

Darian Kovacs– Unlocking Digital Marketing Success for SMEs

Host: Maggie John

Overview:

Darian Kovacs joins us to discuss how small businesses can harness digital tools to maximize the reach and impact of their marketing efforts. Kovacs is the Métis founder of Jelly Digital Marketing & PR and Jelly Academy, based in Vancouver. He hosts the Marketing News Canada podcast, chairs the Digital Marketing Sector Council, and sits on the board of NPower Canada. Kovacs shares what businesses can learn from viral TikTok stars, why the most important social media channels aren't the ones you think, and why he thinks we're in the age of "silent social."

Highlights from our conversation include:

1. Businesses need to be findable and able to respond to customers.
2. The only social media channel that you actually own is your newsletter. You can nurture those contacts and relationships over time, while LinkedIn and Tiktok can change their algorithm tomorrow.
3. Rather than being the sole voice of their brand, businesses need to think about how they can create shareable content that allows customers to be their representatives, while also rewarding that customer loyalty.

MAGGIE:

We are back, Magnet Network Live. We are in the heart of the Distillery District right here at the Spirit of York. You can hear the buzz in the room as people are connecting, networking, and we are here right now with Darian Kovacs. He is the founder of Jelly Digital Marketing and PR. As a leader in digital marketing and public relations, he has a focus on helping businesses grow through innovative marketing

strategies. He also has a deep commitment to helping SMEs compete in a tech-driven economy. How's your day been going so far? What has been your biggest takeaway, Darian, so far?

DARIAN:

That people are curious. People drove here from Hamilton, other cities. They flew in here from right across the country, around the world, to press in and discover what is the best methods, models, what more questions can we ask about future skills and developing the future talent?

MAGGIE:

Let's talk about that. How can small businesses use digital marketing tools to keep up with larger companies in today's fast-changing tech world?

DARIAN:

Well, I love that we live in a time when guy drinking cranberry juice on a longboard can get millions of views to we know what the term so demure means now all of a sudden, because we all have access to this powerful, powerful tool in our hands called a phone, which has access to things, publishing tools like TikTok and Facebook and Instagram and LinkedIn. And so the same large corporations like Coca-Cola and world brands have access to that as well. But with the right content, the right raw production, SMEs have an advantage right now. The world is looking for user-driven, user-created content that speaks to their heart, that speaks to what is happening right now. And without any red tape or bureaucracy, small businesses can produce content quicker, faster, and more relevant than some of these large corps.

MAGGIE:

I love that you used the term publishing tools instead of social media, because I feel like social media has become the bad word. And so this kind of upscales a little TikTok, Instagram, all the things by using the term publishing tools. Why did you intentionally use that term?

DARIAN:

I think it's also to take away the intimidation factor. Like when you look at the history of the Gutenberg press, what it did for medical practice, what it did for political movements, what it did for religions. We are living in a very similar time when the media, like back then, used to be owned by the large church and large organizations and only in certain languages. And it was very difficult to get anything published. But today, the Gutenberg Press moment is the fact that large media, large corporations no longer own and control what people are consuming. And with people's access to mobile devices, people's access to streaming services, people's access to consume that data and content. And we as publishers, we as content creators have the ability to spread our message, hopefully for good, hopefully to let them know about a product or a service that fulfills a need or maybe educates at the same time. And so we have that ability to do it. And let's just hope we do it well. Yeah.

MAGGIE:

With AI changing the marketing landscape, what's the most important skill future marketers should be focusing on?

DARIAN:

I think it's the same skill as always, which is curiosity. And I think staying curious about tools like Hey Jen, which allows you to upload a minute long video. And in turn, you can then create an avatar of yourself and or say a client or a business partner. And then you can create multiple videos in any language saying anything in a very high productive way that takes low effort on the person in the video. Tools like Chat GPT are an incredible executive assistant if you've never been able to afford one, a PA, you have one now and it is powerful it is awesome, but again, at the same time it is like a google on steroids so don't expect it to be life-changing and generate leads. I think that's the concern about AI is people think oh now that it's here much like Kevin Costner and Field of Dreams- if you build it they will come. There's this concern that they think it solves everything, but it solves a few little things like editing work, some blog content creation, some video content, and it just really expedites it, I'd say, more than it actually does it all for you.

MAGGIE:

When you're having conversations with those who run small to medium and large organizations who are saying, social media is just this other thing. Like, I can't take it on. It's a lot. But, you know, it takes a certain knack. I just don't have the energy. What is your response?

DARIAN:

I'd say there are two social media channels. So and I'm going to call it media that you can socialize with. Yeah. So media that exists that you and I, you could do it right now. You could interact with that media on your phone that small businesses need to be on. And it does not include any of the ones that I think most people think. So Google Maps would be number one. It's available on iPhone. It's available on Android. It not only, and my grandma uses this term, it not only helps you with being found and socializing and connecting and telling people about your business. But the second thing it does, like feeding two birds with one grain, it also allows you to rank higher in Google ranking. So a term called SEO or search engine optimization. It makes you findable. So if you don't want to be a face and dancing and singing and creating infographics for Pinterest, please be on google my business it's completely free there's about amazing things you can do right within that tool from uploading videos to coupons, but at least let your people know that you're there you can get reviews you can interact with the reviews. And the second thing would be is the only social media channel and media that you can socialize with that you actually own and you own the followers and you own the contacts with is your e-newsletter. When you think about linkedin and I love them, TIKTOK, you know huge respect and love to all these organizations and Meta, you're you don't own that. They could change the algorithm tomorrow they could shut down there was an afternoon when meta shut down all their things right it was i don't know someone accidentally unplugged something or tripped over whatever happened, but when you have your e-newsletter you own those contacts and you can nurture them. So Cyber Impact is a great Canadian made, it's one of the only kind of CASL compliant email tools out there there's other competitors out there, Constant Contact, MailChimp. But again, be careful about where that data is stored, right? We don't even know it's going to be in America and we don't know who's going to run America soon. So Cyber Impact is the one to check out. It's totally free up to a certain amount of contacts and just do everything you can to nurture those contacts, grow those contacts in your

e-newsletter. And again, that's simply even just touching base once a month. I exist. Hey, feel free to forward this to anyone. Hey, just want to let you know this latest thing. And it can be super low touch and almost less is more. Even if you just put two, three lines of text or an image or a video link, that's all you need to do. And if those are the only two forms of social media that you're on, that is enough.

MAGGIE:

Really?

DARIAN:

Yes.

MAGGIE:

Because I feel like, you know, the first thing people ask you is how many followers do you have on Instagram? You know, like how much do you have on Facebook for those who are on Facebook? You know, how much do you have on X? I mean, those are the ones that everybody talks about. And I agree with you with the Google Maps, but it's definitely not in the vernacular. It's not what everybody's talking about every single day.

DARIAN:

And I'd say this on top of not just e-newsletters being the most crucial after Google Maps, because no one knows about it. It's not public. There's no vanity involved. There's no ego and pride. But it is the one place where you can nurture your past customers. And if you end up running Facebook ads or Google ads, you can actually upload those contacts into Meta and LinkedIn and Meta can build a lookalike audience. It can find people who are like that and advertise to them. You can target your past customers and really you almost don't need to because you already have the ability to reach them % of the time. But the other thing to be really cognizant of and this is really crucial and if you get anything out of this podcast you're listening to right now is that the next year and a half and, it's already starting now, is that we're in the time of silent social.

MAGGIE:

Describe, what does this mean?

DARIAN:

So silent social is all those social media channels. So again, media you can socialize with that are things like, and you probably already involved with some, WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, Discord servers. These are places that advertisers cannot reach. These are places that you and I, as, you know, representatives of our business, the marketing person, the owner, you know, advocate for the business can't reach. So we really need to be even shifting our mindset when it comes to social media, not about what is content that I own, but what is content that I can produce and what is content that my fans can produce and represent me in those silent social channels.

MAGGIE:

What does that look like then for the future of business?

DARIAN:

Oh, it means you're, you know, we've always talked about loyalty programs and the importance of loyalty. Those are more crucial and more important than ever and personalized loyalty programs. So again, it's being able to not just be like, hey, you're of loyalty person, you get you know it was quite shallow in a lot of ways, but it's going deeper with those loyalty folks finding your super fans empowering them with resources graphics, tools, the ability to advocate for you on your behalf. We already saw this recently with a few elections those that empowered advocates to go out into Facebook groups and the silent social channels were ones that saw a huge shift and change within the polls. So being able to be a business owner maybe a politician, whoever you are listening to the show right now, those channels are unseen and unheard and are silent to you and I, but they will continue to have a huge impact on your bottom line and the impact of what sort of movement or change your signing up to produce.

MAGGIE:

So if someone's listening to this today and like, I'm jumping on that silent social right now. What does that look like? What's the first step to make that happen?

DARIAN:

One great tool that exists right now is called StoryTap. So really affordable tool that allows you to send a digital virtual director to all of your customers to say, please do a video review. But instead of just asking that and being like texted back and it's going to be, you know, okay video, it actually prompts them with questions, tells them to answer the question in a complete sentence. It pokes them if the light isn't bright enough. It tells them if the sound isn't loud enough. And so you get these really highly produced, but again, not overproduced videos. We did one recently where we sent it out to a group of people, gave a little carrot of a \$gift card if you did this, and we saw about videos returned within a week. And then the cool thing about that, not only do you as an organization have great user generated content, or UGC as we call it, but then the users can then also the customers can then publish that video they created because it auto edits it for you. Again, AI, a little intro, a little outro, and they can publish it on their social channels. They can publish it in Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups. So that's one great tool. Some people are making Google folders, drop boxes where they have a bunch of files and assets that they share with their super fans to be like, hey, if you share it this month, let us know, screenshot it and you get entered into a draw to win X.

MAGGIE:

Thanks, Darian. You're welcome. You've just like blown my mind in so many areas. And yeah, there's a lot to look at.

DARIAN:

I want to close with one thing is the cookie crumb. So there was a big season where Apple was taking away cookies and all throughout marketing and small business owners, we were talking about cookies. But if you think about Hansel and Gretel and kind of like the breadcrumb trail, right? I'm going to call it the cookie crumb. The reason you want to have any newsletter and that Google Maps and again, if you want to venture beyond that, great. But again, start with those as a foundation is that you want to be able to have multiple touch points with your customer. They talk about seven points of touch is what you need for a customer to consider you or to take you seriously or consider your service or product. So where are those touch points where you want to be? And it may be that you discover your customers

actually hang out on Reddit a lot or Quora or maybe they read Coffee News, right? Whatever that looks like, find out where they are and be where they are and find that breadcrumb, that touch point so that they can be led to you. And people like them can be led to you so you can find more customers to lead them into your business.

MAGGIE:

Amazing. Thanks, Darren.

DARIAN:

You're welcome.

MAGGIE:

That was Darren Kovacs. He is the founder of Jelly Digital Marketing.