

Transcript

Krystal Hobbs 0:04

Welcome to Beyond the Tools, the podcast that helps contractors attract more leads, grow their business, and finally get off the tools. In each episode, you'll discover marketing tactics that work. You'll get actionable insights from other successful contractors, and connect with experts to help you grow. I'm your host, Krystal Hobbs, owner of a social media agency that helps contractors attract and convert more leads. Get ready to take your business to the next level so you can finally enjoy the fruits of your hard labor. Ready, let's go!

Hey, contractors, welcome back to Episode 24 of the Beyond the Tools podcast. I'm your host, Krystal Hobbs. And today, I actually have another Crystal to introduce you to. Crystal Williams is the founder and marketing strategist of Lemon Seed Marketing. And she grew up in the heating and cooling business with her family's HVAC business located in East Texas. She's still involved with McWilliams and Son Heating and Air Conditioning. And she's got her newest venture, Lemon Seed Marketing, which provides a holistic approach to helping contractors create, implement and track successful marketing plans for their business. So today, Crystal and I really get into how you can dominate your market and honestly in ways that you probably haven't thought of before.

Crystal is an absolute powerhouse when it comes to long-term marketing. Marketing that's going to help your company stand the test of time and be successful year after year. I learned so much from this conversation. And I know you guys are absolutely going to love it. So let's get right to Crystal and hear what she has to say.

I am thrilled to introduce today's guest, Crystal Williams of Lemon Seed Marketing. Welcome to the show, Crystal.

Crystal Williams 2:19

Thank you so much. I'm so excited. I can talk to anyone at any time. But you're probably one of my favorites just from our warm-up conversations. And so I'm so excited.

Krystal Hobbs 2:30

Yes, my team was like a Krystal and Crystal episode, it has to happen.

Crystal Williams 2:34

Sounds fantastic.

Krystal Hobbs 2:38

So Crystal, tell me a little bit about where you start. When you're working with one of your home service business clients like the marketing strategy, a lot of them tend to kind of neglect that step and skip right to the tactics. So where do you begin when it comes to your marketing strategy?

Crystal Williams 3:00

So Lemon Seed Marketing is built on auditing, and organizing a structured marketing approach for home service companies. And so a lot of times, the first thing I really like to do is just a good healthy audit of what is currently going on. And that sounds super simple and not a lot to do. But a lot of contractors just say, "Well, I don't really do anything for marketing," but then I'll say "So you're not in any magazines?" "Oh, yeah. I do a little bit of magazine." "So you don't do social media?" "Oh, yeah. I do a little bit of social media." "Oh, so you don't have a website?" "Oh, yeah." So, I go through and I just like to audit across any tactics that I can find. What are things that have been done things that they've been doing? And then how much are they really invested in the success of that tactic? So "Yeah, I did a billboard for three years, but I never changed the graphic, it kind of fell down. It wasn't even lit. And it wasn't on-brand." Right? So I just like to go in and do a healthy audit and look and see. Is everything consistent? Is everything on-brand? And that's really where I get started. And then I love to have a good conversation with the contractors about their expectations of how they thought their current marketing should have performed versus how it actually performed.

Krystal Hobbs 4:12

Right. Yeah. So when it comes to that, I guess, do you see a lot of misalignment with what their expectations were and how it happened?

Crystal Williams 4:24

Many people are aware of their disorganization, and I believe many contractors are aware of it as well. It's almost as if the first three or four phrases of our discovery call are, "Listen, Crystal, I do this, and I don't have any strategy behind it. I'm going to buy it and try it to see if it works if I like the lady who comes in to sell it to me or if she locks the dude or something." They also have no way of quantifying it. It blows my mind because they're simply, "It didn't work," and I said, "How do you know?" "No one called until they saw my billboard, that is." That isn't how billboards work, though. So now

we're completely correct. It's always a fascinating discussion. However, I've seen that it's often haphazard because contractors are smart people who know smart people. Many of them are far sharper and have a better understanding of marketing than they give themselves credit for. They may not know how to create a comprehensive strategy, but they have a good idea of what works in their industry. But I believe the most important factor is that they simply toss everything away because they can't fit it on their plate. They simply throw money at problems. It's good at times and bad at others. I'm gonna say 75% of the time, it's a hot mess when I get it.

Krystal Hobbs 5:35

So where do you start? Once, you know, you discover you got a hot mess on your hands? Where do you start to clean that up?

Crystal Williams 5:43

So I just started looking around, and thought, "What were they doing? So, how did they go about branding?" It sounds posh. But really, where were you running something solely to maintain your name in front of people's minds, not a \$49 tuna, not a \$99 drain clearing, not a panel inspection? This is direct, you know, Crystal's heating and air conditioning with my logo. We're not comfortable until you are, right? I go look at what they're doing for branding. Nine times out of ten, it's a zero. Then I go look at what they were doing calls to action. Now I can get on my soapbox about this. Because as contractors, we don't always care about the marketing funnel, right? So the marketing funnel, of course, is the widest part of the funnel. The very, very top part of the funnel is where the majority of people live because they don't need our service only when they need our service. But at the very bottom of that funnel, so many contractors only focus on tactics to grab people at the bottom of the funnel. Whereas if you adapt, if you adopt a marathon strategy, where not everyone needs you right now, but you start right now building your brand. So if you can just equalize your marketing budget, you know you need to brand for longevity, for long-term success, for positioning in the market, for all the fancy buzzwords, you need to do it. Call to action, we get so distracted with any new, shiny item that comes across our face. So, especially if we're in lots of social media groups, or best practice groups if someone says that they drove their van backward, down the road dress like a leprechaun waving an American flag. And 500 people called me, contractors all over the world are buying leprechaun suits and driving backward and waving American flags. Because it was, "Oh, that worked for him. Let me do it. I need to go do it right now. I need to go do that right now. Let me go drive backward, up and down the highway." And it's really because if we have no strategy in

place, everything looks better than what we're doing. Because we don't know what we're doing. So just don't get distracted by those shiny things. So that's kind of where I start. What are you doing for branding? And what are you doing for calls to action? And are those aligned incorrectly? Or are those really every bit that we spend is going towards calls to action?

Krystal Hobbs 8:09

That is an excellent point. And I see that a lot, especially on the Facebook side of things, you know, the tune-up, in particular, having those very specific, financially motivated incentives, which don't always really do it. When you're getting in front of someone for the very first time.

Crystal Williams 8:30

Social media is a good example of you got to give things time to marinate. So people want to launch a social media ad and in 20 minutes have five leads booked. And I said, "That's not how it works," and what it is, is we've been told somebody that told somebody else, how good this worked for Joe down the street. And so why is it not working that way for me? Well, it probably didn't work that way for Joe. He just told you this. So, a lot of times, we just have to get into a strategy and get into the tactics. So if you're gonna choose social media marketing, it's fantastic for building brand awareness and interrupting a view of potential clients by being in their scroll and being in the feed on social media. Fantastic approach. What you choose to put on social media also depends on what you're trying to drive growth in. Are you trying to drive maintenance leads or replacement leads? Or are you trying to hire whatever you're trying to do? You have to give it time to be successful, and pushing and pulling on it a lot doesn't do anything but irritate the algorithm. That's what I think.

Krystal Hobbs 9:36

Absolutely. So if you have a company that's like, "Okay, Crystal, I want to aggressively grow. I want to be the number one contractor in my market." Where do you start to figure out how they can appeal to their end customer?

Crystal Williams 9:56

So, a lot of the time, I prefer to talk to people about where they stand in the market. So, are you the quality guy, as in everything is about quality? To me, it implies I'm not the most expensive person on the market, but I'm really high quality. So, if you're going to be the most expensive guy in town, go for it, own it, and own it like a boss. If you're trying to offer extremely, super high-end items, which is terrific, and your craftsmanship

is going to be excellent, that also means you have to deliver like a boss, your CSRs have to answer like a boss, and everything has to be at that level. However, if your customer service is inadequate, your marketing will, in my opinion, only operate at half capacity. As a result, I believe that is a safe assumption. So, if I understand your viewpoint correctly, some folks are loss leaders; they like to get into every home with low-cost maintenance, tune-up, drain clearing, or whatever. And so if that's going to be your space, you're going to have to take the good with the bad, but you're getting into a lot of homes. So you got to make the most of it, and you got to own it. So I always start there, what is their position in the market currently, and then who are the dominators. And just by simple searching, and a little FBI investigating work, you know, I can get in there and figure out this guy's probably dominating the market. This guy has 750 reviews while you have seven, right? So I can go in and do a little competitive analysis. And then audit your existing things. And then nine times out of 10, your problems are probably from your digital exposure. You have a website, but you're not paying for any SEO. You have paid ads that you think or you have PPC but really your PPC budgets are \$350. Well, then you don't have PPC, right? So as a matter of fact, I want to tell you just take your \$350 and hold it, hold it until you have \$1,500 Just hold it for five months. And when you have \$1,500, then go buy it. Because you're literally even though some of you are like well, I do I dabble. If you dabble you dribble, it's terrible. So you're better off waiting until you have a decent, I'm not telling you, you got to have \$10,000. But you need to have a decent amount to go after. So I come in, and I'm going to start with their digital presence. So understanding how they're positioned in the market, and then what is their digital presence o'clock? Normally, by those two factors, I can tell what we need to do, "Hey, you have zero brand awareness. People don't know who you are. People don't know what's going on."

A lot of times you can pull data of who's pulling the most permits for those people that actually follow rules and pull permits. Sales by region and things like that. Just trying to see, how much of the market you're holding. And that's kind of where I start, and it doesn't sound fun at all, but I actually love it. And a lot of people underestimate how small they really are in the grand scheme of things. A lot of contractors think, how do people not know who I am? And because they don't. Because if I were to ask you to ask a heating and air conditioning contractor and say, we'll name all the landscapers in the mall, in your market, name all the roofers, name all the people that can do tilework, name all the people that do trash can delivery, you're gonna name a few people, but you know you're gonna name the people that brand unless your buddy is the gutter guy. And

so I try to use that sometimes. Yes, people should know. People should know what everyone does, but they don't. They only were a time of need service. So they only need us when they need it. So we have to work really hard. So that's kind of where I start is where do you sit as it is. But as far as tactics go, website, and digital social media, I'm going to be all up in your business looking and seeing what you're doing.

Krystal Hobbs 13:53

Right. So from a practical standpoint, if a company's, "Okay, I get it, Crystal, I got to get my brand out there. People need to know me." What does that look like? How do they go about branding their company once they know their position and how they want to put themselves forward?

Crystal Williams 14:14

Well, so I'm a little old school, which nobody likes to hear. But, it works. To me, branding is a multitude of things. So get your story together. Why do you do what you do? And some people will say, "Well, Crystal, I mean, there's just I'm just a guy that my dad started it and now I do it. My son's coming up." Oh, so you're three generations company? "Yes. Well, my son got out of the army." Oh, he's a veteran. So now your veteran-owned third generation. I just built your story in two minutes. Just because you don't have this big sob story doesn't mean you don't still have a story. So you need to put that story into motion. You need to give it life, you need to give it some pomp and circumstance. You need to make it enchanting. It's not about lying. It's about really writing down where you really came from and what you've done. And then what is your brand look like as far as logo, colors, mascots or signatures or whatever you've got. And then how can I really take that into the marketplace? So a lot of people say, "Well, our brand, I mean, that's on my website." That's not Branding. Branding is what you want people to think about you in the market. So if I want people to think that we are family-owned and operated for three generations, that's a very traditional approach. So you know what, I do very traditional things. We do daddy-daughter-dinners, but also have a mascot. And so he is that anything I can put him at? Sailor Mac is our mascot, my brother's company's mascot. And he is at every downtown trick or treating, handing out treats to kids and taking pictures. Our vans are pulling trailers and Christmas parades. Our billboard campaign is not a sales campaign. It's a brand, telling the story about sailor Mack, it all started with a hat. And the story is behind how my grandfather traded his sailor hat for his technician hat, right. And it's just all a braided piece. So I push that same message into the market. I have another client out of Oklahoma, who is very trendy. He's bright pink, and he's got the pink van Tex and he's got a dog. That's what

his legacy color and what his membership club is named after and just how all these cool things. So for him, guess what we do anything and everything we can do for pink. And so I encourage you to look for opportunities. I saw some really cool stuff yesterday, like your vans, could you go out and deliver the toys at Christmas time for Toys for Tots in your van, drive your van and then jump out and have on a Santa Claus hat and deliver, do all of these things. So people start to understand, if you have a really creative tagline, making the most out of comfort, then I would be doing all kinds of things around the word comfort, I'd be giving away recliners and fun stuff to just reiterate my brand. And that's just boots-on-the-ground marketing sell. And it's not immediate. And it's not like, "I just went and drove my van around and deliver three presents and look at all these calls I'm getting." It's not what it's about. It's about longevity and building that brand. Using things such as community outreach, when you're doing social media, are you branding yourself? So if you want to be the traditional, wholesome company, then that's the kind of content you should be putting out. I wouldn't be putting out super, let's say you want to put a meme out there. And it's featuring alcohol. But you're in the bible belt down here in East Texas. And that's not on-brand for us. So we wouldn't use that mean, I don't care if you use that name. That's just not my brand. So your brand is way more than just a logo, way, way more. It's a lot. It's much more about who you are, instead of what you're doing. So you need to use it to tell people to make sure your vans are in vehicles are wrapped, that they're clean that they're organized. If you drove up to install a job and your guys get out with untucked shirts and torn pants, smoking cigarettes, and let them hang out of the side of their mouth and trash falls out and they run up the yard. Do you know what they're thinking? That's how my installs gonna look. Just like that. Right? So your brand is so important across everything. So don't get lazy with it.

Krystal Hobbs 18:35

I love that. Do you ever find that your clients question the return on their branding?

Crystal Williams 18:45

It makes them a little more nervous. But honestly, I have a lot of clients that are in some best practice groups, some wonderful best practice groups, Service Nation Alliance, Praxis, a lot of EGAI members, some NexStar members. And what it does is I think it makes them aware that branding is where it is at for long-term success.

Now, if you're trying to be in and out of business in two years, branding is going to be a struggle, unless you're gonna dump 20% into marketing. But for the majority of us, and contractors, we're just trying to build a solid company that will stand the test of time. And

so it's always scary, right? It's always scary because I tell people marketing is a game. I don't have this magical crystal ball that knows exactly how to kill the game on marketing in every single market for every single trade. So what I do is I put math before marketing, and we start looking at what do you need to generate leads? What does the side of your operation look like? And then how are we going to make it work? And then we put pencil to paper and we say okay, this looks what your budgets gonna be. We need to allocate at least 40-50% of your budget to digital because that's where everybody's going. But then the other 50%, a chunk of that needs to be for branding. And his overall use of your new customer acquisition for the year should grow because of what we're doing for branding. But we need to be intentional and organized with that branding play. Not so haphazard. And when you put dedication, and you put thought and organization and strategy into things, you may have to tweak it here and there, but for the most part, it's gonna work.

Krystal Hobbs 20:33

Love that. So when a company is doing some more of the like call to action style things, have you found that there are certain I don't know, offers or incentives that really seem to work in that regard?

Crystal Williams 20:50

On the calls to action, which I always support, they need to be really good, some form of upkeep. For example, if you're looking for a drain cleaning deal for plumbers, okay, plumbers are terrified of a drain-clearing offer because they're thinking, "Well, what if it's here?" Or is it anything else? What if it's a bigger issue? You just knocked on the door of a client who was having a major issue, so figure it out. They're ready to help, but I'm going to recommend that as far as these calls to action go, simply establish a price and say, "I'm going to run this tune-up deal all year. And I'm going to sell it for \$66, \$86, or \$112 all year. And I'm going to use that in all of my strategies". So, if you're doing social media ads, you may say, "Hey, start the spring season off right with a \$66 AC inspection." And I'm going to use the same language in my digital ads, on social media, in organic posting, on my website, and I'm simply running it off for new customer acquisition. Then there's the replacement side, which includes the HVAC business, as well as re-piping and other similar services for clients. I'm a big lover of stuff that catches people's attention. I don't think somebody wakes up and thinks to themselves, "Oh my god, today is a great day to spend \$15,000 on an air conditioner." Today is a fantastic day in my opinion. That doesn't happen. So I usually try to do something fun to get the buyer's attention. So, right now, we're doing gas, and we're paying cash for it. So

if you buy a new system from Crystal's heating and air conditioning, we'll offer you up to \$500 in a Visa cash card, which you can use to buy gas, go on vacation, or whatever you want, or we can do indoor air quality. If that's a significant deal in your market, where people are concerned about their indoor air quality, why not offer something, "Hey, if you install this IQ package, we'll put up a new system for you for \$500." And you need to be priced adequately to have some skin in the game. Don't go overboard. However, I believe you may be a little kitschy with the fun things. If that's not your thing, stick to payment. The payment issue is a significant deal for people right now, and they're afraid of losing a lot of money. So you might say, "Hey, we have 12 months with no interest, three months with no payments, and installments as low as \$99." There are a lot of great things you can do there since we have all the payment factors items that come from some pretty strong finance partners. However, I believe that 0% financing for a set period of time is an excellent deal. It's a costly offer to the contractor path, which will bog down. But, if you've priced it right and it's making the phone ring, and you're still making margins, I'd say go for it. Not every market responds well to that strategy, but my running joke is that I really want to walk around conferences handing out silver bullet squishies because that's what everyone wants, and everyone will be looking at me because they think I have a silver bullet. Spin and consistency are my silver bullets. Because of what this client does in a metro market and on the East Coast, West Coast, in the Deep South, in the Deep North, in a highly Metro market, extremely rural market. It works when I provide two services, one when I have 50 texts and the other when I have three texts. I mean, if a client comes to you and says, "I do social media advertising," that's like saying, "I'm a girl," which may mean a million different things nowadays. "So you're in the business of social media advertising? Tell me about it." Because they'll say things such as "I spend like \$20 a day," and they'll think they're doing well. That's correct. And you're thinking to yourself, "Yeah, I have content to spend \$1,000 every day, right?" So it's just a matter of keeping everything relevant to your current location.

Krystal Hobbs 24:44

Speed and consistency. I think those are two things that not a lot of contractors necessarily think about.

Crystal Williams 24:57

They don't want to hear it now. I'm sure they're paying attention right now. They just want me to spend a lot of money, or there's a contract or whatever going on, but I've matured. I've increased by 30% year over year and only spend 2% of my income. In the

field of marketing. What got you here won't get you there, I'll tell you that. And if someone enters your market who is willing to invest aggressively, it will steamroll you. Trust me, I have clients right now who are steamrolling over, three years old, and they start with me and say, "There's this highly established company, but they don't do much marketing, but they're who everyone uses." So I said, "Give me six months, give me six months," and I meant it. And then, six months later, "Oh, they know we're here now." Because no one is pushing the envelope, you'll see them ramp up their marketing efforts. In many markets, no one is going active in marketing. Those of you who reside in a metropolitan area. It's a dog-eat-dog world over there. However, many markets are now underserved by actual, effective advertising strategies from home service companies.

Krystal Hobbs 25:59

Absolutely. So I know you hinted at this a little bit before in terms of, you know, making sure your customer experience matches your marketing and your positioning. What do you see that a lot of companies need to do to prepare for the marketing that they're going to be doing?

Crystal Williams 26:23

You must be operationally prepared. As a result, it will not assist you. If you're having operational issues, adding marketing to the mix isn't going to help. In fact, that will exacerbate the situation. So, as I often tell people, the first thing you should do is look at your operations. And tell me, am I ready? Is my CSR up to par? What's the difference between a competent dispatcher and a strong lead program? Do I have a program where everyone understands how to flip over leads? Do I have a good program of dewy? Is my CSR booking the call when the phone rings? Is her booking right or do I need to spend more time just getting my team ready? Are my technicians bought in and sold on my maintenance program? Because if we're going to run a promotion around a maintenance tune-up, that's \$59, it costs most of you more than \$59 to roll a truck. So it is imperative that your technicians are trained well enough on your maintenance club to flip those maintenance tune-ups to the, at the very least, the clubs. And so maybe take a step back and look and get prepared internally. A lot of people call me and they'll say they're excited. I didn't know that anyone organized marketing for contractors, and I don't have to leave my current vendors. I'm so excited. And I'm gonna go tell me about your business. Tell me about your operations. And a lot of times they'll go, "Well, I got some problems" or "I've got some turnover" or they're gonna say things such as, "We've hired a coach, and we've really made a lot of ground up." Both of them perked my ears

up, but for different reasons. Mainly because in truthful honesty, I'm an HVAC baby. I was born into this, my grandpa then my dad. So I've lived the life of my dad being a heating and air conditioning technician when I was growing up with my brother, and I know I don't want to waste a contractor of money. By doing their marketing when it's not good, all it's gonna do is call into an unorganized team on the backside. So our job is to make the phone ring. But literally once a CSR connects that call, it is out of my hands. And that frustrates me to no end because I want to come in and be like, dude, or sis, we need some work here. And a lot of times, I'll still do it. I'll say something along the lines of, hey, I'm listening to these calls and we did a fantastic job. We had some great calls come in, but we couldn't book them, or I've heard people respond with, "Well, you know what, we're booked for three to four days out, why don't you call..." and they'll name a competitor down the street. Or "I don't have anyone who can come out there right now, even though we have two people out with COVID." Or how about my personal favorite? I've had contractors tell me that the CSR doesn't have permission to book the call, and I'm like, "Tell me why, sir?" So, "Please allow me to collect your name and phone number, and I'll have Sue call you back. She's currently eating her meal. I mean, I'd love to schedule your call. Sue, on the other hand, is the only one who books." People need to get their act together and act like you've booked it. It makes no difference to me if you really type it into the computer. Act as though you've scheduled it so that people on the plumbing side can get me more Roundup because that's usually when people phone you with a significant problem. There's water all over the place. There's crap all over the place. There are some significant issues. And you're asking if we can call you back?

Crystal Williams 29:44

So, whatever the case may be, it's just a challenge for me like what in the world? So I'm going to start with operations. Second, know your figures and stop being terrified, man. Make a plan based on your target number. So here's another revelation that I believe a lot of people are unaware of: if they made \$1 million last year, they should plan to make \$1 million this year. "So you don't want to grow?" I'll say. "Yes, I want to develop." "Okay, so you only set aside \$1 million for this project. That's what you did the previous year. Then, what are they?" "1.5" "Okay, so we'll have to budget for 1.50." So you should budget for the year you're aiming for, not the year you just finished; you don't need that figure; you've already reached it, right? You don't need to go there. So all you have to do is know your numbers and concentrate on your operations. After that, it's up to the professionals to handle it. So, if you're getting a new website, stop focusing on the website company and how they do their job. Give a little bit of input but don't get too

caught up in the weeds about this word, that word, that color, that line, that box. Guys, let people be professionals and hold them accountable for meeting deadlines and hitting SEO and other things like that. However, you nitpick people to death over minor details that have no bearing on the campaign's overall effectiveness. So select your battles, and if you're entrusting a website firm with it, you must trust them. If you don't trust them, you'll need to find a new company to work with.

Krystal Hobbs 31:15

I love that. Well, Crystal, I feel like there has been so much jam-packed into this interview and I know our listeners are going to want to connect with you. So how can they learn more about you and lemon seed marketing?

Crystal Williams 31:30

Sure. So, Lemon Seed Marketing was born for the home service contractor but they can learn all about me at lemonseedmarketing.com. That is because we bring all things zesty and fresh to your marketing budget. And we help you squeeze the most out of it. All of our fun lemonade puns there. But that is one easy way but my email's pretty simple, crystal@lemonseedmarketing.com or hello@lemonseedmarketing.com. Feel free to reach out to us online. I'd love for them to listen to our podcast as well from the Yellow Chair Podcast, it's me and my partner Emily, who is a fantastic graphic designer and brand specialist. And she and I together are the faces behind the company. But I would love to talk to anyone about how we can help them structure their marketing and just get organized and planned. And it's so exciting. Y'all don't like it, but I love it.

Krystal Hobbs 32:26

Love it. Thank you, Crystal and we'll put all your contact information in the show notes. So anybody listening can check it out there. But this has been fantastic. I'm so appreciative of your time. Thank you for being on the show.

Crystal Williams 32:41

Yes, ma'am. It was my pleasure. Thank you so much.

Krystal Hobbs 32:48

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Beyond the Tools. If you liked what you heard, please subscribe, rate, and review wherever you get your podcast. I'd love it if you could also share this episode with a fellow contractor who is ready to get off the tools and grow their business. And if you want more leads, sign up for our email list at reflectivemarketing.com where we share weekly marketing insights that you can't get

anywhere else. I'm Krystal Hobbs and I hope you'll join me on the next episode of Beyond the Tools. See you next time.