S2: E207: Your Biggest Advantage in the Age of AI

Hey there, welcome to the Make Your Message a Movement podcast. This is your host Tiffany Neuman, and I'm so grateful that you're here with me today. So I've been having this conversation lately with several of my clients, and it came up again in a really interesting way inside my mastermind, and we were talking about what is actually creating momentum in people's businesses right now. So a lot of my clients are still having a ton of momentum. Some of them are finding things that used to work are no longer working, which happens in business all the time, but it's happening a lot right now.

And even myself, we are completely booked out through February for one-on-one work. So if you've been wanting to work with me, get on the waitlist now. But The main thing is we want to look at what has shifted, and what we were talking about is actually how no one is saying more followers, right? It used to be, and I talked a little bit about this on last week's podcast episode, so this is a continuation because I felt like this discussion needed its own space.

What we're finding is a lot of us were never interested in the vanity metrics anyways, right? I talked a lot about recently we're moving from the influencer era to the authority era. So if you've been following along, you already know these things. So for those of you who might be listening for the first time, quickly to catch up, that's what we've been talking about. And there's still been some people who are like, ooh, if I could just go viral, if I could just have 100,000 followers.

And there's nothing wrong with those things, but no one in this moment is saying if I could just get a viral post, everything would change. And when we were talking to the mastermind, I help direct my clients and help them keep future focused and planning for next year. How is this going to play out What should you be preparing for? What do you need to think about? What should your launch strategies be?

All of those things. And one thing I kept circling back to was relationships. What will get you warm introductions? How can you really focus on referral partners, smaller rooms, and being in the right conversations? Because getting in front of 10 really aligned people or partners, as opposed to tens of thousands of random ones, can really make a huge difference.

So one of my clients was talking about how her best referral relationships weren't necessarily the people with the biggest audiences. They were the people who really knew her work, understand who she was best suited to help, and genuinely wanted to introduce her to the right people. Another client was thinking about hosting a small curated dinner once a month because

the people she wants to reach are incredibly busy executives, and the idea of getting them into yet another webinar or an online event wasn't really compelling. Or we, we pretty much came to the conclusion it's not going to be compelling for that specific audience, but gathering a handful of smart interesting women around a table for meaning conversation, that felt completely different for her target audience. And yet another client said that the easiest part of her business, the part of her that felt most natural, was simply loving on people, building community, and developing deep relationships.

And so as we were strategizing, I was really thinking, you know, this is something we've been talking about. I've been predicting it, especially in the age of AI. We're going and moving more back to deeper relationships. But for the last decade, maybe even longer, we have been taught to optimize almost everything in our business for reach, right? How many followers, views, subscribers, how many people saw the post, how many people came to the webinar, how big is the email list.

And again, those numbers are not meaningless, but I'm also not going to sit here and tell you that having more people know who you are is the answer. Reach does matter, but we've spent so much time trying to make the top of the funnel wider that we haven't always asked a more important question. How deeply do the people who are already in your audience, do they actually know you? Because being seen and being known are not the same thing. And so it used to be in the influencer era when we focused on vanity metrics that being seen, there was a lot more trust.

And now as we've moved into this trust recession, The businesses that understand that distinction and communication and connection are key are going to have a significant advantage over the next few years. So think about this as the difference between a big stadium and a dinner party. Imagine you're standing on stage in front of 20,000 people. That's incredible visibility. 20,000 people hear your message, maybe a few thousand remember your name, and maybe a few hundred go to look you up afterwards.

That's how numbers work, and there is value in that. And a lot of my audience I know are speakers or want to be speakers, so I'm not saying not to do that. But I also now want you to imagine you're sitting at a dinner table with maybe 12 to 20 people. The reach is much smaller and it's not going to look impressive on your analytics dashboard. Nobody's posting like, my dinner blew up last night, 12 attendees.

But over the course of that dinner, something different happens. You hear what somebody's struggling with, you learn what another person's building, Someone tells a story they probably

would never share in 20,000 people. And you discover that one person knows some other person that you've been trying to meet for 6 months. Or you realize that someone at the table would be a perfect guest for your podcast. Or someone else realizes you're the perfect partner they've been looking for.

To promote to their audience. You leave knowing these people differently and on a deeper level, and they know you deeper as well. So the stadium or the dinner table is not inherently better, but the mistake is assuming that the stadium is always more valuable because the number is bigger. Because depending on your business, that dinner table may create far more opportunity. And I think a lot of us has been trained to underestimate it.

So this is especially true for those of us who have been expert businesses. If you're a speaker, author, coach, consultant, advisor, service provider, you probably do not need millions of people to know who you are. You need enough of the right people to understand exactly why your work matters. A speaker, even paid speakers, don't need every person on LinkedIn to know her name. She needs the event organizers, podcast hosts, maybe associations and people making recommendations to understand what she speaks about and why she's different.

An author doesn't need people to see a post about a book and for have it go viral, although it can't hurt. But really, she needs people to care enough about the ideas in the book to recommend it, talk about it, invite her onto stages, bring her into organizations maybe, or hand the book to someone else and say, you need to read this.

And let's look at consultants, right? They may not need 100,000 followers, but maybe 500 people who genuinely understand their expertise And can immediately think of someone who needs them. So this is a very different growth strategy than we've been fed on, especially in the online space over the last 10 years. And it becomes even more important when we layer in everything we've been talking about on the podcast: AI, again, the trust recession, people becoming more discerning. The sheer amount of information and content coming at us every single day.

Because we don't trust someone simply because we saw them once or maybe even 10 times. We trust people over time. And trust needs proximity, right? People are more skeptical than they used to be. They're more sophisticated than they used to be.

They've been marketed to. They've watched experts make huge promises, and not all of them actually follow through. They've seen businesses appear overnight, sell something aggressively for 6 months, and then disappear. And now AI is making it possible for someone to create what

looks like a more enormous body of work very quickly with no foundation under it. So when we're deciding who we want to work with, hire, refer, recommend, invite onto the stage, there's a natural question that we should be looking at and that your ideal clients are probably asking too.

This is often subconscious. Some people may think of it consciously, but the question is, do I actually know enough about this person to to trust them. And that's where depth becomes incredibly powerful because trust grows through repeated proximity. You know, hearing someone on a podcast, then you see something they wrote, somebody you respect mentions them, you join one of their workshops, you read another email. Maybe you disagree with something they say, but that's actually useful because now you know they have a real point of view unless it's a deal breaker with your values.

So basically, over time, you start to understand how they think, how they work, and something subtle happens, right? You, you go from, okay, I've heard of her, or I think, I think I like her, to I know her. I actually feel like I know her. And I'm saying her, but this could be him too, of course. And of course, you don't literally know the person the way their best friend knows them, but you, at this point, with enough touchpoints, you understand their work, what they value, the way they approach problems, and their personality enough to know whether you'd enjoy working with them, at least on a higher level and a deeper level than just seeing a few posts.

And this is such an important shift. And I think of long-form content as one of the best examples of how this works. So for instance, I'll use myself as an example. Someone who sees one of my LinkedIn posts might spend 30 seconds with me, but someone who listens to this podcast regularly might spend about 30 minutes a week with me. So if you've been listening for a year, you've probably spent 20 or 30 hours with my ideas.

And if it's been years, you've probably spent significantly more. Now, not to say that you're necessarily listening to every episode. So at this point, you've heard me probably more from a lot of members of my extended family or my long-lost friends, right? And thank you. First of all, if that is you, thank you so much.

And I'm so grateful that I can be here to support you. But as this example, think about what happens during all of those hours. You're not just learning what I do. You understand what I believe. You know I care about building a business that gives you freedom, not just revenue.

You know I think AI is incredibly powerful, but I don't want it determining who you are or helping craft your identity. You know I think your intellectual property matters. You know, I

believe experts should build brands for where they're going, not where they are now. You've, you've heard when I've changed my mind, what I get excited about. You occasionally hear me lose my train of thought and know I'm in perimenopause, which is authentic, and I don't edit the podcast.

So all of these things create depth, and this is what I want you to start thinking about when you think about your marketing machine, your— the way you're putting your message out into the world. And this is why podcasting, newsletters, books, long-form video, and intimate events— these things are becoming interesting again. Like, think about it. Blogs were like huge and kind of went away, and now they're starting to come back. And these are things that people give their time and effort to.

And yeah, we could do this 1-minute post on LinkedIn. You could do stories on Instagram. All of those things don't hurt, but it's not going to bring people to the level and the depth of trust to actually work with you typically. And so reach will tell people you exist, but depth is what gives them a reason to care.

And, you know, there's something so seductive about virality, right? I understand it. If someone told me tomorrow this episode is going to reach a million people, I'm not going to say no, thank you, right? I'll take the million listeners. But virality and relationship are not the same thing.

I'd much rather have, you know, however many people are listening to this, thousands rather than millions or hundreds rather than thousands, because it creates that depth and it's the right people. And so this is where we need to get more sophisticated about what we mean when we say something is— I'm doing air quotes here— Working. We tend to measure the things that are easiest to count— views, followers, downloads— and relationships are messier. How do you put a number on someone recommending you 6 months later because they remembered a conversation you had? Or, I don't know, a client introducing you to someone because she loves your work?

A person listening to your podcast for a year before they finally reach out and say, I'm ready, or an event organizer thinking of your name because your ideas stuck with them. Those things don't fit neatly onto a dashboard, but they are incredibly valuable and more valuable than ever. And so this also came up during my mastermind intensive. We were talking about referral partners and collaborations. And that is one of the strengths that I've had to grow my business, and one of the things that people ask me about most other than branding and websites and things like that.

And one of the realizations was that having a giant list of people who technically agreed to be partners is also not the goal, because you can have 100 people on a spreadsheet who once said, sure, I'd love to promote you, and never hear from them again, or they don't follow through. But you can have 5 or 10 relationships where they are deeply supporting your launch. You know what they are launching. You think of each other when opportunities arise. You make introductions and you support each other's work because you genuinely believe in it.

Which of those is more valuable? Definitely the second, right? And so The lesson isn't that everything needs to be small and tiny, but it's that depth compounds differently than reach. A deeply trusted relationship can generate opportunity for years, and a random impression or viral post will not. So this is why I think we're seeing more curated rooms.

So with events, there's still enormous value in large conference. You know, I love being in a big room with energy and ideas and people I would never have met otherwise. But at the same time, more and more people are creating highly curated experiences like those private dinners I was talking about, roundtables instead of summits, masterminds instead of Big courses or memberships, small retreats, invite-only conversations. So one of my clients is exploring this right now, and we're strategizing because she wants to reach high-level women and executives. And like I said earlier, we talked about the dinners, but we also talked about how to reach those women and how they tend to know other women that are the same.

And, and really There's no reason for her to be on social media at all, right? We talked about who her ideal clients were if she was to put them all in a room. And yeah, they might be scrolling on Instagram, but they're probably looking at recipes and funny cat videos because they're super busy and overwhelmed and just need a brain break. They're not looking for a coach to support them.

So we need to be careful here because especially in entrepreneurship, small often sounds like failure. Oh, I have a small audience. I have a small event, a small list, a small community. I've heard so many people say this in a negative tone. And I don't know where this thought of where we immediately assume bigger is more successful.

I also know because I've been behind The scenes of a lot of big businesses that have these fancy revenue numbers. Oh, we made $3 million last year. But by the time you look at their expenses and the cost of their ads and all of these things, they're probably taking home the same amount that I am or you are. So what I want you to think about as we start to wrap up today is intimacy. Is not the same thing as a lack of ambition.

Sometimes small is strategic. So the question to be thinking about instead of, you know, how big is this, or what are the results, and looking at the numbers, is how much meaning is being created here? And what relationships are being developed. Because when people genuinely understand your work, they don't just consume it. They're going to remember it, talk about it, and refer people.

And that's where depth starts creating reach of its own, which is a really interesting paradox. We often think we have to choose, do I go wide or do I go deep? Sometimes going deep is exactly what creates that next layer of reach. You know, someone recommends you, they invite you to speak, and 500 new people hear you. Someone deeply trusts you and they introduce you to a podcast, Hope.

So what you need to think about is it's slower sometimes than buying an impression with ads, but it And it's harder to force, but when it happens, when you get those introductions, when you get those stages, there's trust attached to it. So that's the other question I want you to be thinking is, am I building trust when you're writing your emails, when you're doing that? Because a simple tip or a simple quote graphic is not going to build trust. That could be from anyone. Right?

And so this is one of the reasons I keep saying partnerships, relationships, and referrals are going to become even more important over the next few years. So this is something when we're looking at my clients' brand strategies, how can we bake this in? How can we make the message easy to refer? How can we set up with the offers for partner programs? And the truth is, of course, business has always grown through relationships.

Before the internet, that's pretty much all we had. But we spent this weird period of time where it seemed like technology would allow us to bypass relationships. I mean, there's literally people that said you could just build the funnel, run the ad, create the automation, get enough eyeballs, And there is a place for those things. I actually remember people telling me like, I just don't want to work with humans, so I'm going to create this funnel. And for me, I'm like, why would you do that?

Like, the favorite thing in my business is relationships, whether it's in my mastermind, we're working one-on-one together, or it's done with you and it's more self-guided, but I'm still involved. I still want to make sure and get to know every single person In my community, and if you're listening, I'm pretty sure you feel the same way, right?

But none of those things like ads, automations can replace the oldest marketing strategy in the world. Someone trusts you enough to tell someone else about you or to work with you.

So I want you to think about today, where are you chasing reach? When you need depth? Where are you spending tremendous amount of energy trying to get in front of more people when there already may be enough people in your world who would benefit from a deeper relationship with you? Maybe you do need more visibility or to get on more stages or to grow the podcast or to publish more consistently, but maybe you also need to call that referral partner you haven't talked to in 6 months. Or create something longer than a 30-second piece of content.

Maybe you need to host a dinner or spend more time following up with the person or people you met at the conference rather than trying to go home and find new cold leads on LinkedIn.

Maybe the opportunity isn't always out there somewhere, but it's just one relationship away.

And most of you listening are probably not starting from scratch, right? You have the experience, you have clients, relationships, former colleagues, people who already trust you. But oftentimes we get so focused on finding the next audience that we haven't recognized the value of the one you've already built. So what I want you to think about is being deeply known is a competitive advantage, and that's how we want to build the foundation of your brand. How do you bake in that being known, being trusted?

And a lot of it is like, like being known, like and trusted. Of course you want people to like you, but that's also a downside because when we're people pleasing and we show up too much in that, oh, I just want people to like me energy, That doesn't necessarily work either. And this is going to become more pronounced as AI continues to evolve. So we've talked about this, but I'm going to sound like a broken record, but I can't help myself because it's so important. Because creating content is becoming easier, content alone is not a differentiator, right?

Producing more is not going to be helpful. The hardest thing to replicate is that trust, relationships, context, and ultimately someone being able to say, I'm ready to work with you, from getting to know you as a human. Which brings us back to what we talked about last week. The most valuable brands need to feel human, but humanity isn't useful if nobody gets close enough to experience it. So relationships require proximity, time, that repeated interaction, and people staying in your world long enough to understand you.

And so Once people do want to stay, the last thing I want you to think about is what are you inviting them into? Because there's another shift that happens when people stop consuming your ideas and really begin to interact with them or work with you.

And the relationship stops being only between you and your audience And then you get to start connecting people with each other and your brand starts becoming more than a platform. It starts becoming a place. And that's where we're going to go next week. We're going to talk about the strongest brands of the future being meeting places. It's going to be a really great convo.

So make sure you come here and let's continue the conversation that last Next week. I said last week. That makes no sense. I almost got through this whole episode without too many mistakes, but that's what happens. All right, have a beautiful rest of your week.

Thank you as always for being here. If you ever have any questions, connect with me on LinkedIn, DM me. I love hearing from you. Sending you so much love, and we'll see you next week. Bye.