



Creating an Authentic Brand Transcript

Janice Hostager: Well, Amy, thank you for being with me today. How are you?

MüD Modular: I am doing fabulous Janice. Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited for our conversation.

Janice Hostager: For our listeners. Amy, and I have been friends for many years ever since we were young entrepreneurs. I think we first met in an entrepreneur group somewhere in Wisconsin somewhere. I don't even really remember where we first met.

MüD Modular: I don't, but I do believe you are right. It had to have been something like that.

Janice Hostager: Yeah, yeah. Well it's great to have you on the show. I mean, you create amazing trade show materials, and I, I've always been in awe of your ability to visualize something and create it. Basically, and I love what you did, your company is mood modular. And you started out at least creating And there's just pause there.

Janice Hostager: You started out, creating what does the word not objects?

MüD Modular: Okay. Oh,...

Janice Hostager: But My.

MüD Modular: modular displays themes. Yeah.

Janice Hostager: Display system. Thank you. Okay. So you started out creating modular display systems, which I love, because you could just fold them right up and take them anywhere and even ordered one for my last business. So, tell me a little bit about your background, how you get started in that? Because I think it's quite an interesting story, if I remember, right?

MüD Modular: Yeah. Well, thanks for asking and it is it I, well, I think it is, but let me again. It's my journey and story. I'm so I'm not sure how interesting this, but I have an industrial design degree background and actually went into that, to be a theatrical set designer, which was what drew me into that. I ended then doing my thesis and furniture design, and then found myself in the shopping center industry. Working for developers of shopping centers and...

MüD Modular: doing retail design in visual merchandising. And I did that for 15 years and the last five was I was a contracted service. So that was my first official dip into entrepreneurship. And through those five years I realized and witnessed a, an obviously leading up to that a ton of waste in the

MüD Modular: Visuals of marketing. And At the same time, nothing was ever. Really speaking directly to the audience, it at hand in front of them and walking through a shopping center or a brick and mortar

department store. Anything is no different than literally walking through an exhibit hall or an event. So there's that connection with that and I would literally sketch out this idea because I knew there had to be a better way. And I would literally hand my sketches of what now is mood modular with all of its modular components. To my clients and tenants and I would have them.

MüD Modular: Say Go take this to your signed company, have them x y z, and they would bring me back a flat piece of foam core that I knew wouldn't last and was not anywhere near the flexibility and versatility of what I was sketching for them. So that's actually the the beginning of where mood started. So at those five years, I was putting on probably 50,000 miles a year and my vehicle. So I had a lot of windshield time to keep on thinking of like, There's got to be a better way. There's got to be a better way. How can somebody take, what they've invested in and use it for multiple purposes? And that's really where the catalyst for mood began. So, when I did start to,

MüD Modular: You know, put out my first prototypes and and literally sell those first for prototypes. It was helping people, see beyond the initial, use of them where they were using them inside a shopping center and then I would have that deep conversation and brainstorming session with them and say So where else can you use this? Like Let's really get your bang for your buck out of this and because everything's modular. You're and it's magnetic graphics and different things like that. You can literally switch up your marketing message. to speak directly to the audience that you're in front of whether it's in the middle of the shopping center and a trade show or in your background while you're on a virtual interaction, in the new modern day, business world that we're in

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Janice Hostager: I mean, I'd love to talk a little more about that too. But first I want to say, because I spent my early years in retail marketing, and I love what you say about walking through department store. Because that was, that was my everyday, because I worked on the 11th floor, and I'd walk through this Minneapolis department store every morning and I just be pulled in by specialty cosmetics and and some of the visual merchandising that they had going on there. And I I love that you picked up on that because I don't think I did at the time that those were all designed really to pull us all in and to make that purchase of course. But I, you know, I I find that really interesting and how we can as small business owners use that information in everything we do in terms of Branding and such.

MüD Modular: Absolutely. Well, it really does come down to our human psychology in all honesty. You know, I with the industrial design degree. There's I also have that little bit of that industrial psychology and I just have always been fascinated by the human psychology and in how and why? You know, we react to things and in what separates that and and that really does play into our everyday life.

Janice Hostager: It does. Yeah, for sure, we don't realize that how much it does. I mean there's so much of, you know, involved in psychology. We don't even realize in terms of definitely marketing, but but that's a that's a topic for another podcast,...

MüD Modular: If?

Janice Hostager: probably. But well, like so many of us, you know, life changed for you and you really had to pivot during the covid-19 lockdown. Tell me about what happened at that point for you.

MüD Modular: yeah, you know, I had actually just landed back in Minneapolis at the airport from a large conference that I was at as a strategic partner in Florida and within 24 hours to 24 to 48 hours after re

landing back in Minnesota I we were going on lockdown and it was like “Whoa did I just enter Twilight Zone?” and from that moment everything, leads, all the interactions. All the relationships that had been built over the last few days at this conference were at best at a standstill. It was null and void at that point in time for the foreseeable future, and the foreseeable future is pretty much what happened in that particular industry and in, in the strategic partnership that I had with that organization at that time.

Janice Hostager: Wow.

MüD Modular: so it was it was once again a pivoting and, you know, Maybe that's why I built a modular versatile system. Hindsight was even though I'd always talked about utilizing them in videos and backgrounds and in different, you know, aspects. Because I want people, I always wanted people to think beyond the initial use of things and whether it was my product or any other product out there that they invested in, as far as a visual marketing tool, to really think outside that box and use it in in different ways so fast forward to

MüD Modular: Literally seeing everybody popping up in a very vulnerable state. You know, we were, we were asked to open up our comfort zones. Aka our homes, literally to the world within a matter of hours. And what happened? There was. Really witnessing the uncomfortableness that people had with that.

MüD Modular: In thinking to myself, Oh, but this could be such an amazing breakthrough to really build deeper relationships with people across a camera lens. You know, here we are needing to still conduct business. The best we could from our safe zone, our comfort zone, our homes. And even though people like you, and I may have been in a lot of entrepreneurs, in small business owners, maybe used to having a home office. We weren't necessarily the great majority weren't turning on a camera and allowing them to see that behind the scenes. So it really came down to Well, it's time to, you know, reinvent myself again and help people really see beyond what was really happening and how we could layer our backgrounds and literally curate.

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MüD Modular: The story we wanted to tell. And at the same time, Try to be on brand. and, Show a little bit more of our behind the scenes, but be credible at the same time, which is a lot to pack into that ball. And and honestly, it took a while for me to even bring that forward because people just weren't weren't there. They were at a very different space in just trying to just navigate the technology, let alone the psychology that is happening from what our audience views. When we show up on screen, you know, you and I both know first impressions are

MüD Modular: Highly important. In fact, I think it was Princeton that recently did a study that obviously first impressions are made within. Like, they think the first seven seconds were in all reality. The initial one is made in a tenth of a second. Yeah.

Janice Hostager: Wow. Yeah. Well, I mean Yeah, that I loved what you have done. I mean listening to this, you can't, you can't see Amy screen right now but you know that you have a texture and you have images and you have a little cube where you're showing some of your awards that you've done your designs awards and and you're right. It makes a very, very professional looking background and you I would never know that you're sitting in your home right now. You know,...

MüD Modular: What? Yeah,...

Janice Hostager: how do you not tell me?

MüD Modular: you know, anything it's about, you know, I have a whole presentation and a whole program that I do of lights camera in action. And, you know, because that is the modern day business that we live in today, and we are telling a story visually, when we pop up on somebody's screen, but it's no different than the story we used to tell, when they would walk into a work physical space, or we would walk into our clients space. So we would meet in a, you know, a neutral location. All those environments would speak to

MüD Modular: Our presence, like, who we were like, you know, our presence is more than just us as a person. It's also within our surroundings. So how do we become the three-dimensional beings that we are and build those deeper relationships across the camera lens? We do that by adding layers and depths and texture and you don't need a ton of space, you know, I from my camera lens to my back wall is under five feet and but yet it appears as though it's a lot, I don't have a ton in my back, you know, it's but it's very strategically. Placed the items and curated what I do have and it's done to allow the human eye to move naturally through what they're seeing of me. But also allowing me to be the main subject. And that our conversation is

MüD Modular: Is not distracting. And and...

Janice Hostager: Right.

MüD Modular: that's why we need it. I 100% believe that we need to remove the ego because I'm not showing up for me. I'm showing up for you. I'm showing up for whoever's on the other end of that lens and leading with that heart versus the ego, if that makes sense.

Janice Hostager: Absolutely. Now, you may get sound too. Like you had been like this was in the back of your mind. So in covid happened, you just seamlessly moved right into it. It was that how it happened, or was it was there like a? Because I would have thought that Had I been in your shoes, I would have had this, you know, sick feeling in the pit of my stomach at the time, which I'm, I'm guessing. You may have had a little of just considering you had to do some pivoting, but

MüD Modular: Yeah. Absolutely. I don't think there was any of us that didn't have some type of effect in our inner makeup moment in time,...

Janice Hostager: Right. Yeah.

MüD Modular: but absolutely because there was You know, I had always again thought of, but I have been doing virtuals, you know, since Skype or email.

Janice Hostager: Right.

MüD Modular: So, I've, I've always had that comfort because I had to in order to reach certain clients because I had my, you know, Properties in the shopping center all over the country and it was just the way to work on a design for that aspect. But so I always kind of had that understanding of what it but my superpower is also, you know, spatial visual spatial intelligence. I like to say, You know, I see things a little differently but I would have to say the the biggest hurdle in that is even though I knew how my product could benefit people in, in helping them in that transition and to

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MüD Modular: This virtual platform, regardless of if was their home or hotel room or an RV for as far as that goes. It was. Having. People realize that. Get have them get through the initial shock of what was happening. Like, we need it again, going back to opening up our our homes, our comfort zones, a very personal side of us. And they're, you know, I used to take great pride in my personal and my professional life. we're two very separate things like they did applied and...

Janice Hostager: No.

MüD Modular: you know, twenty twenty, you know, Professional and life, personal collided, pretty heavily for everyone. So that was probably the hardest part for me was to tiptoe over that very personal experience that people were having and helping them. See that? Yes, we are all real but how do we blend that personal into our business life and still have security inside our safe zones? But also open up ourselves to allow our business world to see that. We are all human.

Janice Hostager: Right, right? Yeah, yeah. And we talked a little bit of blasting when we chatted briefly about, you know, the branding and showing up as your authentic self and in how it's also important to maintain a level of professionalism to at least in most instances, you know, how do you feel like How easy is it? Do you think that to walk that? That line? I mean, I feel like there are some people that You know, our way more casual and there are others that are way more professional and and how does that tie in with your brand? Do you think

MüD Modular: You know, I really think it's well. Hey, I think we have misused the word authentic, at least in my opinion because being authentic isn't about. I don't care. I'm gonna go to the grocery store in my pajamas, but you know. And if, if what I'm gonna say triggers you, I want you to then sit kind of with that and and Take note of why that triggered you, but that's just being lazy. That's, that's giving up on yourself. That is telling me you don't have a whole lot of self-worth. We're not looking at the inside. And I'm not saying that you need to be a professional.

MüD Modular: Service or area that you may be in that, you need to be in a three-piece suit or foreign chills. And any of that when it comes to your brand, it's an authenticity in an individual, it's about showing up as your best. At that moment in time. And that best could can and will look different I believe every day. But there are certain core values that we all hold. which, Translate into our brands and small business owners and entrepreneurs. Because without those then there's a huge disc connect between us and the values in the cores of why we build that business, if that makes sense. So, I believe that. Deciding who you are at your best.

MüD Modular: And what really? Because when we feel good about ourselves, we do better. I mean that's just given when we feel not our greatest, we're not going to give our authentic 100% self. So I think it's identified. I think it's going in to understanding what those core values are and being true. Like if you are somebody who loves wearing like you're out like when you feel most powerful isn't a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. Then rock the heck out of that. but then that means you have to own that look and your audience is going to see you as credible, if you know, you like to be in foreign shields and God bless you, if you can still wear those after the last

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MüD Modular: Like I love them, but yeah, my feet don't like to work so well enough anymore,...

Janice Hostager: Here.

MüD Modular: but you know what? I have them in view beyond my camera lens because they do give me a little bit of that. Oh, I love that. Feeling of what it was like to be in those You know, you stand a little taller. You're, you know, your legs always look better and heels. And you know, all those kind of fun things. But in the core of it, it's It's owning who you are and that's gonna just come across, but you have to stand in that. That power you have to stand in your weird style, your space because that energy is what comes across and that's when you are being most authentic and that's how you connect it to your brand.

Janice Hostager: Oh, that's golden. I love that. I love that. That's so funny. You should I'm 5-10". So I've never been able to pull off heels and plus I'm not really all that coordinated either. So I admire anybody that can work four inch heels.

MüD Modular: Hey, sorry too.

Janice Hostager: Just to put that out there. Because I'm always in flats.

Janice Hostager: You know, and one thing I work with clients too and I talk about the layers of your brand, you know, and you really have to go back to the core of your brand and say, Who am I really all about? What, what are my core values? This is where we start. So, what is it, What is, why am I in business, what, what is my why? Basically, you know, just attach your meanings to though that core you write in it kind of from there, it goes outward. Um, and I I do have certain layers that I go through when I'm working with a client but all the way out to the very end of it which is like your logo and and how you address customers and and for many of us now who are working from home, it is how you dress and how you, how we come across in a meeting, a video meeting and so on. So, I love that.

MüD Modular: absolutely, you know, and I think, you know, for me, I walk my clients that are kind of a similar process and, and you and I do like I don't design logos, but I I look at a person's logo and I work through that process of. So what is the essence? That you were. We're wanting from that and you know so I really do work with them in a complementary way of what you do and in the fact of now let's really bring that essence which is your core values. in in how that translates through an experience with your audience and clients and customers. And in, you know, if it's understanding the psychographic versus the demographic. and and how that relates to

MüD Modular: The business at hand. And what is that story that you're the essence? What, what is that feeling? You want them to get from your brand?

Janice Hostager: Right? Right. And I love you pulled in the emotional part of it because it definitely is part of it. And, and Totally forgot. What I was going to say here. At the startup.

Janice Hostager: One of the things that I've talked to my customers about too, is that if you don't define your brand on your own, then your customers, your clients will define it for you or others will define it for you. So it's really important to make that effort and get to know your start out with your why and really think through what image you want to portray to people and how you want that to be reflected in all the touch points from your logo to your backdrops, to anything that you do to your Business cards or whatever you have. So I think it's really important that you take the time and do that rather than letting somebody else do that. Because absolutely people will define it for you because we do that all the time. You know, if you

Janice Hostager: Are going to a Chinese restaurant down the street. You're gonna have an opinion about it. When you walk in the door, based on the way, the tables are arranged, they're lighting the cleanliness of

it, the the staff, whether you agreed, when you walked in how long you had to wait, I mean all of this ties into who you business is in the eyes, the customer and that is what your brand is.

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Janice Hostager: Oh interesting. That's really interesting. Yeah, that would make sense because Yeah, you're right. I love it.

Janice Hostager: Yeah.

Janice Hostager: The name of the show is my weekly marketing. One of the things that I like to do in the show is to tell entrepreneurs, how to build a marketing in their weekly routines. So that it's something that they're always kind of working on in the background. What could somebody do each week to stay on top of their personal brand and work it into their everyday life?

Janice Hostager: Wow.

Janice Hostager: That's really interesting. I should also mention that you did that for me last week when we were on a chat and you kind of made me look at my office because I had my desk turned a different way. And, and now it's up against the wall with, you know, a little more pleasant looking background right now. But, yeah, I had my own whiteboard back there, and then I worked with clients on that whiteboard. So, when I'm on a meeting with somebody else, I try to blur that out so that people, I'm because there's proprietary information back there. I people should not be able to see what I'm working on with other clients, you know. So, you know, never thought about that. But you're absolutely right. People do wonder, like, what is it, that they've got that picture of the beach behind them, you know, whether they are hiding in there. So I love that.

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Janice Hostager: Yeah.

Janice Hostager: Right? I love that. Where can people find out more about you and what you do?

MüD Modular: And yeah, just a great place to connect and always DM or email us. Well,

Janice Hostager: Okay. Okay. We'll put that in the show notes and your company is mood modular. That's M-U-with umlauts-D <https://mudmodular.com> Okay. Yeah.

MüD Modular: Yes, absolutely, which is also a great place to meet me.

Janice Hostager: Yeah, so obviously there's no umlots on that on our computers anyway, but so it's just <https://mudmodular.com>

MüD Modular: Yeah. Correct.

Janice Hostager: But anyway, we'll put that in the show. Notice notes as Well. Amy, thank you so much for being with us today. This was such a great conversation. I love love all you had to say about branding and I love your backgrounds. And I've backdrops and I've always been a fan of your modular components for trade shows and whatnot. And I'm optimistic as I'm off to a show next week. I'm really optimistic that we're gonna be back in meeting again in person and and but I don't think our zoom calls are ever gonna really end. So I think maybe you have just expanded your business. So, I hope you have

MüD Modular: Yeah. Absolutely. And that they are both around to stay at trade shows in person. There's just going to be a hybrid mix. I do believe so. Absolutely. Well,...

Janice Hostager: Yeah, I think so too. Hey. Thanks Amy.

MüD Modular: thank you so much for having me on

Janice Hostager: This has been fun. See you soon.