

Renia:

What would it change for us if we thought of digital marketing as a way to create a better world instead of sheepishly joking that marketers ruin everything? In this week's episode to kick off season four, I'm taking on that question, both in my own work and with a call to action for all digital influencers, however that looks for you, to do better at digital so we can be better humans. Marketers must be a part of the movement for liberation too. We'll talk about why, what the path forward might look like in this week's episode. Welcome to season four, y'all. Let's get started. Welcome to Small Stage, Big Impact where we are dismantling the idea that big is better by showcasing the wisdom, courage, and kindness of tiny companies having a massive impact on the communities they serve. What does it look like to run a small company with kindness at its core?

Renia:

How can digital influencers break up with grow marketing and manipulative sales hacks that compromise their values? What does it really take to shape a digital footprint with empathy, equity, and accessibility at the center of the strategy? These are the questions I've been asking myself over the past several years. In season four of the show we're speaking to digital activists, upstart developers, bad-ass content creators, brave community leaders, and even a few Instagram influencers to answer these questions and more. I am your host Lourenia Carsillo. I'm a veteran SEO nerd, digital strategists and recovering know-it-all. Over the past decade, I've spent way too much time feeling frustrated with digital marketers making excuses for their bad behavior. So we're here this season to help you learn how to do better at digital, no trip wires, sales hustles, or soft closes required. Join us every Thursday morning for Small Stage, Big Impact season four, sustainable courage for leaders who want to do better digital.

Renia:

Welcome to season four of Small Stage, Big Impact. I am not just honored, I feel like I say that every week, but so just jumping up and down excited about being back for season four of Small Stage, Big Impact. We are coming back during INBOUND 2020 that is looking very different than what INBOUNDs of the past many years of my life have looked like. I have all the feels about that, which we're going to talk about in just a little bit. But first I really want to talk to you about what season four is about and why this now. Because season four of Small Stage, Big Impact, as you probably heard in the new show intro, is all about doing better digital. I am hoping that I may be able to get you to occasionally use the hashtag do better digital to help us with this movement, because frankly, this shit has got to end.

Renia:

If you're listening to this in real time, it is the fall of 2020, and this year has been bananas, right? A lot of things have happened, and I know that a lot of people are talking about equity and inclusion and social justice and things like that, and a lot of people who are much smarter than I am, a lot of people who have way more experience and knowledge and training to talk about that than I do. Many, many times over the course of this season, as we did last season, we are going to direct you to those people. We are not here for that. What we are here for is our piece of how we do better at being humans, how we make a better, kinder, more liberated, more just world. For me as a digital strategist, and for you possibly, if you're listening to this as a digital influencer or as a business owner or as a digital marketer, we have to do better at digital if we're going to have a better world.

Renia:

Because I have been in this space for 11 years, and I want to talk to you about a few things that we know damn well go wrong constantly and yet we keep doing them. In fact, there is a very popular hashtag based on a phrase that Gary V., one of the worst of the worst of the bro-marketers said years and years ago, "Marketers ruin everything." We use that phrase as if it's like isn't that cute thing, and continue to go on doing the dumb shit that we know we shouldn't be doing, the kind of shit that ... Ladies and gentlemen, and everybody else in between, see I just did it there, the kind of shit that we know isn't right. The things that are born out of habits or born out of pushing for results above anything else that we just keep doing over and over and over again, and then we sheepishly laugh at ourselves and say marketers ruin everything.

Renia:

But what if it didn't have to be like that? The question that I've been asking myself for the past three and actively working quietly trying to figure out for the past three years, is what if marketers, instead of ruining everything, we're creating the world that we want to live in. What if we were a part of the solution, a part of the movement for liberation for all people instead of actively hindering it with the terrible manipulative things that we do? What would it shift if we didn't feel slightly icky about our sales funnel? Or maybe a lot of icky. I'm looking at you white dudes with your coaching packages on the internet. What would it look like if we weren't actively using big data to manipulate people's thoughts, emotions, buying patterns in ways that we wouldn't want to be manipulated ourselves? Even though a hint, we probably are because nobody can be vigilant all the time.

Renia:

The more that I have learned about algorithms and how they work, the more that I have delved deeper and deeper into search strategy and social media marketing strategies, and the more time I spend in spreadsheet hell parsing out data, the more I am acutely aware of what it costs us to continue to do business in a way that we know isn't right but we hide from with phrases like, oh, I don't really get the technology or my web dude just makes this work, or yeah, maybe it's not the greatest thing to do, but it works and so nothing else works. So if I don't do this, what am I supposed to do? I've got a really great program or I'm a really good coach, or I really have something that people need so I have to manipulate them to get them into the program.

Renia:

In fact, there's a really popular book, not to be named, that gives explicit marketing advice to sell people what they want and then give them what they need in your program, which sounds all well and good, and there is some truth in that statement. But how that gets interpreting in the marketing world, how that gets interpreted often is manipulate people into your programs as if they have no personal autonomy to decide what it is that they need at any given moment. I am just tired of it. I'm tired of how we use big data to manipulate people from the largest companies down to person sitting at their computer at their kitchen table building Facebook ads. I'm tired of how we blame the issues of equity and access and equality, and even voting issues in our world on the wolves of Silicon Valley, as if we are not active participants in this process.

Renia:

If you are a digital influencer, if you are an online content creator, if you are a digital marketer, if you are a small business owner using the internet to grow your business, you are not an innocent bystander in these practices. You are, unless you have taken a lot of time to look at it carefully, more than likely an

active participant in the type of manipulation and toxic capitalism, if we want to go there, that makes us feel rightly so like marketers ruin everything. The good news is I've started to see a light. I've started over the past two years to really see that there are other ways to do digital. There are other ways to be in the world of the digital marketing and be successful and have the impact you want to have without the manipulation. It makes me tired, y'all. From every so-called thought leader with a course that's not really being honest about how this space has changed since 2008 to the psychological manipulation to reinforce toxic and oppressive systems, to the bots before beliefs and values that we seem to have abdicated our own autonomy to do anything about, I'm just hired.

Renia:

It doesn't have to be this way. If 2020 has taught us nothing else, it is that if we don't do things differently, there may not be a path forward for a lot of us. The cool thing that I've been seeing over and over again over the last seven months is people doing things differently, forging a new path forward. I got to be honest, three years ago when I first started really thinking heavily about this, I didn't know if there was another way because the only thing I knew was the digital marketing world that most of you probably know, which is hyper-masculine, steeped in white supremacy and largely, totally unconcerned with accessibility. That means that we leave great swaths of the population out and or actively suppressed them in these so-called liberated paths that we are taking into this new utopian world that we all thought we were creating when we started these journeys back in the early 2000.

Renia:

Three years ago when I started looking at this, there were so few places that I could find where people were talking about this. It's not that they weren't there. There were a few, but not like it is today, and that gives me a lot of hope because there are people coming out and showing every day that there is a difference way. But and the biggest, most influential people in the digital marketing space are still almost entirely steeped in these really problematic ways of doing business, hyper-masculine, steeped in white supremacy, largely totally unconcerned with accessibility. I'm showing up for you in season four in a different position that I showed up in the past. In the past, I have come to you as a teacher. I have come to you about topics that I am 100% clear on, about tried and true marketing tactics, about systems that I have used to create strategic plans and strategies over the course of a decade.

Renia:

I am very confident in my ability to navigate and guide with you through everything that we have talked about up until this moment. But in season four, this season for the next 12 episodes and maybe more who knows, I am coming with a humble heart. That's why I said in the intro I am coming as a recovery know-it-all. I am a student here very much. I am still learning how to do differently, and I have to check not only my own privilege, but my own habits as a veteran digital marketing person every single day. It is hard and it hurts, and sometimes I don't know how to get the results that I am used to getting by not manipulating people to do it. What I have done for this season is I have gone out to some of the most kick ass bad-asses that I can find, whether they are developers or content creators or Instagram influencers or activists, and I have asked with my words, sometimes with my money, because can we please pay people for their time and attention?

Renia:

I have asked them to help us. I am coming here as a student as well. I've been, over the past couple of years, starting to get some really encouraging new results doing things without the manipulation,

breaking the patterns of white supremacy, breaking some of the patterns of creating things and telling ourselves we can't afford to make them accessible. But I am still very much in the work. I'm in the work myself, I'm in the work every day with my clients, and I want you to hear from people who have figured this out, if not entirely at a deeper level than I am at today. I didn't want to wait to be an expert. See, I felt called many times over the past year and a half or so to talk to you all about these topics, but I didn't feel like it was my right and I kept waiting for somebody else to step up and do it in this space.

Renia:

I kept waiting for somebody else, another SEO nerd, another digital strategist to really step up and start having deep conversations about not just that we should do these things, but how to do them and still have sustainable sales systems, how to do them and not just the why because the why I hope if you're listening to this is self-evident, but how. How do we actually get it done? How do we create the right content? How do we have the right metadata? How do we allocate resources for things like captioning and transcripts and all of these other things that do cost real dollars on limited budgets? How do we get it done? How do we put empathy, equity, inclusion, and liberation at the center of our strategy while keeping a keen eye towards growing our sales? I don't believe that these things belong in two columns anymore.

Renia:

I believe that they all mesh together if we're going to have a better more liberated world, we must do better digital so we can do better humans. It's INBOUND week. I want to talk to you a little bit about INBOUND's illustrative example of what both the opportunities and the challenges and the real frustrations are that I have here. Because I love INBOUND. I have loved INBOUND since the first time I heard of the event. I love the energy of INBOUND. I have in the past, although I don't as much now, loved the HubSpot platform. I love many of the speakers at INBOUND. I got to meet my hero a few years ago at INBOUND. I love the energy, I love the thoughts that are passed, I love the City of Boston where until this year's digital event, it was held. I love that several years ago, I want to say it was 2017, when the bro-marketing culture that is the HubSpot partner world flipped the gasket about so many female speakers the people at HubSpot basically told them where to go.

Renia:

I love that INBOUND was forcefully trying to show up for making a better world in a lot of ways. This year, I got to speak at INBOUND for the first time. Not the way I wanted, not the way I planned. I applied for INBOUND in January thinking there was no way in hell that little old me with not that big a following was going to get a speaker slot. A couple of weeks into the COVID lockdowns, I got the notice that I, against all odds, did get a spot. I waited for months because I figured that the event would get canceled, and I went back and forth in my mind thinking, "Well, even if it doesn't get canceled would go in there be the right thing to do," et cetera, et cetera. As many of you know, if you've been participating in this week or if you've just been watching what happened, INBOUND became a two-day virtual event, which is very different than the week of parties and speakers and trainings and interactions that usually is INBOUND.

Renia:

My 90-minute workshop became a five-minute intro to a meetup, which if any of you know me, is not really my thing. I'm still not sure if doing it at all was the right thing to do. I still not sure if I shouldn't have just backed out entirely, but we did what we did. We did it. It's over now. If you're listening to this

live, that means that's means it happened yesterday. But despite all of that, I love the opportunity that was INBOUND. I love the interactions that I had. I love that I had the opportunity to be an INBOUND speaker, even if in a totally imperfect way. Because this is one of my favorite events of the year. For several years before I went to it the first time, it was my aspirational event. It was the place that I so wanted to go. But here's the thing, the dark side of INBOUND, because I feel the same way about this event as I feel about the digital marketing culture as a whole.

Renia:

There is so of it that I love, there's so much of it that speaks to my soul and so much opportunity and so many beautiful things happening there. But then there's this dark nasty place, and in the INBOUND world that is largely the HubSpot agency world. If you get into the HubSpot agency world, it is very strongly a bro culture. In the US is what I can speak to being a former director of a HubSpot partner agency. It's very much very male, quite a bit older than the average digital marketing person. Probably men in their 40s and 50s maybe. Maybe a few a little younger, but it's largely male, largely white. The last time that I was at a live INBOUND when they did a partner panel with the diamond and top level agencies, I think maybe there was one woman on the stage and there was definitely no nonwhite person on the stage. You see that in the digital marketing world in general, where you see a lot of liberal ideas and you see a lot of diversity out in the spotlight.

Renia:

If you dig underneath the surface, it's the leadership, the business leadership, is largely just like any other line of business that we are so commonly frustrated with. It's largely white dudes telling everybody else what to do. If you don't have experience with that whole system, an easy way to look at this with INBOUND is just to go peruse their breakout speaker page. You'll notice that there's an eye towards diversity with the top speakers. These are the spotlight speakers and the people that would be on the main stage. I'm not sure I didn't count them all up, so I'm not sure if it's exactly parody, but you'll see an eye towards diversity that you don't see at every digital conference. But if you scroll down and you look at the rest of the speakers, the 250 so odd other speakers, ones like me, you'll notice that out of around 250 speakers, there are 21 or so that are nonwhite, 10 of them, nonwhite women, 11 nonwhite men, which means the lion's share of those speakers are white men and women.

Renia:

They're about equal this year, which is awesome, and that's movement in one direction. That's better than it's been in the past. I think there may even be a few more women than men this year. But you'll notice that the diversity that is so evidently paid attention to at the top of the ticket, if you go down just a little bit further under the surface, there's not as much attention paid there. That for me seems to happen so much it's indicative of what this world is like. Let me give you an example of what I mean. How many digital influencers have you seen out over the last several months talking about Black Lives Matter or talking about social justice or talking about income inequality? But if you scratch under the surface of their marketing systems, if you scratch under the surface of their websites, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are obviously not things that they invest, money, resources, or pay attention to, other than as a marketing ploy.

Renia:

I am not the person to help with that, in terms of making it a part of your culture, in terms of doing the difficult work of recognizing these things in yourself. There are people like Trudy LeBron who can help

you with that. But what I am called to figure out, what I can help with, what I am a student of is the nuts and bolts digital tactics that need to happen to put those things at the center of your strategy. These are things like proper metadata and all tags and image descriptions and transcripts on your videos and captioning on your videos and accessibility for people of all ability types on your website or your mobile app or things like that. This technology is easier and easier to access every day, and it is an moral imperative that we do so. Just like HubSpot is trying really, really hard at the top when it comes to INBOUND, it's obvious they're trying really hard at the top.

Renia:

But they haven't yet scratched beneath the surface to look closely at what's happening with their partners, or at least as far as I know, to look closely at what is happening with their ranking file speakers, to look closely at what is happening with their attendees. Many of us are not scratching beneath the surface with our digital marketing, and that is what season four is all about. I broke up with bro-marketing culture a long time ago, and I'm hoping that this season will maybe give you a light in the tarp so you can do the same. It's time. It's like this in so many spaces within digital marketing, and I want to see this change and maybe you do too, and we're not going to change it from the top top down. It's all well and good to call for these big influencers to do better, it's all well and good to call for huge companies to be more accountable. I'm in favor of that.

Renia:

But the way that we are really going to change this culture is from the bottom up. It's tiny companies like mine, and hopefully like yours, doing better every day. It's me and you and our neighbors. We can do better digital, and the more of us that do, the more groundswell will happen to change the culture. The first three seasons of Small Stage, Big Impact have been all about things that I know for sure. This season, like I said before, y'all, I'm still a student, I'm still learning, so we're speaking to teachers from a lot of different interesting places. We're talking to people who are in the work, doing the work and trained for the work. It's very important to me as we set out on this for you to know that. Anyone that we have invited to be a guest on the show this season has been vetted for these three things.

Renia:

They are trauma-informed and or trauma-trained so that they have an eye towards not using manipulative psychology in marketing. They are 100% committed to equity and working towards liberation for all. That does not mean they are perfect, that means they are actively in the work and trying. And they have successfully executed the thing they are teaching you on multiple occasions. Meaning if we've asked them to come and talk to you about a topic, we've seen more than once them successfully do the thing we've asked them to talk to you about. This is important to me. This is not theoretical knowledge that we are here to pass on to you this season. These are tactics and strategies that you can really take and implement into your own work so that you can do better digital too. I want to know how it's going for you, and I'm going to share with you in several solo episodes scheduled throughout the season, how it's going for us.

Renia:

I'll be honest when it's difficult, I'll be transparent when I screw up, and I really hope to share several victories with you too, and I want to know about yours. If you're going to go on this journey with us and you really care about this issue, I want to ask you to head on over to realignyourstrategy.com and join the list to get updates about this program. You'll see it right at the top of the page because it's

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important. I don't know what else to say about it, except for I see too much in my work to believe that we can do better as humans without doing better as marketers. I hope that each one of you really wants to do better too. I'll see you all next week.

Renia:

Thank you for listening to Small Stage, Big Impact. If you enjoyed the show, please show your support by reviewing us or rating us on iTunes, and follow Lourenia C. on Instagram. This helps others seeking to do better digital to find us and support the movement. For full show notes, transcripts and resources mentioned in the episode, visit us at realignyourstrategy.com. Thank you for listening. We'll be back next week.