

Simple Content

Season 1 | Episode 2 | Alice Benham

Ann (00:00):

You are listening to Simple Content, the podcast for entrepreneurs, creatives, and anyone who dreams of making money whilst doing what they love. I'm your host Ann Martin, a copywriter, author, and content expert. In this podcast, I'll be sharing my own experiences, plus having conversations with some of the world's most inspiring content creators and industry experts. This is your one-stop shop for practical PR marketing, business and self-development advice. Put the kettle on, settle in and get ready to listen, learn and feel inspired.

Ann (00:39)

Hi, Alice, and welcome to the Simple Content podcast. It's so lovely to have you here today with me.

Alice (00:40)

Thank you so much for having me. It's always an honour to kind of be able to be on the other side of the podcast mic and just get to have a good chat. I think we were saying before we hit record that it feels wild that doing this counts as work. So, yeah, privileged to be here. Excited to chat.

Ann (01:05)

Alice is somebody that I have been following for a long time on social media, and I'm always really struck, Alice, by how simple, you make marketing and business strategies seem. I really love that simplicity and obviously in this podcast we want to focus on keeping things in business super simple so I think all of you listening will really benefit from this episode. So let's start with an intro as we always do. Alice can you tell us a bit about you and your business?

Alice (01:32)

Absolutely. So my kind of whole mission, where everything I do is about is helping business owners to grow in a way that feels good to them. So I'm all about kind of value driven growth. And if there's any phrase that I'd love to be known for, it would be, you know, take messy action. That's for me what it's all about, helping people to take the action they need to, you know, grow in the way they want to. So what that looks like in practice is that my main work is as a business and marketing strategist. So I spend probably 80% of my working day on Zoom calls with amazing business owners and entrepreneurs helping them to, yeah, figure out

Alice (02:00)

where they want to be, how to get there, hold them accountable when they go on that journey. And then alongside that, I host my own podcast, Starting The Conversation, done that for the last five and a half years, host retreats, courses, host different events. So I wear a few different hats, but really for me, it's all about bringing business owners together, helping them to take action, helping to simplify strategies. So I'm glad that's coming across. And yeah, really just kind of building communities where we can help each other to grow. So yeah,

Alice (02:27)

that's what I do. I also do have a second business on the side, which is a stationery shop for business owners. That is a much newer business, far less established, much more of an expensive hobby I'd say at this point, than a business, but yeah, a couple of different things going on.

Ann (00:06)

Wow, you are one busy, lady <laugh>.

Alice (00:09)

<laugh>. I like to thrive in chaos. That's kind of my vibe. If things feel too calm, that doesn't feel good to me. So for me, you know, lots of things going on, spinning a lot of plates, that's kind of my happy zone. And if you'll believe this, there's a lot of things

that don't make the cut. Like that's the short list of all the ideas in my head. So <laugh>, yeah, it's a lot, but it's taken seven years to do all of those things. You know, I spent two years at the start just doing one-to-one client work. So I definitely began very simple, very small, and it, it's only been able to kind of grow in this way because of the amount of time I think.

Ann (00:44)

Yeah, it feels like also you're, you're one of those people who can master everything. So you've got a lot on, but you're doing everything really well.

Alice (00:54)

<laugh> Glad that's coming across <laugh> I don't know if it ever feels that way internally does it? But that's one of the things that I love about what I do, is I think I get such a privilege of seeing the inside of so many businesses and a lot, most of my clients that I work with, are established businesses. So it's people that you would look at and go, you know, they're nailing it. I wanna be where they are. I wish I could do what they're doing. And when I meet these people and hear their behind the scenes, I'm just reminded every single time, we all have such messy behind the scenes. Yeah, no one feels ready, everyone has a to-do list that's longer than what they're ever gonna be able to get done. My big thing at the moment is I just constantly feel like I'm failing something and I'm just starting to realise that's kind of part of the process. So yeah, I'm glad externally and I can, it's interesting, isn't it, when you can see like, oh, I can see how externally it looks like everything's perfect, but always reality check in there of like, there's a lot of mess behind the scenes, but that's okay. I think that's fine. That's just business, isn't it? If we expect perfection inside, we are never gonna do the outside stuff. So we've just gotta get on with that, I think.

Ann (01:56)

Yeah, that's so true. And I think that's so reassuring for people listening because I think when we see people online on social media, we have this sort of perception, like you

say, that everyone is nailing it, everyone has everything covered, particularly when it comes to marketing, because I think we have this pressure that we need to be doing absolutely everything with our marketing rather than focusing in on sort of two or three key areas. And I'd like to talk a bit about that and just in terms of a strategy, when people start looking at their marketing strategy, can you give us a bit of advice around where should they be focusing? What should they be doing?

Alice (02:30)

Yeah, it's a tricky question to answer in a universal way because I think the real answer to that is, well, it totally depends on where you're at, what your goals are and where you want your business to be. You know, one of my biggest frustrations in the online space, don't get me wrong, I love the online space for how much we can build communities, share advice, et cetera, et cetera. But I do also think there's this part of it where we start seeing this very kind of binary advice. You know, you must do this, or to be successful on social media, you need to be creating this content. And whilst I'm like all for sharing expertise and kind of learning from that, I just don't think business or marketing strategy is ever a blueprint. You can't copy and paste it because every business is wildly different.

Alice (03:14)

So the, the biggest thing I try and encourage people to think about is, what are your very specific goals? And therefore what marketing action is gonna help to align with that? So if people are sat here thinking, okay, well where I'm at in my business at the moment is I've got, you know, a great audience, there's people there, I'm visible, but I'm not making sales. Okay. That tells me that maybe we need to think about introducing a platform that's more focused on conversion, like for example, email marketing or that we just need to think about the content you can create that's gonna move people through your buyer's journey. Or I noticed some people maybe have the problem of going, everything in my marketing feels good. I don't need anyone to tell me all the more things I should be doing on TikTok or Instagram.

Alice (03:55)

But actually what I'm noticing is I don't feel like my strategy is very diverse. So maybe then it's looking at a podcast or a blog and how that can come into the mix. I guess what I'm trying to say with those examples, I'd never feel comfortable being like, everyone should be on this platform, everyone should do this thing. It's like, no, you've gotta know where am I? And therefore what do I need to move forward? Because as business owners, our capacity is so limited, right? The last thing we need is another thing added to our plate unnecessarily. So to bring it back to your question, I hope this answers it. I think it's about knowing, yeah, what's gonna be the best fit for you, and then ignoring all of the advice that's maybe talking about other things that might be relevant but maybe aren't the best fit for you in that moment.

Ann (04:34)

Yeah, I completely agree. And I agree with the fact that you've said that there's not one blueprint, because I think we exist in a world where people are overwhelmed. They're overwhelmed with content, there's so much content out there, isn't there? They're overwhelmed by downloading freebies and trying to learn from these freebies. And there's just so much of that now that people have inboxes full of freebies but don't really know what they're doing with that information. And I think that can feel very overwhelming because you're sort of doing this patchwork puzzle of trying to piece together free information from all over the place when you first start, but never really mastering or sort of streamlining what your strategy or your plan is because you're just trying to grapple with the information that's out, there that's, you know, maybe available in free download.

Ann (05:27)

I think when people try to put together a marketing strategy, I know that I did this, I spent two, three hours on a document when I first started my business and sort of tried to put together this marketing strategy. I probably have looked at that document two or three times on the course of my business. So it's been something that's sat there with

the business plan and has never really been properly looked at. So what I want to ask you is how do we create a marketing plan that is something that is an ever evolving, useful document that we can use in our business?

Alice (06:00)

It's a great question. And I think that experience you had, everyone's probably got their own version of that story. I've definitely had it. I remember in the early years of my business, I filled out a business plan template because that's what you're meant to do, right? When you start a business, you fill out a business plan. I think it was like 20 something pages long. I spent days on it and I remember all it left me feeling was more overwhelmed than how I felt starting it. And I thought, okay, maybe that wasn't how that was meant to feel like I did this to make myself feel better when actually I think we've gotta remember the goal of a strategy is to help you take action. A strategy that doesn't help you take action is a waste of time. And I say that with so much compassion, because I know it's so easy to fall into that trap where we, we almost create a strategy to create a strategy.

Alice (06:43)

But I couldn't care less about anyone having a strategy if it's not used. You know, we should be creating one to use one, not creating one to have one. So I think then the question we need to ask is not like, what is a strategy? Because all a strategy is, is an action plan, right? It's actually very simple. Then we've instead got to think, how do I build an action plan in a way that works for me? What level of detail, what information do I need to gather that's going to help me take action? And I think with marketing, the simpler, the better. You know, we spend so much time, and you touched on this perfectly a second ago, thinking that we need to learn more, plan more. I think it comes often from a place of fear because we think, well I'm not ready, I'm not gonna be good enough.

Alice (07:24)

So if I just spend more time on the internal planning, then I'm going to be ready. If I just buy that course, then I'm going to be able to do it when actually the answer to a lot of your questions is going to be held in action. Because action breeds clarity. You learn more from doing than you do from sat around planning. So when it comes to building a marketing strategy, simple is good. The way you do it really depends on what's going to work for you. Sometimes for me, the extent of my marketing strategy is post-it notes on my wall with just ideas. And that's all I need to help myself take action that week. For some of my clients, it's very intricate notion boards or spreadsheets that do have a lot of detail within them because that's what they need, right? I think we've got to take away this idea that there's a one size fits all approach to strategy.

Alice (08:11)

Actually, if your strategy works for you, it's an effective strategy. So I think in terms of marketing, really the main things we just need to know is what am I trying to achieve? What am I trying to do? You know, what are we trying to say here? And then how are we doing that? So on a basic level, if you just have three post-it notes, one post-it note, that's right, what are my goals? Who am I trying to reach? What message am I trying to spread? Post-it note number two, right? Where am I showing up? What platforms am I on? What touch points am I using? And then post-it number three is right, what content am I creating? What am I doing? What am I sharing? I'd say that's the most basic way you could do a marketing strategy. And I'd say that's enough to help you start taking that action.

Alice (08:51)

Like I said, there's then business owners who will need something far more intricate and detailed. Maybe you've got a number of team members. Often when you've got a team involved, things need to be more detailed because you can't rely on everything being in your own head. But all a marketing strategy is, is the clarity and the plan that helps you take action. And most importantly, helps you take action before you feel like

you're ready to take that action. I feel like that was quite a long answer, but I hope that makes sense.

Ann (09:16)

That makes absolute sense and it touched upon what you said right at the beginning about taking messy action and just getting on with it, and just doing it because it's so easy to procrastinate. It's so easy to think, oh, my strategy isn't perfect or yeah, the plan isn't quite where it should be. And I think we also live in a world where we're told that we need to plan very far in advance. So you know, what are your goals for the year? What are your intentions for the full year? What are you planning to do six months ahead? And often we don't know, life evolves. Life changes our business evolves and we might not know exactly what's going to happen in the next six months. So the plan can be loose and it can evolve and it can change as we change as business owners.

Ann (09:55)

And I think there's this pressure that we have to have it all written down in a plan, and that doesn't always work. That's not real life. And let's be honest, lots of us are winging it half the time. I mean, I know I do, there's times when I've got a launch coming up and I think, oh well that's happening in two or three months. I don't really know what it's going to look like yet, but I know that it's happening and I know that I will get there. But the ins and outs and the sort of minute details are not planned out specifically. I just have a rough idea of what it will look like. And I know that you've done a launch recently and you said that you were sort of debating how to run it and that sort of thing and you ended up running it in quite an organic way. What did that look like for you?

Alice (10:35)

Yeah, good question. So I guess a bit of context to it. I hadn't launched in a very long time until this most recent one. You know, I'd announced things, I'd shared different things, but you know, a proper kind of course launch hadn't been done for me in a few

years, at least not to that degree. And yeah, I think the main way that I approached it was again with that mindset of just how can I make this simple and actionable? I think when we feel fear about something, often our immediate reaction is to let perfectionism start to have a bit of a voice. And actually I think a lot of the time perfectionism is just fear in disguise because it's us thinking that we've, if we get it perfect, we're not going to feel scared because it's not going to go wrong. No one's going to judge it, it's not going to flop, whatever the fear might be of, right.

Alice (11:17)

So I realised for me, I had to really, really adopt that mindset of realising I'm not going to feel ready. So I can't wait until I feel ready. I'm never going to feel like the plan is good enough because the plan is not going to prove to me that this launch is going to work, my action is going to do that. So for me, again, it was just that idea of keeping it super simple and thinking just for me it's always bring it back to theory. You know, marketing can get so fluffy and blue sky and conceptual, but actually let's remember it's just the theory of selling. And the theory of selling is all about moving people through the buyer's journey. And when we understand the buyer's journey, when we understand what it takes to build awareness, move people through the consideration stage, and then help them to make a decision immediately, then we can build marketing strategies, launch plans, whatever it might be in a much more intentional way.

Alice (12:05)

So that's just the way I thought about it, right? This launch is about selling, getting people to a point where they want to buy this thing. What are all of the things I'm going to need to do in order to make that happen, right? What platforms have I got? Okay, now let's come up with a plan for this. And it started on post-it notes. I feel like I'm really coming across as a big post-it notes <laugh> lover, but I love them. Yeah, it was a very basic post-it note plan that ended up on a spreadsheet and that was, I think the only thing that really helped me through launch was having that plan and having

something ahead of me. I'm a massive fan of winging it. I think with ongoing marketing, especially if you're at the beginning, wing it, try not to have too much of a plan. But the big exception I think is a launch, launches are so intensive, there's so many mindset blocks, there's so much fear that comes up. I think you need a plan to help yourself actually follow through with it and do the thing

Ann (12:53)

That makes sense. You need to get a deal with Post-It. You've obviously mentioned them like three times.

Alice (12:58)

<laugh> Honestly, if they could sponsor my podcast, please that would be the dream. I haven't even got them on my potential sponsors list. I need to add that.

Ann (13:07)

Go add that one in <laugh>.

Alice (13:10)

I did actually try to create my own post-it notes in my stationery brand and they were absolutely crap. I was like, fair enough. I'm not trying to compete with Post-It note here. I don't know how they do it. They're so sticky, they're so good.

Ann (13:21)

<laugh> Clearly there's an art form to it.

Ann (13:23)

There is a recipe for the glue or something. <laugh>

Alice (13:26)

Probably, probably some special ingredient somewhere that I don't have the energy or time or money to figure out. So leave it to the pros.

Ann (13:34)

So there's people listening to this who will not have anywhere near the sort of audience that you have. And they might be thinking, I want to launch, but I need to grow my audience first to be able to launch to, you know, a decent amount of people. How would you recommend that people start to grow their audience and start to build a community of people around them?

Alice (13:54)

It's a good question. I think one thing to touch on is it can be easy with launching or sharing anything or I think doing anything in business, to be fair because we put it off because we think, well I'm not ready, I don't have enough people. You are never going to feel like you have enough. You are always going to feel like you could have a bigger community, a more engaged community. You know, I went into this launch thinking, okay, I kind of feel like I've got a big enough community, but I don't feel like I've done a very good job recently of nurturing them and building relationships with them. So are they even engaged? You know, that was my concern. I guess I share that just as a reminder of, I don't think there's this magic point of like, oh I'm good enough now, I'm ready.

Alice (14:33)

But you're so right. I think actually if you're at the very start of business, you need some people there to sell to. And I think that's true, whether it's launching or just selling on an ongoing basis. If we think about it like the buyer's journey, if we've not got anyone in there that we can actually move through that journey. If we've not got any kind of fish in the pond to fish from, you know, there's no point putting that net in there and trying to do it. I always like that analogy by the way of thinking of your community almost like fish in a pond before we're ready to put the net in and see if anyone wants

to, you know, jump into the net and buy the thing. We've gotta make sure we've actually got fish in there. And I think it's not just about making sure there's fish in there, but also that those fish are like connected to you.

Alice (15:13)

Maybe this analogy stops working at some point, but you know what I mean, you've got to feed the fish, you've got to make sure the fish are happy. So I think the, the big things to think about there is creating content, which first of all is valuable to your community. That's how you're going to grow your community. That's how you're going to make them build a relationship with you, build trust with you. Valuable content. You know, it looks like anything from informative to entertaining to relatable, to encouraging, to inspiring. I think we fall into a trap of thinking valuable has to be three tips for this and how to do that and that content is great. But a lot of the content that's really going to engage with people is where you share your perspectives, your stories, your experiences, your opinions. That's what people will really connect with. So I think that's the first thing you want to be doing.

Alice (15:57)

And then the second thing is making sure that you're connecting people to you and to what you do. It's all well and good sharing valuable content, but if you never have content in there, which is connecting them to you as a business owner or as a service provider or a creator or maker, whatever you do, they're never going to be in a place to think about buying from you. Take a random example, BuzzFeed for example, they share a ton of valuable content for the people that they're intending to speak to, but they don't share anything that's, you know, helping people to understand why they might wanna buy from them or see the value in engaging with one of their products or services. So all they're doing is just kind of building a readership, an audience. There's nothing wrong with that, but as business owners we've got to think a step further.

Alice (16:39)

How do I build an audience but then how do I turn them into a community? How do I make sure they know me, like me, trust me, you know those marketing phrases that we always hear thrown around. And then I think you're ready to launch as soon as you feel like you've just got a couple of people in there, a couple of those fish in the pond and launching, selling, is one massive experiment. Don't put it off. Don't think you've got to wait until you feel ready, the second you think you might be ready. Go for it and you'll learn something from it alongside probably getting some results back as well.

Ann (17:07)

And you touched upon that know, like, and trust factor there, which is, like you said, it's a marketing term that gets thrown around, but I think more and more now we're seeing how important personal brand is and how important it is that people connect with you as an individual, as a business owner, but as you know, a human being and somebody who has a life and a personality outside of your business. And I've noticed with your socials that you touched upon things in your personal life but you don't overshare. And I wondered if that was a conscious approach to sharing your personality without showing everything?

Alice (17:40)

It's incredibly intentional because I've made a lot of mistakes when it comes to sharing the personal stuff. You know, we know that people buy from people. Another marketing phrase thrown in there, I was at a marketing conference yesterday, so I think that's why my head's in marketing jargon world. People want to see people. We don't want to connect with faceless, human-less brands, particularly if what you do is you sell your services or your products. It's not just nice for people to connect with you, it's essential because they're not just buying what you do, they're buying who you are. So the easy way to do that is to make your content more personal. We do that in content, you know, speak as an I, use your face, use your voice wherever possible. But I think another great way to do it is to share some of that personal stuff, whether that be kind of behind the scenes of your business or some of your personal life.

Alice (18:30)

But I think the big thing to consider there is where do the boundaries sit? It's very easy I think, and I say this just because I've done it, to fall into the trap of thinking, the more I share, the more they connect. So I'm just going to share everything. It's almost like, and I feel like I can say this because I was doing it myself, we know that vulnerability and personal stuff gets engagement so we almost then start to do it because of that. We're not necessarily thinking, I want to share this. We're not even probably questioning whether we want to share it or not. We're just thinking it's almost like vulnerability, clickbait, personal life clickbait. It's like I'm going to share this because I know it'll connect with people. Easy example of this, right? My post on Instagram announcing that I had a boyfriend, which is the most dull societally conformative thing I've ever done in my life.

Alice (19:16)

God love him. But like, you know, it's not groundbreaking getting a boyfriend. That got more likes and comments than me getting a book deal, which is my biggest career highlight. Doesn't happen to everyone, worked super hard for it. He got more likes than my book deal and they happened within a few weeks for each other. So it's not even like I'd had a different audience size at each. So just an example there of people liked the personal stuff but as I said, we've got to find the right boundaries for it. In the past I used to share everything. I'm talking drunk stories of me out on a Friday night because I thought it was funny, and my boyfriend and I have just broken up and I'm going through this really tough thing in business, you know, I was just an open book and I thought that that transparency, vulnerability, honesty was good.

Alice (20:03)

Those are massive values that I hold. I used to think I had to share everything to be authentic. Actually now I'm realising it's much healthier to have some boundaries around that authenticity. So something that I do now, there's probably two things that come to mind that I've really learned. First of all is understanding my boundaries of

what I do and don't share. So I just draw a very clean line of like everything I do in a work context is shareable. I'll share any of my behind the scenes, I'll talk about all of my business challenges. I'll show you my business friends. But actually anything in my personal life isn't a default share. My family, people wouldn't know much about. A lot of my friends have never been in kind of my online space. My boyfriend thankfully doesn't mind being shared a bit, but you know, people don't know his name.

Alice (20:48)

He's not comfortable with that. For a year I didn't show his face because he wasn't comfortable with that. You know, there's very clear boundaries to me of where I stopped sharing. I think what that helps with is people still feel like I'm a human being because they see the business stuff. They see some of me personally so they don't feel like I'm not a human, but they only know maybe a small part of my personal life. And I think just quickly, I know this answer's getting long, but the second thing that's helped, which I actually think I got from Jenna Kutcher's podcast I know you've had on this podcast already is the phrase of asking yourself, is it a wound or is it a scar when you're sharing something. I don't know if you've heard that before, but it's basically the idea of if you're sharing something vulnerable, make sure that it's a scar and not a wound.

Alice (21:26)

So if I'm thinking about sharing a challenge I've had in my business, you know recently I've talked about my challenges going VAT registered and how I made a ton of mistakes and it was really challenging for me. I didn't share any of that when it was happening because it was a wound, it was fresh, it was happening. I was quite overwhelmed by it. It didn't have anything useful to say. If I'd have talked about it, it wouldn't have been helpful. I wouldn't have, you know, enjoyed people asking me more questions. I waited until it was a scar, until it was healed, until I could look back with context and then I shared it. And I think that's been a massive realisation for me of I'm still authentic and transparent by learning the best time to share things. And that

doesn't make me inhuman. If anything that makes that kind of content so much more impactful, so much safer for me as well because I don't feel as vulnerable. So yeah, there's a lot more I could say on that. But yeah, I think sharing the personal stuff is amazing. I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't share a lot of that, but do it carefully I think is my big advice on it.

Ann (22:25)

Yeah, I think the thing that's so interesting, because it's important to be transparent, that as business owners we all have challenge. You know, every day is not perfect. There are days when it's very difficult, it can be, you know, a huge emotional rollercoaster. And it's important to talk about that because people who see this sort of highlight reel on social media often don't understand what's going on behind the scenes. However, there has to, like you say, be boundaries around how much of the behind the scenes that you share. And I'd love to know, just thinking about that challenge and the times when you've had hardship in your business, how do you deal with that and how do you pick yourself back up again on the other side?

Alice (23:04)

I think the biggest thing that helps me is community. In my early days of business I was super isolated. I didn't know anyone else that ran a business. I felt really alone. And you know, friends and family are great but they just don't get it. It's sometimes hard to have those conversations with them because you have to give so much context and maybe they still don't even understand it. God bless them <laugh>. So the biggest thing that I think helps me now, that helps me to weather those challenges in, in such a better way is having that community. You know, whether that's speaking to my own mentors, my therapist, I work with a life coach sometimes, you know, those kind of hired professionals that can help me unpack it, or just speaking to business friends. You know, the amount of times I'll go into a WhatsApp group and just go, this thing has happened.

Alice (23:47)

Anyone else? Just me? What do you think? How do I navigate this? And I think that's invaluable because it helps you realise that you're not alone. You get insights from other people that might have been there, done that. And I think also the biggest thing that has helped me now and you know, I think maybe seven, eight years in, you have enough challenges at that point to realise that the challenges aren't a bad thing. I think in the early days of business I thought if I struggled with something, if something went wrong, if I had a challenge in a client project, whatever it might have been, I used to really see that as a dangerous situation. Like red flag, everything's going wrong now it's like they're weekly. So I'm always just maybe a bit better at how I view them and seeing them as an okay thing. Because I think if you don't face challenges in business, I think you're slightly doing something wrong. It tells me that there's probably not, not any growth there or not anything that you're kind of pushing for more within. So yeah, I think the biggest thing that helps me is seeing it as normal, get support from people that get it, be honest with other people and yeah, I just think community is so valuable.

Ann (24:46)

Yeah and I think as well, like you say, it's that honesty and a safe space. So if you have a WhatsApp group, you have people who are at a similar stage of business to you, it is having that safe space where you know, you can just say I'm having a terrible day and things have gone wrong. Tech's gone wrong, whatever's happened and you can almost just vent and get it off your chest before moving on. All of us have pyjama days, all of us have days where we don't actually <laugh>, you know, we don't want to work and we, you know, maybe we're not feeling well or maybe we've had a bad day. All of us have down days when we're maybe not the most proactive and that's okay as well. I think it's important to say that we're not all sat at our desks nine to five being super productive. So it's that sort of up and down, push and pull thing where you have to listen to yourself as well, isn't it?

Alice (25:40)

Yeah, absolutely. And I think you've got to find your own definition of balance. You know, I don't really think balance is a universal thing. I'm not even sure if in my world at least, it doesn't ever feel like it exists. I'm, you know, one extreme to another kind of person. But I think you just got to find kind your own way of doing things and realise that that's okay. I mean just a huge believer that the more we realise that everyone else's businesses are probably as messy as ours, the easier it then feels to run a business. You know, nothing changes when you realise that you're not alone. But somehow everything changes as well because you stop judging yourself so much you stop thinking I'm a bad business owner for feeling this way. And as you said there, you know, you then kind of allow yourself to, to do what you need to do to take the day off if you need it to step back from that project, if it's really not feeling good to you to, to make those decisions that maybe feel counterproductive to what business growth should mean.

Alice (26:31)

But actually, for you are going to be the right fit. Business I think is such a personal thing and the more I think we can kind of connect with what we want, what's important to us, what we need, the better. I once heard, one of my clients actually said that running a business to her feels like being in therapy every day because you're just constantly becoming so aware of your challenges and issues. And we always joke now that business is like therapy but without the bit where anyone helps you to get better, you basically just have <laugh> constant self-awareness. But yeah, I think the more self-aware we are the easier the business becomes.

Ann (27:02)

I know and I find, you know, it's interesting you've done that analogy to therapy because I find myself talking to myself a lot and talking things out, talking things through, especially when I'm writing I find myself, it almost is like a therapy session because I'm just monologging at myself basically. And you find your own rhythm don't you? And I think everybody, when they have their own business has to find their own

rhythm because we are on our own a lot aren't we? We spend a lot of time by ourselves and I definitely tend to get quite into my own head and think things through. And I think it's important to have that community so that you don't feel lonely as well. Because loneliness is a big part of being a business owner, isn't it? Have you felt that as well?

Alice (27:45)

Yes absolutely. I think in the early days of business, isolation was the biggest problem I had. It wasn't a practical thing. And don't get me wrong, I was getting a lot of practical things wrong back then. I think the biggest thing that that held me back. I actually burned out quite badly about a year into business. I was massively overworking and just not, not doing things in a good way and looking back, I think if I wasn't so isolated that maybe could have been avoided, but I didn't have people that I felt I could chat to. I didn't have people to maybe give me some advice, some help from people that got it. I wasn't in community with people that could kind of offer that support. I made the stupidest of mistakes, you know, things like, and I say stupid if anyone's made these mistakes I have.

Alice (28:31)

So I'm not, you know, judging in any way. You know, not saving for tax, not having contracts with my clients, not taking any time off. You know, those things that now I'm like, those are so obvious you don't know, what you don't know. And 17 year old me definitely didn't know any of those things. So I think if I'd got myself into a community sooner, I probably would've avoided making a lot of mistakes the hard way. It's the biggest thing I say to people now when you start a business is like getting community. Find people that get it, keep your friends that don't get it. They're invaluable, they're amazing. Most of my friends do not care about what I do. Don't get it, don't really understand it at all. I love that. And then I've got the people there that really do get it, that make a difference too, and I think it's the, the best time to look for community podcasts, online memberships, Instagram profiles, Facebook groups. Seven years ago

I didn't really know where to find community. It didn't really exist. Now there's kind of no excuse. It's everywhere. You've just got to throw yourself in, I think.

Ann (29:24)

And it's important to point out as well, like you said that you were so young when you started your business. So the mistakes were obviously going to happen. You know, you were so young and I think young people starting businesses that, I say this with the most love, when we're 17, 18, we have this really lovely sort of like optimistic attitude view of the world. And I know when I was that age, I was very naive. So you've got this sort of business idea and it's like, oh, I'm just gonna do that. And there's not the depth of thought that you would perhaps have as you get older and you have more experience, and you fail at things and you learn. And so 17 year old Alice, you know, I'm not surprised that she had made a few mistakes. <laugh>

Alice (30:05)

No, she was trying her best. She was doing what she could with the information she had. But it's funny you say that word naivety in there. That's, I think the biggest thing that us young business owners have on our side is that naive optimism is how I see it. You know, I was just far too optimistic for a 17 year old about my ability to run a business, but I'm, I'm glad of it because I think that's the only reason that I kind of kept going and got started. And actually the event that I was at yesterday, that was a theme that came up a lot in the panel discussions and the interviews was all of these incredible business owners all saying the same thing of like, I wasn't the best, I was just the most optimistic, I was just the most naive. I didn't know what I was doing, I wasn't ready, but I just did it. And I think that's such a valuable mindset or kind of attitude as a business owner because you can figure it all out. So as long as you just keep going, I think that's the important thing.

Ann (30:57)

It's interesting. Thinking about the age thing, do you find that people ask about your age all the time? Is that a topic that comes up for you? Do you find that it's something that people ask when they realise that you're a younger business owner?

Alice (31:09)

Yes. It probably used to come up a bit more when I was maybe younger, I feel like now I don't feel that the age, is as much of a cool thing about me, <laugh> in a weird way. It was definitely a bit of an identity thing for me. I think when I was 21, 22 it was like, I'm a young business owner. I'm now 25 and there's a lot of business owners that are 25 years old. So I've definitely had to grieve losing that title <laugh> top tip to listeners don't get attached to an age related identity because age changes. It's a rough identity to have. It does kind of come up quite a lot. I remember the first moment that I signed a client who was finally younger than me. That was a real moment that took years to work with someone who I felt was, was younger, but you know, age doesn't matter.

Alice (31:48)

But it would just always make me laugh that I was kind of in these rooms with people far more experienced, far further in their careers. And actually not to keep referencing it, it's just top of mind. I had the event yesterday, I suddenly looked through the lineup and I asked one of the other speakers, I was like, how old are you? And they were 26. And I suddenly realised like, I'm the youngest person on stage today. That's wild but I hadn't thought about it because I think business really levels the field. You know, our access to information, our access to creating our own platforms. It kind of stopped age from being a thing. You know, I sat alongside someone on the panel who I think was late thirties and we were talking afterwards around how people would put us in such different generations.

Alice (32:31)

But actually our behaviours, our values, our skillset are so similar. And I think business has this amazing way of kind of taking age out of the equation, which I love. So yeah, I

don't really feel it holds me back or it's a huge part of my experience. If anything, it's just sometimes I have that moment of realising like, oh, everyone's really different ages here. That's so interesting. And I always think it's one of those things as well where like I find it as well being like a female business owner, the more I get asked about it, it makes me think it's, it shouldn't be a big deal. Whereas actually in my experience, people don't care. My clients have never asked me on a call like, so how old are you? because we just wanna check you're old enough for us to trust you.

Alice (33:10)

Business levels, the playing field, I think age is one of the least important things. Don't wait until you're old enough because I don't think that really exists. And I think it goes the other way. I've got friends that started their business in their fifties or their sixties and I think again, there can be that feeling of missing the boat, but there's some amazing stories of entrepreneurs who began their businesses later, I don't think there's a perfect time. I like being a young business owner. I feel like I've got a lot of energy. I'm sure at some point I'm going to want to slow down.

Ann (33:43)

It's taking the opportunity whenever it finds you in life, isn't it, whether you're younger or older, that's it. Whenever you have that inspiration or that opportunity just too, you know, grab it by the horns. And obviously you will have worked with lots of people of different ages, you know, you do one-to-ones, you have group programs and you will have noticed a whole spectrum of different types of business owners. But I wonder if you've noticed that people tend to make the same mistakes regardless of backgrounds and whether you can share some of those mistakes with us so that we can learn from them?

Alice (34:13)

There's three main areas that I help people in business model, operations and marketing. So I'll give you one for each. Why not? So I'd say operations is such a

simple one, but financially I think people make the simplest mistakes. I think the biggest one being that they don't separate out their business and personal finances and that they don't separate out even further than their business finances. So if anyone's listening to this, if you're a sole trader based in the UK, you are technically allowed to have your business and personal finance in the same account. Doesn't mean that you shouldn't separate them out, treat them differently. They need to be looked at separately. And then I think within that, even if you do have separate finances, the amount of business owners I come across where I'm like, what's your financial process, what's going on?

Alice (34:59)

And they just show me one bank account that has tens of thousands of pounds in it or whatever number. That's scary to me because what is that money for? Is that for your tax bill, your VAT bill? Is that your savings? Is that money that you are accruing in the business to invest? Like one big number is not gonna help you to really utilise your finances clearly. So I'm a big advocate for using a business bank where you can create those pots or spaces, you know, like Monzo or Starling, put aside your money for tax as soon as you make it, build up your profit in a separate pot. You know, save money for whatever it is that you want in your business. You know, whether that's like a contingency fund or saving for investments or just saving for a bit of a personal bonus.

Alice (35:44)

It really is a small change. But if you have a separate business account and then have some separate finances within that, that will make a massive difference. I think that really helps because the finances of your business dictate how long your business runs for, right? So we've gotta make sure we're looking at that. Marketing wise, I say the biggest mistake is people thinking that they're just not ready in some way. You know what we said earlier, if people feel like, I just need a better plan or I need to spend more time planning, actually you just need to show up. You find your voice by using it. You learn best from taking action. So actually just like messily putting yourself out there and

be really, really willing to learn from it and get it wrong. I think we put a lot of pressure in marketing on every individual action.

Alice (36:33)

We think, oh this one piece of content is everything. But actually, if you think of it in this way, one piece of content is like one song in a whole album. It's not about changing someone's life in that one song. It's about what that one song is gonna do in the context of that whole album listening experience. Whatever analogy you want to use, it's one episode in a massive long sitcom, right? It's not everything. So take the pressure off, just put it out there, just make it happen. And then business-wise, setting goals that are focused on results, not action. So when people set goals and they go, okay, my goal is to make 20,000 pounds this year from this offering, that's great, but it's not actionable. You're gonna find that really hard to actually achieve because you're not clear on what you actually need to do.

Alice (37:20)

So instead, what I encourage people to think about with goal setting is set a goal that's focused on the action you need to take. So achieve the result that you want. So an easy example of this, like with my launch, my goal wasn't to make 20,000 pounds. My goal was to create and implement my launch strategy consistently. I knew what kind of results I wanted to achieve. I had KPIs that I was measuring throughout. And at the end, I'm not ignoring the results, but set goals that are focused on what you need to do, not where you're going to go. Obviously know where you're going to go so you know what you need to do. But yeah, results-based goals often are just a source of frustration and disappointment because they're really hard to action and you'll feel rubbish if you don't achieve them because they feel very binary as well. Long answer. But those are probably three big mistakes. I'm sure I could give you a million more, but three that come to mind that I see people make <laugh>.

Ann (38:10)

I'm sure you have lots and lots of those and I think you probably see the same things coming up time and time again. And it's interesting that you mentioned the financial goal, because that's something that I think is very common now to set yourself that big financial target. And then if you don't quite hit it, there's a feeling that the launch has failed, even if you are a few hundred pounds away from that big goal. So it's often very misleading because it makes you feel like it's a failure. Even when you've actually run a hugely successful launch. If you look at all the processes, about the people coming into your program, all of that has worked. But you've set yourself this massive financial target. And I think finances and communication of targets and of wealth and of, six figure launches and this sort of narrative can be quite damaging and toxic for people because they feel like they have to, every single launch they do has to be this massive success. And if you don't have the audience or you don't have the strategy, or you're not quite sure what you're doing with launching, you're not going to have a massive big launch, but you will learn lots of things along the way that will then help you with the next launch and the next launch. So again, the, the narrative around six figure launches and all of that stuff does frustrate me a little bit because I think it's very unrealistic for people who are new to business or people who have never done anything like that before.

Alice (39:33)

They're also just such inaccurate figures most of the time. I remember when I had my first 10K month and I didn't even realise until two months afterwards. I was excited, it was good, but you know, I'm not sat here watching the numbers and I reach that next target. But I realised it and then I told someone and they're like, oh my god, so you've got 10,000 pounds. And I was like, no, I don't have 10,000 pounds because there's tax, there's VAT, here's what it costs me to make that money. Here's my expenses. So actually the money I've got in the bank is this amount. And you know, I'm not saying that's then a bad thing, but it's just these shiny numbers don't tell the whole story. I'm not against people sharing the money that they make. You know, a recent podcast episode I did, I shared all of the numbers from my launch.

Alice (40:19)

But the point is I didn't just say, oh, my launch made 18,000 pounds. I said it made 18,000 and here's what the behind the scenes of that looked like. Here's how much work I put in to make that, here's how it felt. Here's the profit actually from that big shiny figure and I think that's the stuff we need to hear more of. If people want to talk about the big numbers, I think they've got a responsibility to also talk about the behind the scenes of that to new business owners, otherwise it's just going to feel so unrealistic. A lot of the time the people achieving those figures are spending huge amounts on ads or on a team or they've burned out in the process of making that money. I just think we need to acknowledge all of that part of it as well. So I'm totally with you on that. I think making money is great. Wanting to make more money in your business. I'm all for it if that's someone's goal. But wanting to make 10k to make 10k or hit six figures because that's what everyone on Instagram seems to think you should do. I'm not for that. And I can speak from very confident experience that achieving financial goals will do absolutely nothing for your fulfilment or how actually successful your business is. Those numbers often come with more headaches and challenges than I think people would expect.

Ann (41:34)

And it's, it's like we said as well, we spoke about this earlier, about that transparency piece and that sharing the reality of a launch. What's going on behind the scenes of your business and really communicating that's not all profit. There's expenses, there's a team, there's Facebook ads, whatever it is you're spending the money on, there's lots of layers underneath that. And people listening if you've had a launch and you feel like it hasn't gone the way you wanted to financially, just be encouraged in the fact that you've run a launch. You've had people come into your program, you know, even if it was one or two people, that's still a success because you've tested the theory, you've gone through the steps, it's worked, people have bought. So you just have to take the learnings from that and move on to the next stage. Just because you're seeing people

on social media that are having massive launches doesn't mean that behind the scenes that's really what's going on. Yeah, I think it's important to talk about that. And you mentioned about your podcast and you're about to hit, is it 250 episodes you're about to hit?

Alice (42:35)

Yeah, good spot. I didn't even really look that we were there, but yes, this weeks episode I think was 244. So yeah, we are six weeks away.

Ann (42:44)

You're almost at 250, which is super exciting. You have to celebrate your 250th podcast somehow. So clearly with 250 podcasts, you're a total podcast pro. There will be people listening who are thinking about setting up their own podcast. What sort of tips do you have for people who are just getting started?

Alice (43:03)

First of all, do it. You will not regret it. Podcasts are such a joy. I am so, so grateful that the me of five and a half years ago. I mean, back then podcasting wasn't really much of a thing. I don't really know why I wanted to start. I do know why I wanna start a podcast, but it was a bit of a rogue move, but I'm really, really glad I did it. I think it's the biggest thing that has helped grow my business in a marketing sense. It's an amazing platform to meet new people, to connect. A lot of my friends I've met through them being a podcast guest. I love that. So yeah, do it if you've got an idea you're really excited about. I think that's the first thing I'd say. Don't start one, just to start one, because podcasts are bloody hard work and they take consistency.

Alice (43:44)

So you've got to love it. You've got to be excited about it, you've got to enjoy creating it. And that way you're going to find it a lot easier to be consistent. I think the second

encouragement I'd give to people is be consistent with it. You know, my podcast for the first year barely got any downloads. And I'm not saying that's going to be true for other people because I remember when I started it, I didn't know how to promote it. I didn't really have a community, but it basically took a year for it to get any traction. And it was only about seven months ago that my podcast became profitable. So for five years it was a loss making activity and I was fine with that because of all the other things that it did for the business and the kind of indirect revenue that it brought in.

Alice (44:23)

But consistency really is king with growing a podcast. So I saw a stat the other day, and it feels a really dramatic stat, but if it's true, it's wild. It said that only 1% of podcasts make it past 20 episodes. Wow. And I thought that was crazy. And I think there's another stat, I think it's around 50 or 60% of podcasts don't make it past three. So there's such a trend there of people starting, and I get it, you're excited and then you realise all the work it takes, or you don't get the reaction you wanted and you stop. Podcasts are a long game. You've got to be consistent before you decide if it's working or not. So the biggest encouragement I'd give with that is commit to the first season. Don't just do one or two and be like, oh, it's not working. Just like you're doing and you know, decide I'm going to pre-record all of season one. I'm going to get this ready to go. So I know that I'm going to follow through on that commitment.

Alice (47:47)

And probably the final thing I'd say around the marketing of it is you're going to have to tell people a lot that you host a podcast and tell them about the episodes. You know, podcasts don't have their own discovery platform, unless you've got really great episode titles. People aren't really going to find your podcast organically. The biggest thing that's going to help to grow it is your content, but from the back of it.

Alice (48:14)

If possible, have video content related to your podcast, create content on other platforms that links to it. If you've got guests, think about who might be able to share it with you, empower your community to talk about the podcast themselves. If people don't know about it, they can't listen to it. I think that's the biggest mistake I made in the first year is I just kept posting and never told anyone about it. You've got to be wildly repetitive in promoting it to make sure that people get it. I still have people now be like, I didn't know you had a podcast.

Alice (48:44)

How do you not? It's at about 250 episodes. I've be around for a while. I have the same when I'm launching stuff, you've got to be way more repetitive than you think you do to make it grow, but you won't regret it. If you really love what you're creating and you're consistent, I think starting a podcast is one of the best things you can do for your business. And it's a growing medium, so start it sooner rather than later would be my encouragement as well.

Ann (49:14)

Amazing. It's one of those things that I think everybody has a podcast in them. Everyone has a story to tell or some sort of angle they can take. But it's about the consistency and it's about finding your niche and just running with it and talking about it probably until you're sick of hearing yourself talk about it. Consistently talking about it until you start to get some traction. Some of the best podcasts in the world are not groundbreaking concepts. You know, take, mine's a good example, it's just conversations with business owners, tips that I share.

Alice (49:43)

You know, the one that we all know, probably in the business space, Steven Bartlett, Diary of a CEO, it's a very simple podcast concept he's got there. It's not groundbreaking. It's the same as most people's podcast concepts, interview

people talk about their challenges, share tips, tell stories. What is successful about his podcast is not the idea, it's the execution of it. It's the great quality. It's the great guests. It's the way that he shares it. It's how consistent he's been.

Alice (50:11)

So I think don't try and overcomplicate it. It doesn't have to be a crazy concept, but it's more about how you do it that I think makes the biggest difference. It's like starting any new habits. If you want to be going to the gym, you don't care on the first day about being able to, I don't know, bench press 100 kilograms. You just care that you show up. And I think that's what podcasting is about. Just show up and then you'll improve from there.

Ann (50:39)

So wrapping up, let's have a chat about what's happening for you next. I know you've got the book, which is very exciting. What else is coming up for you?

Alice (51:08)

Oh gosh, it feels like it's been a big year so far. And in a way that I think I didn't even really plan for. It's been a really amazing year of unexpected opportunities, I think is the way that I'd put it. I'm really excited to be doing a lot more speaking and collaborations with amazing companies. As many people know, you can't really control those things happening in business. You just kind of have to put yourself out there and hope for the best. So it's been amazing to see some of that coming to life. A lot of things happened that, were not even on the vision board. So it's almost hard in a way to think about like, okay, where do we go from here? So I'd love to continue to do more public speaking. I guess a Ted talk would be next on the list there. I need to finish the book so that can come out soon.

Alice (51:34)

I'm going to be hosting my Christmas party again at the end of the year for business owners. So we're already starting to plan that because we're going to do one in London as we normally do, and then also going to do one up North. So we're going to come to Liverpool or Manchester, maybe Edinburgh's next. Making our way up the country. I was actually on a call this morning with one of my students who is up in Scotland as well. So there's some community there.

Alice (52:01)

I'm just excited to keep doing what I'm doing. I love my work. So just looking to keep building really and keep showing up. I'm hosting a retreat in September, which I haven't done in four years. So I am thrilled about that and super excited for that. Nothing ground-breaking. There's no secret projects. You know, the book was the big one that I was working on over the last year or so. Hopefully I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing and if opportunities continue to come my way I will say yes and fake it until I make it as I always do.

Ann (52:15)

Well I can't wait to see what comes up for you over the next few months. Thank you so much for talking to us today.

Alice (52:16)

Thank you for having me. I can totally tell your journalism background, you're a fantastic question asker and yeah that's what really makes a podcast as well is the host, so you've done an amazing job, you're a pro.

Ann (52:54)

Thank you so much for coming on and I know that everyone else had so much value from this. Thanks so much.

Alice (53:33)

Thanks for having me.

Ann (53:34)

Thank you so much for listening today. Before you go, if you've enjoyed this episode or any of the other episodes on the podcast, please head over to Apple Podcasts and give us a lovely review. It really does make a big difference and it helps other people to find us. Whilst you're there, click subscribe so that you don't miss out on any of our future episodes. If you're unsure about how to do this, just check out the show notes for all the information that you need. Thank you and see you for the next episode of Simple Content.

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