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Episode 14
Mastering DIY Design for Non-Designers

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Well, hey, hey, and welcome to another episode of My Weekly Marketing. I'm Janice Hostager and I'm so glad you're tuning in today. If you design any artwork for your business, so if you're in business now, I don't know who that wouldn't be. You'll want to hear from my guest today.

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Lauren Felder is a design educator for non-designers. She describes herself as a former ladder climber, spending the first decade of her career overseeing marketing operations and technical systems for a university admissions office, although also teaching a popular design course as an adjunct faculty member. After following the traditional path to success, she found intense burnout and an identity crisis when she got to the top, a path that sounds very familiar to a lot of us, me included.

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Once she realized that the corporate and educational worlds were not for her, she went out on her own and she created a design course specifically for non-designers who find designing an inevitable part of their regular to-do list. She prides herself on a no-shame, no-shade approach to her web design, branding and design education. So if you feel like you're always jumping onto Canva or working on some sort of social media or design project, you'll want to hear this conversation with my guest for today, Lauren Felder. Well, hey there, lauren. How are you today?

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I'm good. Thanks so much for having me.

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I love what you're doing with your business and I just look forward to having your discussion today. I think this is really going to be interesting to our listeners. So I talked a little bit in my bio about your background and all of that in your business, but can you tell me where you are today in your business and where it started? So what's your story and how did you arrive at this place?

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Yeah, so I'm about three years into being a self-employed business owner about a year and a half into this version of the business. So the first iteration was that I wanted to be a motivational speaker, and that decision was made at a time in my life when I thought that traveling all the time was really glamorous and exciting. And then, of course, the pandemic happened and life changes and it's like, oh, I actually don't want to live out of a suitcase and be on the go all the time, But as someone who is multi-passionate and multi-talented, honestly it was a little difficult to decide what I wanted to do with my business. It was like I could do this, I could do that, you know, and the possibilities are endless. But it was really in working with a career coach that I realized that design for non-designers was really the thing that I needed to hone in on, because it has such a benefit to so many people and it's such a unique angle. And I think something that a lot of graphic designers and web designers struggle with who I've worked with in the past is that they don't really know how to speak their language to non-designers, and so there's a lot of frustration throughout the design process and like well, you know, just like, take my word for it. Like I promise I know what I'm doing. But it's like if you can't explain to an accountant or you know why this thing is important or why this thing is necessary, then there's really a breakdown in communication.

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Oh, that is so true. I mean, you're talking to a former designer here. So I totally get it and I think a lot of times people have a vision. I just kind of want to know what it was, because you did a big shift, like you were in University and you were, you know, heading a department, right? And so it was a huge shift. I mean, what, what was it that appealed to you about being self-employed, owning your own business and especially like going Focusing on like a hyper niche? You know, it's not just design, it's like teaching design to non designers. What was the process like of how you got there?

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so I can tell you what Initially motivated me and then in learning more about myself, what motivated me. So initially it was that. So I worked at a university for six years and then I did corporate consulting for five months because I was like I need to try something else. And I just remember having to log by the 15 minute exactly what I was doing every day and having to sit at a desk from 8: 30 to 5: 30 and just physically be a breathing body in a place to show that you know, this was my worth. And I just felt that it was so frustrating that, like my value should not be limited to you know, time it logged in this system or you know time spent at this desk. Like my value should have an impact. And so it was like I wanted to make that impact. So I think initially it came out of this frustration of lack of freedom and then, in learning more about myself, it's that I'm an enneagram 3 with a wing 4. So basically, the enneagram 3 is the achiever I need people to see me as successful and the 4 is the individualist. So I need people to see me as successful, but I need to do it on my own terms. So like I couldn't just go follow someone else's version of success, and so that's why you know when it kind of all clicked like oh, this design for non designers, like this isn't really something that other people are doing.

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Oh, yeah, and I hear you, you know, sitting at a desk all day and especially the, you know, the dollar per hour shifts that I think so many of us make, is that you feel so you are only worth that much after a while. You know, and, oh, I hear you. I hear you for sure. So tell me about, like, design per se. So what? How do you define good design and why? Why is that important to people?

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Yeah, so my whole philosophy is good design doesn't just look good. Good design attracts the right person, it converts them and it actually closes the deal. And so you know that's done in a number of different ways. It's the choices that you're making with your fonts, your colors, your shapes, your logo. It's how you're displaying information on a page to entice them to actually read the copy that you've invested, you know, time and money in someone writing, and it conveys that you're professional, that you're trustworthy, that you have this consistent presence, and so it gets someone to actually sign on the dotted line. It's truly the thing that you know weaves between all of the other strategies in our business.

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Yeah, and that's so true. I love that you said that this is front and center in your website to you know, convert a curious onlooker and close this deal. I mean, it really is true when they say that a picture is worth a thousand words because it really does it. We process pictures so much faster. We process design without even realizing it. When I was working as a designer and had a design agency, I would get a lot of people that were just opening their businesses and they said, oh, I want to need a logo and I need a website and everything, but let's start with the logo, which was great. And then I would go and work with them on something like this very long branding exercise. So I actually kind of talked about how I just did an episode a couple of weeks ago about branding and how the logo and the design part of it is the tip of the branding iceberg. I would say, right? Tell me a little bit about how you feel about that and how it integrates with what you do.

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So, as someone who is both a designer and has been, you know, on the client side of working with countless design agencies. You know, when I was at a university, I knew that I wanted to strike a very delicate balance of getting enough information but not forcing someone to feel as if they're, you know, going through this tedious process and they're like I just need a logo, you know, because people don't understand. They're like well, why does it matter? Why do you need all this? You know whatever. So what I teach in my course and then what I do with my done for you clients, as I say, I need you to tell me what are five words that you would want your ideal person to use to describe your brand when they see your website, your Instagram, the PDF that you hand them. You know whatever the thing is. And then, from those five words, I typically create three iterations of that. So if those five words are professional and serious and, you know, buttoned up, then I'm going to create three visual looks for that. If they tell me that their five words are bold, lively and sassy, then I'm going to create five looks of that. And when I say bold, lively and sassy, you can just picture in your head. You know, bright colors or bold colors.

You know, maybe some kind of like sunburst looking line work. You know, like a very impactful font, like the visual elements that you use are conveying those words. And so, before someone ever reads your Instagram bio, your eye help statement, your, you know problem and solution. They're picking up on those visual cues about what your brand is and what you stand for, based on the colors on your website, the fonts that you're using, if you have a squiggly line or a straight line, if there's left alignment or center alignment, you know all of those things And so that's why I will never just like, oh yeah, like I'll make a logo for you or oh yeah, I'll make a social graphic for you. It always goes back to the five words.

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Oh, I love that. That is so powerful because you're absolutely right. Even before they get to the words, they are making a judgment. What are some of the most common design mistakes that you see business owners making?

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Yeah. So the number one mistake really is consistency, and you know, canva has made design incredibly accessible. I used to have to teach college students the Adobe Creative Suite, which is really unnecessary for someone who just wants to make a flyer or make a social graphic, but really prior to Canva, the alternative was a Word doc, which, if you've ever tried to move a picture in a Word document, you probably want to throw your laptop out the window. So I think Canva has made design incredibly accessible. But the problem with Canva is I see a lot of people every time they need to make something new, they go to Canva, pick a template, maybe change the colors, maybe change the fonts, but then what we have is an Instagram that doesn't look like a website, that doesn't look like the sales deck that I'm seeing in your webinar, that doesn't look like the PDF that you've handed me, and so we've got this really inconsistent presence across different channels, and what that does is that casts doubt in the mind of your ideal buyer, because they are not seeing this consistent professional presence.

They're seeing a little bit of hodgepodge, a little bit of oh, this doesn't look like this, and so I think that's really the thing that I see people struggle with the most is consistency across platforms, and then I'll take it a step further is consistency within a single design. So oftentimes when I teach students, they have this thing in their head like, oh, being creative means mixing it up, and so that means that being consistent is boring and it's the opposite of creative. And so like let's take, you know, a PDF, for example. If you have a PDF that is, you know, a one cheater for your business, there needs to be a really bold headline at the top that is the most prominently designed thing that grabs my attention and that makes me want to actually read whatever is on that flyer. And then I need to see some headings above paragraphs of text that give me a little summary of why I should read that paragraph of text. And every single one of those headings needs to look exactly the same so that I can tell these are all headings, these are all the same thing, without actually having to read them. The same goes for an Instagram carousel. If I have my five tips, you know whatever. Every single time I swipe, it needs to look exactly the same so I don't have to digest a new layout and a new font and a new color and like oh wait, the tip is over here now, or oh, this is actually the heading. Now you know, consistency helps people to easily be able to scan and skim and actually read the copy that you want them to read.

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Not only that, but you know, it really does tie into their brand. One of the things that I noticed is, like anything, that there's obviously large corporations that do branding really well. One of them is like Disney. Anytime I see anything that's even remotely Disney, I can pick up on it immediately because of the colors, the fonts, the look, even like Starbucks. I mean, I was driving down a road near where I live and I saw them building a new building and I'm like that shape looks familiar. Oh, it's going to be a Starbucks, you know. So, you know, all of that consistency makes a difference in how you know, how we're viewed as business owners and that level of professionalism that even if it's even more of a casual look, it still conveys professionalism. I know also, one of the things that I would hear a lot from business owners is that, oh, I'm so tired of looking at my website, I'm so tired of my logo, I'm so tired of my colors. You know, can we change it up? and I'll say when you've only had them, you know, a year or two years or whatever it was, and and it's true that as business owners, we get really tired of it and, honestly, as having a design background myself, i want to jump in and it's like I think I need a logo fresh, freshening or something like that too, you know. But so tell us why that's not a good idea.

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So I mean the reality is that you know all brands are probably going to evolve and shift every Two to five years. But what that doesn't mean is that doesn't mean that every two years I'm drawing a line in the sand and I'm changing my logo and my colors and my fonts and everything else. No, what that means is that every two to five years I'm saying this color is gonna get phased out and we're gonna start using this color instead, or we're gonna swap this font for this one, or we're gonna make a slight tweak to the logo to make it a little bit more elevated and modern, or whatever it is. So I mean, really, when I work with people on brand refreshes, there's typically always like one thing or a few things that stay exactly the same and everything else is kind of like shaping and evolving around it, because there's never going to be just like this complete, drastic visual shift in in your elements. It's kind of like thinking about your wardrobe. You know most people don't one day just take every hanger in the closet and throw it out. It's like I'm gonna stop wearing this shape because it doesn't flatter me anymore And I'm gonna phase in this shape, but I'm still gonna wear these jeans, because I look good in these jeans.

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What are some of the most common things that you see people doing when they're doing their DIY Design? I mean, what is it that people should watch out for if they're doing any of their own designing?

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Yeah, so I think you know, with my DIYers, I think something that they struggle with is having enough breath of things to work with. So often times people have like one logo for one application and it's either very horizontal or very vertical, and so it's difficult to you know use in different places, or they only have two colors or they have like oh, this is my one brand font, and so really, what I recommend is, you know, when you have those five words that I mentioned earlier that you want your Ideal person to use to describe your brand. From there, I recommend

choosing six to eight colors that reflect those five words, that are a healthy mix of both light and dark colors, two to three fonts and then three to four design elements that use that you can use consistently across Your website and graphics and PDFs and you know whatever it else it is you're creating. So you have enough versatility to mix and match. You know multiple light colors on a dark color or vice versa, but you still have this very on-brand presence.

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Do you feel like everybody is able to design on their own. Do you feel like because I know you teach design, DIY design basically, and for people who are not designers do you feel like most people can do it? Do you feel like it's just something that only a few can do if they've got an artistic eye? What are your thoughts on that?

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So I love that you said the eye because that is something I hear all the time is like well, I don't have an eye for design, and you know, okay, an eye for design is needed. If you're trying to be like this trendsetter or you're trying to, you know, design a billboard or a storefront for, you know, gucci in Paris, but you don't need this eye for design to create an Instagram graphic that attracts the right person and gets them to take action. You just need to know some rules to follow and you know, just so happens that I teach those rules. So I really break down design into like do this, don't do this in this situation, always do it this way, or you could do it this way if you know, for whatever reason. So it really is, it can be, you know, broken down in that way and you don't have to feel like, oh, like I either got it or I don't.

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That's interesting, because I would hear that a lot. So what recommendations do you have for people? Where do you start with your, if you're just wanting to do some of your own design work? I mean, do you jump on Canva? I mean, maybe take your course, probably, but yeah.

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Yeah. So I mean, you know, I think it's really important to understand the meaning of fonts, colors and shapes. The first module of my course is, when you use this color versus this color or this shape versus this shape, what does it mean? What does it communicate like? That's very important to know. And then I also teach you know these rules of okay, we're going to use left alignment for this purpose, we're going to use center alignment for this purpose, kind of like I was saying with you know, designing that PDF and having consistency within a single design. When do things need to look the same? When do things need to look different? Those are rules that you can learn, that you can apply to literally anything.

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Who is the best customer for the course that you have or or something that you would teach?

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Yeah, so for the education side of my business, I mainly know my students are typically VA's, freelancers, nine to fivers, or business owners who are just starting out and don't have the funds

to pay someone to do it for them. And then on my done for you side of my business, I typically work with slightly more established business owners who are kind of they've DIYed it to get started and now they're looking to achieve that consistency. They're looking for something slightly more elevated, slightly more professional. But I mean I really work with anyone from attorneys, copywriters, social media managers. I just launched a website for a therapist. Like, when I say non designers, I mean non designers, right, yeah.

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Well, you have something for people on your website, right? You have. Is it a quiz? or tell me more about that.

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Yeah, so I have a free quiz and it's what fonts and colors should I use for my brand? And you go in, you answer a few questions and then that'll get you started with. Okay, this is where I'm going to start, and then I will give you some more resources for kind of where to go from there to get to that brand suite that we talked about.

21:36
Love it, love it, and I'll put the link to that in the show notes for sure. And there you have it. If you want to take Lauren's free quiz about what fonts and colors work for your brand, or to follow Lauren on social media, visit the show notes for today's episode at myweeklymarketingcom, forward slash 14. You can also find a link there to email me with any marketing questions you have or just some feedback on today's episodes. As always, I appreciate you joining me today more than you know. See you next time. Bye for now.