it, and then I think what happens is you bring in too much of a mix of clientele; some that are the right fit, some that aren't.

Sherri Johnson: Different point of view.

Reuben Johnson: And you realize the brand's point of view isn't clear enough yet, and I think that's part of it, and also just realizing you're doing too many projects you're not really happy with. You can do them and technically you can do all the work in that and deliver something great for them, but if it's not really fulfilling what you want your brand to be, then you know something has got to be off. I mean, we all end up taking projects for whatever reason that may not be like right in our sweet spot, but if you're doing too many of them that you don't want to be, then you realize something needs an adjustment, and for us, we felt a little bit all over the map.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, and we felt it from our clients, too.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: I don't think there was not that same like tight relationship that seemed like other people have with their clients.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: We weren't getting that.

Emily Lewis: Right.

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Sherri Johnson: We were happy enough with our clients, and I think they were happy enough with us, but there wasn't that strong connection like a family does.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Well, I just thought it was a very interesting point about attracting a whole bunch of different clients. The lukewarm-ness part of that, I think a lot of people need to be reminded that branding isn't just about attracting. It's also about strategically rejecting the wrong fit.

Reuben Johnson: Yes.

Sherri Johnson: Yes.

Emily Lewis: Yes.

Sherri Johnson: That was also very hard for us, too, because back in the day we were very much like didn't want to turn anybody off. We didn't want to upset anybody. We didn't want to offend anybody, and we were just like stuck in the middle of it all and then when we rebranded, like I said, we were like, "We're going all in." We were scared to death. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Well...

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Sherri Johnson: But it's been the best thing for us, like now we have like real relationships with our clients, like longer lasting, more meaningful relationships. We're happier in the work that we do. It's much more easy for us to communicate with our clients through our website, our work, our social media. Everything that we do is just easier because it's a representation of who we are as well.

Reuben Johnson: I think, too, one of the things we went through challenges, to jump off what you said, is in the very beginning, we had very much knew what we were going to be and we would have arrived here a decade sooner because I remember when we were sitting down with the SBA, and then when you sit down with a business coach and they have someone like from score or whatever with you and you get all these different mentors and they're like, "Who are your clients?"

And so we mapped out who our client was because we had done all this research and whatever and they're like, "No, everyone is your client. Anyone who wants a website is your client," and I can still remember that day where I'm like, "No, no, not all, like no and like we have a very particular client that would want to work with us that we want to work with that we're all a great fit for, so just not anyone who wants a website."

I think to me that is a perfect example of although those folks were like exceptional in business for their business, you have to like trust yourself and know that if you've done your due diligence and all that, you're the best guy for your own business.

Sherri Johnson: Oh yeah.

Reuben Johnson: Because you can't put it in the hands of anyone else. No one else can help you shift, but the people who run your business.

Sherri Johnson: Right.

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Reuben Johnson: Because someone else's idea of what is a good fit for you is really filtered through the lens of their experiences and their business and what not, and it's not necessarily going to be a really good indicator of where your business is needing to go for your reasons.

Emily Lewis: Man, that's excellent advice. Also, I imagine, it's taken you a long time to like get there. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yes. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: Yes. A little too long it feels like. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, exactly.

Sherri Johnson: I'm sure. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I feel like I'm still second guessing things. I feel like I'm always checking in with Lea, "Is this still worth our time? Are we still going in this direction?" It's still something that I think I'm getting used to as an idea of having a very focused approach to the types of clients we seek.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely, and a lot of that can be done through even some design choices, like I know that Emily and I talk a lot about how the look and feel of our site can attract or repel certain people and we have to remind ourselves that that's okay. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: That's a good thing, yeah.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.



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Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly, like if somebody is afraid of color, Bright Umbrella might not be the right fit for you. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: Yeah. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: And if they're stuck on that like really at the grand scheme of things on that one particular detail versus thinking about holistically how their brand and their business and their goals are all achieved through this particular design, then again, they might not be the right fit, but it is a matter of going back and forth and trying to see like, "How do I remain authentic while also attracting the type of people we want to attract, but being totally okay that that means some people will say no."

Reuben Johnson: I think that's a really good point.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, and they're still not there.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: I think that self-doubt is just normal. I personally think it is because you all know me when it comes to doubting yourself when you wish you didn't. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: No, but seriously, I think you make so many good points. I remember when you talked about color, the LeaLea website from back in the day, it's like a pinkish, purplish color.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah, totally.

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Reuben Johnson: And I remember we saw that and it's just like we immediately were like drawn to that. I think that, like you said, design is about strategy and when it's done well, you're going to bring the right customer. When the right customers comes in, they're going to trust you. They're going to trust your strategy because they understand you connect and they understand that you understand how to communicate with them and their audience and all that stuff.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah. And when you're very design driven, like we are, you want to make sure that your website communicates to your audience.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: Like I felt like we wanted to create a company that we would want to hire.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: We go to all these different web companies and they're great, and their portfolios are great and everything, but if they don't speak to you, you're less likely to handle you their dollars or you're less likely to have that, like, complete trust.

Reuben Johnson: To put your brand in their hands.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, there's somebody for everybody, and like just about every aspect of life. We figured why can't it be that way with the Internet and web design the same way? Why can't it be the same way? So that's what we did, we created a company we would want to hire.



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Emily Lewis: Let's talk about that a little bit. So how did you get to understanding who your client was? Was it more that you knew who you were and you would attract the clients or you started working with certain clients and you noticed how well that aligned with who you guys were?

Reuben Johnson: Yes. I'm just playing... [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: I'm just playing... I wanted to do that for so long. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: It was based 100% on we knew who we were.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: My whole rule is if there's one, there's many.

Emily Lewis: Right.

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Reuben Johnson: I kind of like used that when I did do anything, and I kind of like try to create some proof of it obviously, but we knew who we were. We knew that there was a market of other people out there who were like minded, and so we built everything around that. It make a lot easier if your brand is in line with who you are as a person, then it makes it a lot easier to set tone and voice and all that for your own brand.

Sherri Johnson: Exactly.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah. And then if the clients obviously of that brand are of the same way, everything just lines up and if you do it well, it's almost like the stars align and the heavens open up and it's like, "Oh." [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: And then over time, too, as we started working with more and more people or we got more and more people reaching out to us, we pay really close attention to who was reaching out to us.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: And based off of what, we realized that more and more of the same type of person that we weren't maybe necessarily even intentionally honing so tightly in on was honing tightly in on us, and so then we just start getting more and more of our marketing towards that specific goal.

Lea Alcantara: So specifically to at least based on looking at your marketing, those people tend to be in the entertainment and fashion industry, so does that market drive your own agency's brand as fashion or trendy stuff type of thing? Because it does feel a little bit like a chicken and an egg discussion where you guys know who you are, but then you are listening to who was also reaching out to you after you've honed that. How much push and pull is there? How much are you driving it or how much are you just responding to the market?



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Reuben Johnson: That's a good question. I think for us at least, we definitely pay attention to entertainment and fashion and we'd certainly like get inspiration from there, but we wouldn't say that they drive where we're moving at. I know like even when I think about it because we know fashion is a big thing for both of us and I remember when fashion went from being baggy jeans and big funky sneakers to the slim cut jeans with the high tops.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: And how it zigged away from where our brand went to, but we can still draw inspiration from it, but we're not tightly coupled where fashion can do its own thing and we'll pull whatever inspiration out of it works for our brand.

Sherri Johnson: Whatever it inspired by fashion and entertainment, it creates style and all that stuff.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Sherri Johnson: And our clients pretty much are too.

Reuben Johnson: I think that's why we ended up it's a natural kind of like, I guess, symbiosis type thing.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

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Reuben Johnson: It like naturally attracts people from those industries, though at the same time we get people, you know. Like we've got a client who's an attorney who was drawn in from the like-mindedness.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Reuben Johnson: I think that's where we try to put a lot of our emphasis because I think that's where it's more important where we can help you with strategy for your clientele is the like-mindedness so that we can really effectively create a good strategy.

Emily Lewis: That's interesting. So correct me if I'm wrong, but it's less about a specific market per se like entertainment and more about business owners and businesses who have an appreciation for those things and therefore they're drawn to you?

Reuben Johnson: Yes.

Sherri Johnson: Yes.

Reuben Johnson: Yes. And it would be those and then like we have on our site to the effect of the nonconformists, the unapologetic, basically, it's about that mindset.

Sherri Johnson: Style and mindset.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah. I mean, they will usually have an appreciation for style and aesthetic. It may not necessarily be our exact style and aesthetic because that doesn't necessarily have to matter

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as much, it's just about whether they trust that we can like execute on a strategy that delivers the results that they need for their clients.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, a lot of times we hear, "I see you guys are very edgy, very funky, yadda, yadda, yadda, and I'm looking for somebody who can think outside of the box and you guys do that."
[Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Like the lawyer we were with just telling us that when she called us, she's like, "Where have you guys been my entire professional life?"

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: Because a lawyer is not our typical clientele.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: Like you said, we do a lot more of like the fashion/entertainment type stuff, but we are definitely interested in working with all kinds of people with similar style and mindset, and that's why we try not to hone in on just one specific like genre of entertainment or whatever.

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Emily Lewis: So can you talk a little bit about this in action and maybe in the context of – I think you were saying, was it two years ago you guys redesigned the site and had sort of like a refresh to the brand?

Reuben Johnson: Yes.

Sherri Johnson: Yes, exactly two years ago.

Emily Lewis: Wow!

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Sometimes time just flies. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: Yeah. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Tell me about it.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, can you share your process like how you knew you were going to go all in with your identity, so how did you decide where that showed up on your site and it sounds like is now helping attract clients?

Reuben Johnson: Yeah. I'll let Sherri handle a lot of the identity stuff, I think, and well, unless I just say something incorrect, then you can just correct me.

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Sherri Johnson: Well, I think it's pretty much kind of what we already touched on, how we wanted to create a company that we would hire, so we wanted the visuals to be something that would draw us in and people like us in. We wanted the language to sound like something that would come from us.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Everything on our site was written by us. It's in our words, in the way that we'll speak to you, and so what you see on our website and what you get from us, we hope you'd feel mesh perfectly because we feel like our website, our company, our business is an extension of who we are.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Sherri Johnson: And that's pretty much what we poured ourselves into our website. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So I'm curious more about the specifics though, like in identifying and executing all of the design and those words, like for example, Emily and I went through a survey of our closest colleagues and our friends and everything like that to get an idea of their perception so we had something to compare to with what we wanted, plus we did a whole bunch of like word association exercises and then Emily and I filled out our own survey separately and then we had meetings, those types of things. I'm wondering like what were the specifics that you did to decide, "Okay, this is going to be the color scheme. This is going to be the words."

Reuben Johnson: That's such an interesting thing that you bring out. I remember [that episode](#).

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Reuben Johnson: I remember after you guys did that, we actually went back and redid some of the stuff based on what you guys have said.

Sherri Johnson: We did the same thing.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Yes.

Reuben Johnson: That's so funny that I forgot all about that.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: But yeah. So that is some of the things we did; a bunch of research, looking, and part of that research is kind of also knowing what isn't a good fit for your own brand.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: Finding things that work really well for another brand, but you know don't fit for your branding, and so we did a lot of research looking at other agencies, and then really making sure that – because I think one of the most important things for us that caught us as a foundation is setting tone and voice and everything kind of builds off of that, so we did a lot to figure that out. Everything from reading lyrics to researching...

Sherri Johnson: I love lyrics.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah. [Laughs]

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Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Researching other brands and then a lot of the dry monotonous stuff, I went back to the SBA and just refreshed myself by reading tons of stuff in the small business area of the SBA, which isn't necessarily fun, but I'm kind of like anal like that where... [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: I just do it, you know, and whether or not I enjoyed, I do it because I feel like it's a necessity whatever thing, so I did a lot of reading up on there. We did a lot of that kind of research.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, we also looked at a lot of what had been working for us previously that we were happy with.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: Like the results that we were getting that we were happy with and we wanted more of.

Reuben Johnson: We did a deep dive, too, and we read a ton. So we divided a lot of our clientele between those who had signed on, those who had reached out and hadn't moved forward for whatever reason, and then researched any clients that we'd might have lost over the years and tried to pull out commonalities between them all to make sure, to kind of like see any areas that we were kind of like hidden in plain sight.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: And so we did a lot of that as well and we also asked ourselves each other those questions, and then we kind of looked at the brand as kind of like a third person in a way like another entity so we kind of like want to make sure and so we asked a lot of questions about that entity.

Sherri Johnson: Right.

Reuben Johnson: It was a lot like that soul-searching and documenting and just really like making sure we're reviewing the strategy.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: And then because we didn't want to come across as freelancers, even though we're very laid back, we wanted to come across as professional and experienced because we had a lot of experience.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: And we wanted to have agency vibe, so we looked at other agencies and company websites that we looked at, too, to make sure that we had everything that we needed from that like higher level quality level of what you would expect from an agency.

Emily Lewis: I think one of the things that stand out most to me on your site, and it has from the beginning, I think you've been really consistent with this, is your messaging like the words you choose

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to use on your site. I mean, I like the design, the colors really speak to me, but what really stands out to me are the words and some of like the small micro copy, small choices here and there.

Lea Alcantara: Oh yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I'm just curious because I find that completely ironic that I've literally been writing and editing since I was 16 years old and I still to this day struggle to write in my own voice.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And so when I'm writing for Bright Umbrella, it takes me many iterations to get to the casual friendly person that I am because I just don't write that way.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: So when you were trying to write for that third person, that entity of Fly Media, was that easy?

Sherri Johnson: No.

Emily Lewis: Okay. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: We actually had a leg up though, and yeah, it is not easy at all, but we started a magazine, an online magazine, in like '07 I think.

Sherri Johnson: I don't know, it's been a while.

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Reuben Johnson: It's been a minute, but it was urban lifestyle culture magazine, and we did it on the side because we really wanted to do it. It's something we wanted to do forever. So we did that, we did all the writing and then we also did one where someone had asked us to partner with them to help with the hairstyle magazine for the barber and hair industry, and we did the same thing, and so we were doing like multiple projects that were just writing interviews, content strategy, publishing type stuff, and it really helped hone our writing.

Sherri is like just incredibly good writer. I've had to like come leaps and bounds because I struggled with the same thing, especially because I did a lot of the formality stuff for the business.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: So I have to write in a very formal tone.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: And then we're techies, so... [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: That was a challenge. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, that was... oh my God, that was hard.

Sherri Johnson: It's like how do we sound smart and not stuffy. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

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Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, right.

Reuben Johnson: Removing some of the formality was really difficult for me.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah. And then it became a flip problem where we were like, “How do we sound laidback, but not like...”

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Reuben Johnson: We don't know anything, like not experienced.

Sherri Johnson: It was a real balance. It was really hard. I think like the copy on our website, a lot of it is very old that we just kind of tweak over the years.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Because every time that we think we want to change it, I'm like, “Oh, are we sure?”
[Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: But...

Sherri Johnson: Like it's so much work. I think we got something good here, and it is a lot. Writing for the blog is a lot easier because I just write like I'm talking to my girlfriends.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Writing the copy for the website itself has definitely been much more challenging.

Reuben Johnson: We agonized over paragraphs.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: I mean, we spend hours doing that like bio.

Sherri Johnson: Yes.

Reuben Johnson: It's just like reading it through it, ripping out words, because every word like has value.

Sherri Johnson: Right.

Reuben Johnson: And we're really like fastidious when it comes to the tiny details, so sometimes that can be like, "Oh, God, I wish we weren't so finicky about the details sometimes." [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: Yeah. I think that's a problem that a lot of people have.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: That we're all like it's very difficult to sit down and write about yourself in a way that you're selling yourself to people.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

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Sherri Johnson: Like that is not me, that's just not how I think. [Laughs] So it was a challenge, but we're glad you like it. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: If it's a challenge to sort of craft the story of you on your website, how do you do it outside of the website, but still online like on social media and you're sort of keeping that story going about you two, your company? Is that something that you're strategic about or do you just use social media more casually and naturally?

Reuben Johnson: I think, yeah, we're definitely strategic about it. I think part of that, if you have a clear idea of who your brand is and then you know what your brand is, it makes everything a lot easier because would our brand do this, would our brand say this, would our brand do that, so does this mean something to the brand and to our clientele or does it not mean anything. So anything on the official brand social media is always filtered through the context of is it really in line with the brand or is it not, which makes it pretty straightforward.

Sherri Johnson: And are we talking to people or at people. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, yeah, that's a good point.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: That's very important for us, and I think it's easier in a lot of ways because it's the micro version of this little bit, just little thoughts at a time, and we try really hard not to sell so we just try to talk to people and like we always say, it's the long game. It's that long-term relationship building. That's what we pretty much use social media for. It was actually more challenging for us to start putting our work out there and to talk about our business than it was to talk about it and to put the mindset stuff out there. That was much easier.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So speaking of that particular social media and putting yourself out there, you host a monthly chat on Twitter, #FlyDuoChat, and we'll make sure that's in our show notes properly spelled. How does that fit in your strategy? Why did you start this?

Reuben Johnson: Oh, that's a good question. So #FlyDuoChat was something, we wanted to do something that we enjoyed, but that also got us out there and allowed us to be more public and allowed us to focus on Fly Media Productions, the brand, but also Sherri and I as the stakeholders behind the brand and focus on our own personal brand and kind of like tie it all together.

Sherri Johnson: Right.

Reuben Johnson: But also it's something that gave value back to the community of people who are either our clients or our clients' clients. So those were the biggest things behind why we did it. We wanted to do something where we could cover topics that weren't being covered in the same way and our big thing with Sherri and I is everything is like about multicultural, making it inclusive.

Sherri Johnson: Inclusive.

Reuben Johnson: So we wanted to do a chat that was like bring people from different walks of life, different background.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: Bring them on together in one virtual room and getting us talking about stuff that was like either informative, educational, just positive and we walk away knowing something that you didn't know when you walked into the room and then tie it back.



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Emily Lewis: I have to ask because I don't use Twitter for this, do you really feel like you get real engagement?

Reuben Johnson: Oh, definitely. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, definitely. One of our biggest chats, the STAT Software we're using, something went wrong so we lost the STATs, but the one before that, we had gotten almost a million...

Sherri Johnson: Impressions.

Reuben Johnson: I think it was reach.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Reuben Johnson: I think it was reach. Yeah, we got almost a million, and it was like when you come off of it, it's such a positive high, it's amazing.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

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Reuben Johnson: Because you've talked to so many really interesting people about some great information. I mean, we've met people from our chats that we later become friends with.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah. And we love connecting with people and bringing people together, like one of our favorite things is when people start side conversations and they'll continue the conversation after the chat and we'll see people following each other that you wouldn't normally expect to see follow each other, like we love that. Especially you wouldn't think about it, but a lot of the chat spaces online, they're very segregated.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: And you wouldn't necessarily think that, but they are and we, being a mixed couple, we very much feel that.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: We felt it and we wanted to create... [Laughs] Again, we wanted to create a space we were comfortable in and people who thought like us would feel comfortable too.

Reuben Johnson: Would be comfortable too.

Sherri Johnson: We wanted people to feel welcome no matter where they came from as long as they were interested in the same topics and just thought similar things, they're open.

Reuben Johnson: Have similar mindset.



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Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: I think the cool thing, too, in addition to that is one of the things we wanted to use our platform for was to highlight important causes to us and social causes and then also highlight important people, people that we thought really other people needed to know who these people were and across different industries and whatnot.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: So when we have someone as a panel, a special panelist, and we want to give some spotlight to them with our platform because we think this person is worth checking out and getting a little better whatever they're doing, and so it gives us the opportunity to do that as well and do it via our business, which adds a little bit extra credibility to any chat, so it's kind of dual motives.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, we try 99% of what we talk about, unless it's like very strictly a conversation where like you know ahead of time this is about this...

Reuben Johnson: Social justice.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, so like social justice, we don't tie that to business for the most part, I mean, unless we're having conversation that ties it to business. But just about every topic that we have, we tie it to business in some way or as to people as individuals in business or professionals.

Lea Alcantara: Right. I just wanted to say it's so fascinating because I feel like right now, at least in the web design agency world, people are of two camps in terms of social media. Either they think it's so useless and a waste of time. They read the book, *Deep Work*, and they've decided that social media like is the worst thing ever, so we're going to shut everything off, except on occasion all the way to what it seems like you and Sherri are doing are deep diving, complete opposite

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Sherri Johnson: Yeah. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: But I feel like in a nutshell though, it's like where is your audience, right?

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Like do you feel like your primary clients and the people that want to work with you are active on Twitter.

Reuben Johnson: Yes.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. I think for any business, you've got to do social media where your clientele are at. You've got to meet them where they are and not every platform is good for every business, not every client is on every platform.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: So I think that just takes understanding how social media works and how people's clients, how an individual client group thinks and where they do their activities and whatnot, and then if you're savvy, you're just going to adapt, and you're going to understand where you want to

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be, what is your goal, and then adapt how you're trying to get there to the platform. It's how the platform works and figure out over time how to make that successful and grow it and accomplish your goals, but make sure that you're providing something of value to the people who are engaging too.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And with this #FlyDuoChat, is it a lot of time to make it successful to get the panelists?

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I mean, for example, Lea and I have been doing this podcast for six years and it's not simple. I mean, we have it down to we know what needs to be done now, but it still takes up time that kind of what I heard you are saying Reuben is this podcast makes me feel good at the end of each one, and so that's sort of what keeps it going. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: But how much time does it take for you to put into this and do you have to kind of check and see if that's always justified? Are you always checking to see if it's worth it?

Sherri Johnson: Good question. It takes a lot of time, and that's why we have chosen to do a monthly chat versus a weekly chat where some people do it weekly.

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Sherri Johnson: We've gone back and forth about whether we should do it weekly or not just because like we love the experience, but it is an enormous amount of work, and especially if you have guests because as you know, you have to align everybody's schedules and you have to align like with the Twitter chat, we have three to four guests that are all aligned with the same topic, so all their schedules have to align at the same time, too.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Sherri Johnson: And then on top of that, we do research for every topic. We prepare the questions ahead of time, graphics. We prepare the timeline. It is a lot of work.

Reuben Johnson: Now, we also do like a lot of commotion, the email campaigns for them.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: The social promotion for each one.

Sherri Johnson: But it's definitely worth it.

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Reuben Johnson: Yeah, yeah. I think with based on even the feedback we get from the chat guests, from the panel guests, and then the feedback from people at the chats, I think it's definitely



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worth it. Nowadays in the 2017s, you've got to find some way if you're going to be running a business to be more visible.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: If it's not social media like Twitter or Facebook, blah, blah, blah, it's got to be something. I mean, being visible, there are so many options. It's kind of like how TV was back in the day. I remember like it was two years ago when Pepsi decided, "We're going to pull back on that \$1 billion ad spend per year," and it was within like, what, three months, they reversed and they made an about face and they said, "We're going to put the money into it."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Because I mean, it's one of those ways where you can be top of mind.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: And if you're top of mind for really positive reason and it gives you also at the same time, it's an opportunity to showcase your own expertise and that of focusing your network, I think it is well worth it.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

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Reuben Johnson: In social media, if you do it well, it can give you great returns for a relatively, reasonable investment.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah. We're also setting the groundwork for things that we eventually want to do in the future as well like taking things offline, and we're laying the groundwork for that. We're getting ourselves comfortable, we're putting ourselves out there because we've been behind the scenes for so many years, so we're just kind of taking the baby steps to put ourselves out there in that way, too.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: And Reuben has been wanting to do offline events for a long time, so he's kind of giving me some practice. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Well, I think that's a good segue to one of the questions we had. So where else do you see Fly Media Productions going in the future?

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, we have so many different plans, so many things we want to do. We definitely want to do some offline stuff. As with everything we do, we always have our spin on it. I think that's just kind of like, in my opinion, I'll say a humble brag,

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

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Reuben Johnson: I think that's a mark of a great company is they can do something, but it's always going to be with their own spin and I like to think of us as a great company. [Laughs] I certainly laughed at that. What am I doing? [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: That's some confidence, man.

Sherri Johnson: That's your humbleness...

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, exactly, that's the humble part of the brag. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: He's more humble than brag. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



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Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Well, like we would love to do some offline stuff. Our initial idea, and we had kind of like tested the waters and it looked really good, but then we got so busy that we weren't able to follow through and actually do it, but some intimate little spaces where you have maybe a dozen people kind of like we have some ideas, but I think as we move forward on them, I'm sure they will all evolve. I would love to do some public speaking. We're trying to figure out how that might work, what that might look like, and then we've got an idea for a video podcast as well.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Oh, YouTube channels.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, exactly.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: That's exactly what we were thinking.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: So we've been working to trying to figure out the logistics because, like you guys know, it's so much work if you want to do it. If you know how you want to do it and then do it with quality and stuff.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: We're seeing more and more people hiring people.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: And when the people stay behind the scenes, they kind of get left out, and we've been behind the scenes for a long time, so we're trying to put ourselves out there and that's like our biggest kind of growth thing that we're working towards is developing our personal brand more than just the name. And behind the logo, we want people to see our faces, hear our voice, get to know us a little bit more.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: And that's pretty much where more of what we're doing in the next year or so. Our goal is to get Reuben and Sherri out there more.

Reuben Johnson: Some of that is kind of like in a little bit inspired by the Mark Echo book, *Unlabel*, right? It's *Unlabel*, where at one point, they're like the year of Mark Echo and they wanted to grow the Echo brand from like \$100 million brand to like a \$500 million brand and the way they had planned to do that was Mark was going to be everywhere.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: And when they did that, if I'm remembering correctly, they far surpassed the expectations they had set for that. Just him being visible everywhere, it's like boom, they just blew up huge. Conversely, it was a bit much for him because he kind of collapsed under...

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

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Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: It was a bit much for him because I think it was a little bit counter to his personality as much as he did, but I mean, I think there's a lot to be said for it and I love reading people's stories like that because then I can see the potential, the pitfalls.

Sherri Johnson: The pitfalls as well.

Reuben Johnson: So we can avoid them.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, and that's a challenge for us because in that way, our personalities are very different.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Reuben is very outgoing and he's like ready to jump in and he'll just do anything, and I'm like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa." [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: A month of planning. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I feel like that describes Lea and I, too long to create. [Laughs]

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Lea Alcantara: Totally. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Because Lea and I joined forces, I had decided I did not want to be out there.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I'm like, "Oh, I don't really like this anymore." Because it just didn't fit my personality, but in a lot of the ways that you are all describing, Lea and I are recognizing how important the top of mind is, but where fine tuning is, that as much as I appreciate that we have podcast listeners and people have read my book and this, that and the other, we need to be top of mind for our clients.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And so finding out where to be in front of them is where we're trying to I guess grow or push.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, so everything that we're doing is worth the time.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

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Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Sherri Johnson: Because everything, it's all free time. Everything that you guys are doing, all this putting ourselves out there stuff, it's free time that you're giving to the public so it should hopefully pay off for you, you know? [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Right. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: That's kind of like our strategy too is like everything we do, every topic we covered, they're very well-rehearsed as far as we've done a specific topic because we know it's going to appeal to a specific audience and that audience, in some way, relates directly back to our business as well.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: So like it always has to be give value back to the business, even though it may give a significantly more value to the customer or to the audience or whatever, they all give value back because that's a good point.

Sherri Johnson: We have conversations that will attract our clients.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

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Reuben Johnson: Exactly.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Reuben Johnson: Even if only by like roundabout a little bit where it might seem it's just kind of happenstance.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: I like what you said to Emily about you wanted to stay in the back because I know that's how Sherri had wanted to be for a minute too.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: She was...

Sherri Johnson: Sometimes I still think that way. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: I'm like, "No, I can't do this. No, I just like where I am behind here. Nobody knows who I am." [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I would prefer that to be my life frankly. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

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Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: But what I have in common in Reuben though is I really like being a business owner and I want to be a business owner of a great business.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Yes.

Emily Lewis: And so that means that I need to be uncomfortable.

Sherri Johnson: Yes. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Then I will go be uncomfortable as long as it's going to help the business. What I can see now is the public speaking that I had done before was not for my business. It was for my personal brand, and I don't care about my personal brand. [Laughs] I care about the business, and so that's where I can sort of get comfortable with, "All right, so I'm going to give the presentation. This is an audience of people I want to hire me versus my peers." And so it makes it a whole lot easier for me to be uncomfortable.

Reuben Johnson: That's a really good point. That's where the money is at right there.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: And that's exactly why I'm doing it as well. [Laughs]

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Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: I love being a business owner. We love being in control of what we do. We love being in control of our schedule and the projects we work on and how much we're together and all that stuff.

Lea Alcantara: Oh.

Sherri Johnson: And you don't have any control of like, for example, we did get a contract for an agency last year.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: He did a long contract with them for several months, and he did it on site with them and we were just like, "This is what it would be like if you had a full time job."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: And we were like, "No, this is not the life for us." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: I know, especially in Atlanta where the commute is like torture.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

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Lea Alcantara: Oh, yeah.

Sherri Johnson: Or like the challenges we faced together with the company, at least we're facing them together versus never ever seeing each other, and for me, it's primarily me as far as us putting ourselves out there.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: Like I said, Reuben, for the most part has been very comfortable with that. I have anxiety issues and I have a real hard time being in groups of people. I wasn't always like that, but right now, that's kind of my situation, but I'm trying because I want to have a successful company too, and I want to, you know.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Sherri Johnson: And if it takes me putting myself out there, at least I have a partner to do it with.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, this makes me smile.

Emily Lewis: Well, I know that's how I feel about having a partner with Lea is I'm not doing this by myself. I do have someone who understands where I'm coming from, but also understands the priority of the business, which sort of leads me to a question. You guys have been business partners for 17 years as well as partners in life for longer than that, how well do you guys manage your challenges? They must come up.

Reuben Johnson: Oh, definitely.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

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Reuben Johnson: I think that if you're doing anything that you're trying to be innovative or grow, you're going to have challenges or that saying, you're not really doing anything if it's not hard or you don't run into roadblocks or whatever.

Sherri Johnson: Right.

Reuben Johnson: So this is a really good question because originally we're kind of like thinking about what you guys were asking us, we kind of like thought about this. I think one of the things that I kind of think back to, which is one of the reasons I like still doing contract work here and there, is making sure that my partner in life and in business, I'm just as professional with her as I am on the job.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: Or if I do a contract with another company or whatever, I think it's kind of one of those things where you've got to find the balance where you're professional to one another like business professional, but you're also, if it's like your life partner or romantic partner or whatever, you also give them that extra special respect and consideration because they're not just your colleague at that point either.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: So I think part of it is about respect and appreciation and consideration and then just simple things of how you talk to one another whether you know. Just be kind, you know?

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

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Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: It's like I love the idea – what is it – Mike Monteiro talked about the difference between kindness and niceness and I know he's referencing dealing with clients and contractors and whatnot, but I think it kind of like kindness goes a long way with anybody.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: So I think we have a disagreement or something isn't right and you start off being kind and try to broach a difficult topic or deal with some sort of snag that has happened, it goes a long way, and I think that's patience. Patience is another one.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: Because it's going to happen.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: I mean, to think it's not going to happen is...

Sherri Johnson: Yeah, it's a great, like every other relationship.

Reuben Johnson: Exactly, and business does it for us at least. It's not 9 to 5. There is no such thing as 9 to 5 for us. It's pretty much all the time.

Sherri Johnson: [Agrees]

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Reuben Johnson: I mean, you guys know, you're running your own business.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: You're always thinking about it. Even if you can't help it, it's either you're thinking about a strategy or this thing pops in your head, you're like, "Oh man, I've got to write that down because that would be awesome."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Reuben Johnson: So it's always ever present.

Sherri Johnson: It's a blessing and a curse, and it's a blessing and a curse that we share the same issues.

Reuben Johnson: Yes.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Reuben Johnson: Because you don't get home and like, "Oh, I had a terrible day on the job." Sherri is like, "I was sitting right next to you, I know." [Laughs]

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Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Let's talk about something else." "But I really need to talk about my day." "I was there with you for 12 hours, I know about your day."

Sherri Johnson: We have to force each other to put it away. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, exactly. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So what final advice do you guys have for those who want to focus their business and the markets they target?

Reuben Johnson: Good question. I would say strategy, really understanding who your client is, what they look like, making sure you've really done your homework in that way, understanding what authenticity actually means, and just make sure that like you're on point with it for your own business.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

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Reuben Johnson: Like don't use somebody else's gauge or barometer for what authenticity is to gauge your own business. Just understand what authenticity in business, what they mean by that, and make sure that you're authentic for your own brand.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: Because every brand is going to be different, and if something isn't comfortable for your brand, don't feel as though you're obligated to do it and that's the only way you're going to have any type of business success. You've got to do what works for your brand. Understand your brand and just move for the ride and be adaptable.

Emily Lewis: How about you, Sherri, any final thoughts?

Sherri Johnson: I agree. I don't think so. I don't think so. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Okay. Well, that's all good. But that's all the time we have for today, but before we finish up, we do have our Rapid Fire Ten Questions, so our listeners can get to know you both a bit better.

Sherri Johnson: Okie-doke. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Okay, so we'll ask you both the same question and I'm going to start with Sherri. Are you ready?

Sherri Johnson: Yes.

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Lea Alcantara: Okay. Sherri, are you an introvert or extrovert?

Sherri Johnson: Introvert.

Lea Alcantara: How about you, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: A little bit of both, but more extrovert I'd say.

Emily Lewis: All right, the power is going to be out for the next week, what food from the fridge do you eat first, Sherri?

Sherri Johnson: Ice cream. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: What would you eat first, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: All the snacks and I'd have to go to the store and get more.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So Sherri, what's your favorite website for fun?

Sherri Johnson: Oh, I would have to probably say Pinterest, even though I don't get to spend as much time on it as I would like to.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So what's your favorite website for fun, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: I like medium.com and Very Smart Brothas.

Sherri Johnson: He likes to read. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: I love to read. I've got a whole list. I hate leaving people out. I'll just leave it at those two though.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: What's the last thing you read, Sherri?

Sherri Johnson: Our son just had us read, *Nobody's Weird on the Internet*.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: And I'm currently reading *Boss Bitch* by Nicole Lapin. Yeah, Lapin.

Emily Lewis: And you, Reuben, what's the last thing you read?

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Reuben Johnson: Oh, the last book is the one Sherri got me, it's an old classic. I think it's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*. It's like hip hop history.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Very cool.

Reuben Johnson: That's the last like actual book.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: And then I'm reading like a bunch of other articles and e-books, but I can't even think of any good ones to reference. That makes me look smart.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So Sherri, what's the best piece of professional advice you've ever received?

Sherri Johnson: Oh, I would have to say probably the one that came the latest to us, and that's not to be afraid of turning people off.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

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Lea Alcantara: Right.

Sherri Johnson: As long as you feel strongly about what you're doing and that you feel strongly that there's an audience for you, don't worry about anybody else because it's not for them.

Lea Alcantara: And Reuben, what's the best piece of professional advice you received?

Reuben Johnson: Okay, I've got three. Learn to say no, learn to code by hand, and just appreciation and thank you.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: How about the worst piece of advice you've gotten, Sherri?

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: I guess it goes along with what we were just talking about, and that would be to try to please everybody or try to be something that you're not.

Emily Lewis: How about you, Reuben?

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Reuben Johnson: Yeah. Mine was just basically be more suited and... oh my God, that was the worst advice.

Sherri Johnson: That you need a suit inside.

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, that you have to be suited inside.

Sherri Johnson: You have to look a certain way.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Reuben Johnson: You have to look like a banker wearing suit and all that.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: There were different times when we started this business. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, exactly. The web was not what it is today.

Lea Alcantara: What's your favorite color, Sherri?

Sherri Johnson: I would have to say black and white.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

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Lea Alcantara: What's yours, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: I don't have one. I love black, but I don't really have a favorite color.

Emily Lewis: If you could take us to one restaurant in your town, Sherri, where would we go?

Sherri Johnson: It would have to be a little tiny hole in the wall taco place that Reuben took us to in Atlanta. What it's called, babe?

Reuben Johnson: Oh, Taqueria.

Sherri Johnson: Taqueria. Oh, they have the best tacos. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: What restaurant would you pick, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: I love the Chinese-Japanese. It's a Chinese food place and also a Japanese sushi place in town. It's just like a regular old casual dining, but it's really, really good and the people are super, super nice and they always ask about us.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Reuben Johnson: If I go on just by myself, they're always like, "Where is Sherri?"

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

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Reuben Johnson: I love that. And Publix, Publix is my favorite. I'm going to give them a shout out.

Emily Lewis: The grocery store?

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Yes, I love them. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Well, I get all my snacks there, and I eat a lot of snacks. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: This is very important to him. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So Sherri, what's your favorite board game?

Sherri Johnson: Oh, Castle Panic.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

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Lea Alcantara: And your favorite, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: I like that Panda game. What is it called?

Sherri Johnson: I forget what it's called.

Reuben Johnson: It's where you feed the panda and scare it away.

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: And then you grow grass with a little farmer.

Sherri Johnson: I forget what it's called. It has some funny name, but it is cute.

Reuben Johnson: I don't remember what it is called. It's cool little game.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: All right, last question, Sherri. Hulu or Netflix?

Sherri Johnson: I am going to be the oddball out with most of your guests and say Hulu because I like to watch all the current stuff. [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: When it's on TV.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

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Sherri Johnson: Yeah, when it's on TV and everybody is talking about it.

Emily Lewis: And how about you, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: I'm going to be the indecisive one again. I'm just going to say both.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: He likes Netflix. He likes Netflix. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: You're selling me out, why don't you. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: Seeing I'm blessed. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So that's all the time we have for today. Thanks for joining the show!

Sherri Johnson: Thank you, guys! It was fun!

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Reuben Johnson: Thank you, guys! Oh, it was awesome! We really loved it!

Emily Lewis: In case our listeners want to follow up with you, where can they find you online, Reuben?

Reuben Johnson: I'm [FlyDuoATL](#) pretty much everywhere: Twitter, Instagram, BitBucket, GitHub, everywhere FlyDuoATL.

Emily Lewis: And you, Sherri?

Sherri Johnson: And I am [@FlyGirlFMP](#), and the business is [@FlyDuo](#) and the only difference is [on Instagram, it's @ FlyDuo](#).

Emily Lewis: Okay.

Sherri Johnson: And of course, the website is [flymediaproductions.com](#).

Emily Lewis: This was a really great conversation.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: I wish we'd had it sooner. I feel like Lea and I could have learned a lot from you guys before we did a lot of the branding stuff with all the experience you had about understanding who you were. So thank you so much for sharing this with us today.

Sherri Johnson: Thank you, guys.

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The logo for Bright Umbrella features a pink umbrella icon with a white lightbulb inside, positioned to the left of the text "Bright UMBRELLA".



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Reuben Johnson: Oh, thank you, guys. This show is so awesome. When you initially asked us, we're like, "Wow!" It feels like, "I want to thank the Academy. It just felt really good." [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

Reuben Johnson: It feels really good.

Lea Alcantara: Thank you so much. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: It was an honor.

Reuben Johnson: We're super appreciative.

[Music starts]

Reuben Johnson: Yeah, we definitely were honored.

Sherri Johnson: We listen to you guys all the time and we have learned a lot from you guys.

Emily Lewis: Awww.

Lea Alcantara: Okay, your check is in the mail. [Laughs]

Sherri Johnson: [Laughs]

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Reuben Johnson: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: CTRL+CLICK is produced by [Bright Umbrella](#), a web services agency obsessed with happy clients. Today's podcast would not be possible without the support of this episode's sponsor! Many thanks to [Foster Made!](#)

Emily Lewis: We'd also like to thank our hosting partner: [Arcustech](#).

Lea Alcantara: And thanks to our listeners for tuning in! If you want to know more about CTRL+CLICK, make sure you follow us on Twitter [@ctrlclickcast](#) or visit our website, [ctrlclickcast.com](#). And if you liked this episode, please give us a review on [iTunes](#) or [Stitcher](#) or both! And if you really liked this episode, consider donating to the show. Links are in our show notes and on our site.

Emily Lewis: Don't forget to tune in to our next episode when Amélie Lamont joins the show to offer advice for creatives and teams to foster a culture of positive, productive feedback. Be sure to check out [ctrlclickcast.com/schedule](#) for more upcoming topics.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara ...

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis ...

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for CTRL+CLICK CAST. See you next time!

Emily Lewis: Cheers!

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The logo for Bright Umbrella features a pink umbrella icon to the left of the text 'Bright UMBRELLA'. The word 'Bright' is in a large, bold, black font, and 'UMBRELLA' is in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it.



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[Music stops]

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