**Globally Speaking**

**Podcast 018**

**How to Compete With Global Brands**

M I am Michael Stevens.

R And I’m Renato Beninatto. Today we have a very interesting guest, Kathrin Bussmann, a fellow podcaster who is passionate about international marketing. Unfortunately, due to some scheduling conflicts I wasn’t able to participate in the interview but I’m sure you’re going to love this conversation that she had with Michael.

K Hi I’m Kathrin Bussmann. I am the product of German parents who emigrated to Quebec, the French speaking part of Canada. I am the founder of Verbaccino and I’m also the host of The Worldly Marketer podcast.

M So, Kathrin, this is where you ended up growing up fluent in English, French and German, it was a family background?

K Yes, that was my family background. My parents had literally just arrived from Germany a month before I was born so I grew up speaking nothing but German at home, and at school it was all French, all the time; and English is sort of my third language that I’ve picked up on the side.

M So, you were born to do this, let’s talk a little more about what that is.

K North American marketers.That’s who my target audience is. North American markets and SMEs, marketers who work for those SMEs. There’s just such a world of possibilities out there that they’re just not even looking at yet. That’s how it feels to me, anyway. And that’s kind of my motivation in starting the podcast and, well, founding my business, that’s the whole mission statement of Verbaccino, it’s to kind of help North American Businesses, especially SMEs, start to think outside the English-speaking box a little bit and look at how big their customer base really could be if they could start thinking a little bit more internationally and globally. There’s no reason not to with all the digital channels that they have at their disposal now. It’s sort of unprecedented times, right, in that sense, they have opportunities open to them that no smaller businesses have ever really had available to them before, so it’s a great time to explore that stuff.

M Right. I agree with you but why would you say it’s unprecedented?

K Well, it is. It’s an unprecedented time for SMEs. There are possibilities available now that were never available before, and thanks to the internet and thanks to ecommerce and thanks to social media, you can make your presence known far beyond your domestic borders now, and it’s just a matter of figuring out how to reach out to international customers; how to connect with them; how to communicate with them in their native language because that’s kind of an important aspect of it. You would like to think, perhaps, that most of the world can at least understand English as a second language but that’s just not the case, and so why limit yourself? Why put limits on the size of your business, on the potential growth of your business when you could be investing in something like translation and localization, and it is an investment up front, no doubt about it, but the benefits are incalculable in a way.

You can reach out to people that small businesses and medium sized businesses never reached out to before across the world and what you’re trying to do is, you’re trying to find customers who are, perhaps in many ways, much like your domestic customers who are looking for the same type of service or product but, the difference is, they speak a different language and they live in a different culture. So, at that point, well, you have to think about what that means for your actual product or service, if you have to tweak it in some way to make it more useful for them. But, you also have to think about how your marketing strategy is going to look to actually reach out to those people and connect with them and bring them on board and then retain them as customers.

M That shift is the big evolution I’m seeing because for so long it was about distribution “oh, you can get your products wherever you want them; now just make sure your products work in those places and you’ll be fine”. And there was a lot of conversation about getting things out globally based upon no limits for distribution. Now, marketers are coming to it and going “wait a second, it’s not just about distribution, it’s about messaging, it’s about how we present ourselves” and they are maturing in that way so, hopefully, we’re moving beyond this place where websites are the digital marketing strategy. What are your thoughts on that?

K Well, a website is not a digital strategy. The way I like to think of websites is imagine you’re in a city and your website is a shop on a side street, well away from traffic, including foot traffic, but you want people to come and shop, you want people to discover you and come and spend money in your shop. Well, how are you going to attract those customers? Just putting out a shingle and creating a nice window with an attractive display that might lure passers-by into your shop, that’s just not going to cut it, right? Because, if you’re waiting for people to accidentally find your shop on this little side street you’re going to wait for a long time, plus, there’s lots of competition out there.

So, what you need to do is you need to get, to continue with this metaphor, to get out into the public spaces of this city, whether it’s the marketplace in a more European context, or whether it’s the local public square, the local shopping mall, perhaps, wherever people congregate, the parks, where people go for leisure and to hang out with their friends and their family and relax, and maybe also where people congregate in a more professional context. But, you have to go where the people are, you can’t wait for them to find you, you have to go out to them, and then you have to start socializing, and that’s where social media comes into it.

Social media is how you make yourself known and tell people who might be interested in what you have to offer, tell people something about yourself and make it relatable, make it human, make it something that will tweak their interest and peak their curiosity and maybe entice them to come back to your shop and check out what you have to offer.

But you have to make the effort of getting out there and being social, and the social part is important because your competitors are already doing it; they’re out there already; and your competitors are from all over the place, they’re not just form your little neck of the woods, they’re from everywhere now; in a global context they are from every corner of the globe, potentially, so depending on your industry. So, you’ve got to be out there too; you’ve got to participate in the conversation.

And it’s not about standing on the market square with a megaphone and yelling out what your business name is and what you’re offering and what the special deals of the week are. That might work, maybe, but that’s not really what social media is for. Social media is to create conversations, generate some interest and attract the attention of people who, ultimately, might be the right customers for you. And it’s a long game, right, it’s not something that happens overnight that will sort of bring you results in a few months or even in a couple of years, it’s a long game. You have to establish a presence. You have to establish credibility. And you will probably have to experiment a little bit with your approach to because depending on who you are targeting you are going to have to adjust your message and your delivery of the message.

M I was thinking about the experimental part. What do you think is a key success for someone who is starting in social media; what does it take to be effective?

K I think you just need to be human. I see so many social media accounts, especially on Twitter, where it still feels to me like people are using it as a sales platform, as a promotional platform and that’s not really the point of it. The point of it is to give people the opportunity to get to know you and to figure out what you stand for, to show that you are approachable, that you are willing and able and eager to have a conversation with potential customers, and that you’re not there to sell, sell, sell; you are there to listen, also. You are there to listen to what people need, to what people are saying, the problems that they’re having, the issues that they’re having, what’s going on with them that you could potentially help them with. And then internalize that and then go back and rethink what your offer is, what your product or your service is.

M Exactly. Knowing yourself; knowing your service; knowing your offering and then being able to listen and engage in conversation and see if it’s a right fit; develop that relationship; re-evaluate; that tends to be the experimenting and the trying and the feeling out. And sometimes there’s less of that and sometimes there’s more for people to help them refine a social media strategy. Do you see limitations? Every major brand seems to have a strong social media presence, but is this applicable to small and medium businesses? Is it applicable to the translator who may be listening to our podcast who is trying to get themselves out there and known?

K Oh absolutely. It applies to businesses of any size and freelancers and small businesses, medium-sized businesses, big businesses. It doesn’t matter. Or, if you’re a solopreneur. Social media has pretty much leveled the playing field in many ways. There are still aspects of it that if you have a larger budget you’re going to be at an advantage because, Facebook for instance, more and more it’s a sort of pay-to-play kind of thing, so there are limits as to how much you can achieve if you have no budget.

But, there is a lot you can do with a very small budget, and it’s really just a matter of paying attention to what’s already out there, what seems to be working for people, what is getting good responses, and what is getting negative responses, and then figure out how to position yourself, figure out what your UPI, your unique selling proposition is. And it doesn’t matter what size of business you have; you have to find your unique selling proposition, and you have to know how you can position yourself in relationship to your competitors.

But at the same time, for me personally, I also like to keep an eye on my ‘competitors’ but I don’t really think of them as competitors because I like to see what’s happening in my industry. I think it’s really important, that’s another thing that social media is great for, just keeping in touch with what’s going on in the industry that you’re in and figuring out who you could potentially collaborate with, who are your potential colleagues out there that you have yet to connect with and who maybe would be really exciting to work with.

M The network is much stronger than the individual and that’s what I believe is the basic premises of the connected world we’re in and the more like-minded people. In that idea, before we get into collaborations and those things, who are some of the people you’re looking to that inspire, whether it be through social media or other digital channels, you’re thinking, who should people be watching?

K Well, I mean, I’ll answer that question from a marketer’s point of view. Some of my very, very favorite thought-leaders in the marketing world, and they happen to be all based in North America, the United States to be more specific, but I think a lot of what they have to say is applicable for global marketing, also. I am a huge fan of Mark Schaefer, who is the author of several books but his latest one is called “The Content Code” and he talks a lot about how we’re all kind of completely deluged, now, with content.

I mean, content is drowning us; we’re so flooded with content that we just… there is more content out there than we can possibly consume, so to just keep creating content for the sake of creating content as a business is probably not the strategy to take anymore. There was a time when you could differentiate yourself just by the sheer amount of content you put out there but, now, less is more in some ways and quality is becoming important as well because there’s a lot of mediocre content out there that’s just not differentiating people and services from each other.

So, it’s all about dealing with this content shock that we’re all suffering from and finding other ways to get people’s attention, because that’s what marketers are really in the business of, they’re in the business of capturing people’s attention and attention spans are getting shorter and people have more and more things distracting them so that is the challenge. So, I would recommend anything by Mark Schaefer.

Another really interesting person to follow is Jay Baer. Jay Baer wrote a book recently called “Hug Your Haters”. Hug Your Haters is, I think, a very important book because it talks about how, especially now in the age of social media, any business sooner or later is bound to get so-called haters and how you deal with those haters is actually going to be pretty crucial in the long-term success of your business.

I’ll leave it to people to go check out his book, Hug Your Haters, and see what he has to say about that, but you can sort of tell from the title that the solution is not to downplay any kind of negative comments you might be getting on social media streams or that type of thing, you need to really acknowledge it and deal with it; deal with it in a way that shows that you’re paying attention, you’re listening, and you are being reasonable about people’s comments.

M It’s playing on that philosophy that the opposite of love is not hate, it’s apathy, right? So, if there’s some engagement that means there’s hope for life in that. That’s interesting. I haven’t read that one yet but I’ll have to check that one out, for sure.

K Then, last but not least Seth Godin. Anyone in the marketing field would know about Seth Godin and he is sort of a guru, I would say, for many marketers. The word guru is used very loosely by many people in many situations but I think Seth Godin…

M He’s appropriately a guru.

K He is the real thing. So, if you want to go back and find out where the modern… I guess, today’s approach to marketing comes from the inbound marketing idea, the idea that people follow the tribe, they find the tribe that they feel they belong to and they follow brands for reasons that go far beyond the actual product or service, they want to be part of something, they want to be recognized as being human beings and not just consumers, and the idea that you have to relate to your potential customers as a human, from one human to the other human, it’s not something that brands should take lightly because in a world where customers can easily comparison shop and are very knowledgeable about what’s going on in the world, in the fields that they’re interested in and in the industries that they’re interested in, people can do a lot of their own research now online, before they even start to do serious shopping, right?

So you need to treat your potential customers as human beings; talk to them, put a face to your brand; don’t just talk to them through a logo, just make it human, make it relatable, and build a tribe around you and build a tribe of brand ambassadors is what you’re kind of ideally hoping to achieve where the people who have discovered you and have bought into your product or service and are very enthusiastic about it will basically do your marketing for you in many ways, through word of mouth, except word of mouth, nowadays, is all on social media.

So, that’s another thing about branding today; I think the days when companies had a lot of control over their brand image, those days are, to some extent, over. Your brand really, now, is what other people say it is and how other people perceive it. So, it becomes that much more important to involve your current customers and give them something to talk about, positive things to talk about to their friends and other potential customers.

M Yes. Now, you started this by saying your influencers and the people you’ve looked at are primarily from North America. I know I’m in a bubble being based here; at least you are in Canada, so you may be a little less in the bubble. But, is this an opportunity for new voices exploring global marketing? What are your thoughts on that?

K I think there’s a huge untapped potential. I find that I follow a lot of marketing experts, the ones I mentioned but others as well. After all, I am a North American, I’m surrounded by colleagues here in North America who are also in marketing. What kind of surprises me is there are so many thought leaders out there who, really, are worth following; they have really cutting-edge ideas and anyone who is in marketing really should be paying attention to what they have to say.

That said, I also find that those same experts seem to not do as much global thinking as I think is… well, as they could be doing. Especially, given that we’re talking a lot these days in marketing about social media and the potential of social media; there’s so much that connects people around the world now with the internet, and communication is so much easier than it used to be 10-20 years ago, and to not even consider reaching out to people beyond the scope of North America or beyond… maybe I should actually rephrase that, beyond the scope of the English language, right? Because, there are lots of well-known marketers also in the UK and in Australia, and they’re all very… they’re doing fantastic work, they are really putting out a lot of good content and very useful stuff but I find where they kind of seem to stop their strategy is when it comes to thinking more internationally.

It’s sort of a leap that I feel like English-speaking marketers have yet to make. And I think it might just be a function of the fact that, so far anyway, the internet has been a very Anglophone place in general, or it was for a long time. It was until not that long ago, overwhelmingly English speaking, most of the content was in English; in fact, most of the content still is in English, but the difference now is that most internet users are not English speaking, and that’s kind of a new development. That’s a development that, maybe has happened in the last 10 years or so.

And to just not even try to reach out to all those, to the majority of internet users, in fact the vast majority of internet users, whose first language isn’t English, it seems to me like a huge, huge missed opportunity. I think that, right now, my impression is that global marketers are sort of in one silo, and they deal with localization issues, and they deal with globalization issues, and they usually work in the context of huge multinational companies who obviously have a vested interest in connecting with global audiences. But then, there is everybody else, at least here in North America, who doesn’t seem to make that connection yet and who work in this marketing silo.

And there’s lots going on there and lots of really clever people in there, but I think the next phase in marketing could really be those two silos getting together and getting to know each other, communicating with each other and seeing what the potential is if you start to collaborate. If the marketing gurus of the one silo could kind of go see what the people in the global marketing silo are doing and vice versa and just join forces and see what’s possible, I think the potential there is absolutely incredible.

M You’re definitely inspiring in getting your message out there around this, which I think is great, through a number of different channels. You’re practicing what you preach by having a podcast as well.

Cool. This was great. I think we have great content here.

**END**