

Creative Community: Growing Virtual Communities

Conversation with Krissy Buck

Founder of The Digital Neighborhood

TJ

Well, Krissy, thanks so much for doing this. Tell us a little bit about yourself in case anybody doesn't know who you are.

Krissy

Yeah, so I am Krissy Buck and I'm the owner of The Digital Neighborhood and I help businesses humanize their brands to build online inclusive communities. That's my elevator pitch.

TJ

Absolutely. So tell me a little bit about what that means. Like to unpack, what's the digital neighborhood? What do you mean by that? I'm super excited about what you do. So tell me about what that means.

Krissy

Yeah, so marketing is no longer in in our court anymore. We're definitely on the defense with consumers online. You know, with the advent of the Internet, more and more each year, they gain the power in their buying decision. They're able to research product research pricing, and what The Digital Neighborhood does is it builds relationships because, you know, more and more people, they are looking at investing in small business, investing in people that they personally know. You know, I just had a conversation this morning with a realtor and there is a real estate agent on every corner. No longer can you broadcast your messaging, you've got to go out and build relationships. And so that's what I do for brands. I build relationships, I build a community around their brand, that build referrals. It builds trust, and it just multiplies and it's just awesome. I mean, being in community with people, it's just fun. So that's what the digital neighborhood does.

TJ

So tell me like, because we've both been around long enough, especially with the internet like I remember, you know, starting out, America Online ... It came, it's like you have a ".com" bubble, we have this kind of surge in social media came around. And like people kind of viewed it as a silver bullet. But it's got this kind of plus and this minus. But there's this point at which like, it became clear to you that these online communities, these online experiences and relationships were more than just an extension of real world relationships that they really work communities in and of themselves. So tell me about, how you discovered that and what it did to change how you viewed and interacted with folks?

Krissy

Well, this is a story that, you know, been unfolding for the last decade. About 10 years ago, I found myself in a position where I had no close friends. And one day I was at the grocery store at lunch, and you know, I'm gonna pop in and get something from the deli. And I saw these women getting out of their car and I I'm pretty sure they work at the local elementary school and as employed them in, you know, they're telling each other like, "Oh, you look so cute today your outfit so nice." And I just remember thinking, man, I wish I had some positive female friendships in my life. And shortly after that I was introduced to some people that I ended up joining their church with him and then a year later going on mission, so being a missionary in my own context, so my neighborhood or work or school or whatever that look like. And then fast forward about eight years later, you know, through learning what it meant to be a missionary in my own context and learn how to treat people well and how to accept them where they were at. Really how to build a community that, you know, that promotes

... serving each other and doing life with one another and About then my kids were my two oldest were in high school and I was thinking, man, I'm young. And what am I gonna do with the rest of my life. And so, I went back to school. And I took a digital marketing class that I aced. And I just decided this is what I want to do. And I landed a job with a tech startup here in Wichita. And about a year and a half into that, we developed a product that puts captions on videos. We knew that the majority of people who have bought into the idea of video, and also captioning that video was digital marketers. And those at that point were my people like, this is my tribe. And so I used everything that I have learned in missional church planting, you know how to be a member of that community and serve that community. And I took all those practices and I didn't even realize, like I didn't have a framework for this, it was just part of my DNA. It's something that I did every day. So I took those same principles into the business world. And I built a global community around this brand in just 10 months. And so, I went from, you know, having a very small, local personal community around me to this expansive global community. And these people I still talk to every single day online. And you know, they live in Vancouver, Canada, and they live in Australia and some live in London, and they are as close to me as you know, my church. I realized that when you are intentional about spending time with people, physically or virtually, you're doing an awesome quick way you can develop, develop authentic relationships.

TJ

Absolutely. ... My kids have grown up with always having access to, you know, parents, grandparents and cousins, even though like my brother and his family live in Zimbabwe, Africa, you know, my mom and dad live in Kentucky. But my kids have always had that experience of having this closeness because of technology, because of these virtual relationships. And I was telling them at one point early on, when their mom was out of town, you know, she actually had had to suffer through going to Hawaii with my mother-in-law. And it's I was at home with the kids alone, and we were facetimeing with mom, and we hung up and one of them said, "Did you like to FaceTime your parents when you were little?" I said, you like that wasn't you know, the phone wasn't even mobile - it's attached to the wall like you couldn't, you couldn't do this. And they looked at me they said, "Well, didn't you just feel sad all the time when you weren't together?" I was like "You know, we just didn't know any better." Like, we didn't know that we could have relationships that spanned distance the way we do now. It wasn't something that was even a part of it. So how do you take that principle? You know, like, I know how to do it in my family, like I know how to do with my brothers, but how do you take that principle and apply it to brands? Like how do you build this community online?

Krissy

People started asking me that question fall, you know, how are you doing what you're doing? Because at that point, and in just 10 months, well, by then it was like, maybe eight months, we had users in over 60 countries. So people start asking me, how are you doing this? Like, I'm just doing it and so I had to really break down what I did each day. And so I have three steps that I follow and that's accept people where they're at in the buying journey. And by doing that you're welcoming people into your community. And you might think, oh, I don't have any time to waste on people who aren't interested in buying. But what you're doing is you're welcoming them into your community. They're learning from the other people in your community, some of whom are probably clients of yours. So just by them sharing their experience around your product or service, they are doing the selling on your behalf. And so really like it becomes an inbound sales process, instead of you know, going out and finding leads. So just accepting people where they're at in the buying journey, whether that's top of funnel or bottom of funnel. And honestly, they might not ever be interested in your product or service. And that's okay. They still add value to your brand, because they are bringing their own expertise and their niche and they're joining the conversation that's happening around your brand. The second step is seeking out the influencers. So this was huge for me. Influencers are special people. And I'm sure like a lot of you are thinking "influencer" and you're thinking like the Kardashians. They're special people, too. But when you think of like the micro-influencers, and we have dozens here in Wichita, that you know, have their own food blogs, beauty blogs, or, you know, are just experts maybe have a podcast or something. And, you know, those people are influencing hundreds, if not thousands, of people. One group I belong to is called Sunflower Steals. And this woman is based in Johnson County, so up by Kansas City, and she has like 200,000 people in this discount group she has on Facebook. And I have bought multiple things that she has shared in her group, just because I

trust her. I don't know her from Adam. But she's built this, this trusted network, this community, where women will go on there, and they don't just go on there to find out how they can get the cheapest Roomba. They go on there, and they actually engage with each other and ask for advice. And it's pretty awesome. And so seek out the influencers, you know, connect with them, collaborate with them, work alongside them, allow them to introduce you to their community, but I would say also, you know, introduce your own community to them, and it's really like this good, like cross-promotion process that everybody wins. And also one thing I've learned about influencers is influencers influence influencers. And so you will start to see your community multiply and ... you will not even know that it's happening or who's talking about you but because influencers are talking about you to other influencers, you'll start to see like in Google Analytics, you'll start to see that grow. And then the third step is just go to where people are. So you know, going back to you know, FaceTime and the internet and all of that. You know, I love that you called it America Online...

TJ

Oh, man, it was such a big deal when I was a kid. I just had this conversation with a buddy last night - I remember my computer teacher making fun of people talking in America Online chat rooms like I remember going to a Kentucky Wildcats America Online chat room to talk about... I want to say was Tony Delk. But talking about couple of Kentucky players. He thought that was the stupidest thing that he'd ever heard that you go talk to somebody on the internet about basketball, like you just thought like, that's never gonna catch on, like, what a dumb idea that is. And it's always stuck with me and how dismissive we were to those early stages of this thing unfolding as quirky and as odd as it was at the time.

Krissy

Yeah, well, fast forward from 1997 to 2020. And you know, how many daily users does Facebook have? I lost count, I think, in a couple years ago had 500 million daily users. And so really, the concept of going to where people are at - your audience is online. I mean, that's where they're at. And that's where you need to be engaging them. And I don't mean like broadcasting your message like a billboard onto your Facebook page and then waiting for people to come. No, you need to actively go out as your brand and engage with other people's content. They've spent time and money creating this content so celebrate it, like it, share it, comment on it, you know, create a conversation around it. Really make it about them. People can't help themselves when you comment on their stuff. They're gonna go look and check you out and see who you are. So it's being authentic, and it's being kind, but it's also leading people back to your own platforms, your own accounts. Well, not just virtually going to where people are, I would say even like physically so I spent a lot of my time last year at events and all these people that I've made friends with online through business, I got to meet them in person and have you know, meals with them, coffee with them, lunch with them, dinner with them at conferences. And if you can, try to share... So think about like a conference. It's usually about three days. If you can intentionally try to share each meal with somebody at that conference. You know, what is that, nine meals that you're sharing with somebody? And there's something so intimate about sharing a meal with someone. I mean, you don't just invite people to your house anymore for dinner ... that thing has come and gone. I wish it would come back. But, you know, when somebody invites you to their house, like you feel really special. So you know, sharing a meal with somebody that you met at a conference or somebody that you want to meet at a conference, or even just coffee in the morning. There's something really special about that.

TJ

I think so too. I actually have coffee with somebody this week that I met through Facebook here locally, and you know, I needed his help with some services and in taking care of a mutual client. And we just hit it off. And I don't totally understand the side of business that he's in. And I was like, "man, we should grab coffee." And he's like, "I'd love to." And so we're actually getting coffee this week, to sit down and talk about it. I do think there's a level of, you know, even in the middle of all this stuff that's going on, like all of the things that are happening, where you feel so isolated, you know, I have definitely reached the point where, like, I am enthusiastic about taking a walk, just to get out of my house a little bit. My kids are the same way. They're absolutely the same way. You know, we're all, you know, I don't think we're sick of each other yet, but we're really close. But that ability to like forge a new relationship in the middle of all of this, while stuck at home is

just unique, and those kinds of things don't, couldn't have happened. You know, even 10 years ago, it was really hard to do that because you had websites and blogs, but you didn't have places where everybody was interacting the way you do now. And it's just kind of changed everything. Are there some brands in particular that you've seen that have just really killed it during this, this whole crisis and how they've continued to cultivate a neighborhood cultivate a community around them? Is there anybody that jumps to mind?

Krissy

Yeah, I was just thinking about this this morning. And there's a tech product, super cool, called Lately. And it's an AI so you just plug in your blog posts, and it will use its AI engine to create Tweets for you. Okay, Their sales guy over there, Chris Brough. He just, he continues... I saw him having a conversation with somebody that I know here locally. He just continues to go out and find people who might be a good fit for his product. And he just has a conversation with them. Like, it doesn't even have to be around Lately. And I don't even remember, what the conversation I saw on Twitter was, but it was like, you know, something just, I don't know, just this person loves Marvel, so let's just say it was like Marvel. And he just, you know, added his own take on it. Funny enough during this whole thing, he had COVID! He actually got sick. And he shared his process. And, you know, shared what he was going through the whole thing. And so there's also this concept that I learned, you know, doing life with instead of at or for, and he was definitely like letting us in on his life and what it was like to live in his basement away from his family. Get a glimpse of what he was going through. He was doing life with potential clients and clients on social media, it was pretty awesome. And then another account that I strive to be like is Wendy's. Doesn't matter what's going on? They're killing it. Yeah, I mean, those are two that that come to mind.

TJ

Wendy's has been really interesting to watch that because there's that very different voice in how they communicate where they're snarky, and they're like this kind of faux competitiveness that is just a hallmark of how they've handled things. But it's obvious they don't take themselves too seriously. Which I think is one of the things that makes being in relationship with somebody so easy that if they're really serious, it's almost impossible to you know, if they take themselves as serious, it's impossible to really engage with them deeply. You know, in any kind of like long term relationship because they're it's so they don't laugh at themselves, they don't see themselves as funny. But when you have somebody like Wendy's and Steak-Umms - that's one of those that's been a, you know,...

Krissy

Steak-Umms is a great one, too...

TJ

Their Twitter has been this extraordinary mix of like self-deprecating, and, you know, insightful that has just been awesome. Like, it's genuinely been fun to watch them kind of create a platform for themselves and who would have felt like a shaved meat product, a frozen shaved steak product would have a voice in 2020. But they do. And I think that's the challenge of like, figuring out whatever your brand is, whatever you do, how to humanize yourself and how to find those connections. Yeah, have you seen some of the ways that folks have interacted? Like one of the things I've noticed is, as folks have interacted with Coronavirus and with COVID and how that has changed things, there's been this like, just good neighborliness that has kind of permeated a lot of, at least locally here in Wichita, but globally too. But definitely around the country where you've seen people kind of go above and beyond like, I'm in this group on Facebook that is looking for people sharing recommendations for restaurants that are open, and how to access them. And there's like, there were some older folks who said, like, "Hey, I don't want to use an app to try to buy food. Is there anybody that I just call that does delivery?" And there was like, 15 people within the first hour that said, like, "Hey, you know, if you want to send me a message, and here's my name, here's my phone number. I'd be happy to go pick something up for you if that would be helpful." Um, you know, just like this, this random grandma here in Wichita, like, let me just offer help where I can and like you've seen that. Have you seen that kind of translate into into how brands and relationships are translated online? Have you seen that as well?

Krissy

Oh, yeah, definitely. You know, I was invited to speak at a summit at the end of the month, but it's really, the organizers put it together for people who have found themselves unemployed and are going to try to create their own business. And so really, it's focused on helping people from the beginning of their business. So giving them actionable content that they can that they can put to use right away. And so, I mean, these are digital marketers, they could probably market themselves to these people, but instead, they're pulling together, you know, experts in marketing and entrepreneurship and teaching it, you know, teaching it to people, which I think is super awesome. I'm excited to be a part of that. But I mean, I think you're right, like just the neighborly thing. I have seen more people celebrate each other lately, you know, celebrate their wins. I had a friend who just celebrated a decade in business, and that's huge right now. And it's funny because you do the math. She started her business during the last recession. Yeah. And so, here she is, you know, working through this downturn. And so, you know, I've been invited to a couple of Zoom birthday parties. I mean, it's just amazing, like the level of connectedness that we have right now. And then also, I've just been asking because I'm totally zoomed out. Like, yeah, I've been asking, you know, like, is everybody on board for video moving forward? Or are people ready to see each other in real life, and the majority I think, my little non-scientific, you know - what's the word I'm looking for, TJ?

TJ

Not-scientific ... poll. Non-scientific poll.

Krissy

My poll. 80% said that they were ready to meet people in real life. So I am too. I'm just I'm ready to see people in real life. I'm ready to give hugs and an handshake again. Morning I met somebody for the first time and I went to go, we both went to go handshake and was like, "Oh, I can't do that."

TJ

Absolutely.

Krissy

And so, I did the... Malibu Creative shared this. Like the different [greetings]. I gave him a little elbow bump!

TJ

I've had a couple of those that were like, part of when we even did that video internally. One of the things is like, it's so awkward. I'm 38 years old, and like, I'm that I now have to learn how to greet people new, like a five year old, like, look them in the eye, but don't touch their hands. You know, it's like this weird. It's this weird piece, but like we're all in this together. Like we're all learning this new dynamic. And I think, on the other side of this as we're continuing to grow, I do think it's bringing out some of the the part of what makes us the best. And that is that collaboration, that encouragement, that willingness to laugh, and just kind of enjoy figuring things out together instead of always having to have everything sorted quickly.

Krissy

Yeah, I mean, we've all learned this. We've been practicing this while watching the Tiger King. Talk about not being neighborly.

TJ

Absolutely. It's amazing how much like things have permeated our household. My kids, they're way too young for the Tiger King. They have no idea what it is. I don't even think they know. I don't think they've ever even heard of it. But my seven year old was building Legos the other day and they got knocked over and she goes "I'm never gonna recover from this financially." She heard me make that joke to Julie at one point and so now she's making she's like, totally a part of our family's ethos now.

Krissy

Oh, that's awesome. That is so awesome.

TJ

Yeah, it's a weird world we live in, in which my kids have pop culture references that quickly and don't even know where they came from. So, just out of curiosity, as we're kind of wrapping up here, is there something that you would love to see change in how we do things, you know, collectively as a culture. As a community here in Wichita locally or even nationally or globally, on the other side of this.

Krissy

Yeah, I think, you know, I think through all of those people have learned have learned just inherently how to connect better online. You know, I think somebody shared this morning - oh, it was Content Cal, which is a scheduling tool based out of the UK. And they were showing some analytics how social media, the use of social media has skyrocketed recently, and so people are learning how to connect online. And I would love to see that continue. But for businesses - I just want to see businesses shift their paradigm towards ... just because we're going back to normal doesn't mean that you have to spam people with your sales. You know, continue to connect, continue to learn who people are, celebrate them celebrate that they made a meme. Just because we're back to normal doesn't mean that people don't still have that need to belong. And so continuing to invite people to belong to your brand, belong to your community around your brand. I want to see that happen more and more.

TJ

Absolutely. I hope that that happens like there's a loyalty and a love I have for like restaurants in particular that, like, I liked him. I enjoyed them, but like the way I feel about them now is very different. It was a weird moment in when I realized like it was an act of deep commitment to community and neighborhood to get takeout tacos. Like that was an amazing moment for me during all of this was like there was something defiant and encouraging about, you know, ordering food to go. But it really was this pivot for all of us, I think to learn how to grow and kind of be there together. So I'd love to see that continue too. So Krissy is we've talked Is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't think about asking you that? This should have come up?

Krissy

This is a great conversation. I think it's one that challenges me. I have trouble coming up with some answers a little bit. I think it was good.

TJ

Great. I did my job. I got prepared ahead of time. That's great. So Krissy, my question for you is, if somebody wanted to learn more about you. If they wanted to engage with the digital neighborhood. They wanted to talk with you or learn about it, in particular, the conference you were talking about coming up, what are some ways that they could connect with you?

Krissy

Yeah, just follow me on social media, you can find me @thedigitalneighborhood, both on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. And then you can also just check out my website and find all my links there. It's thedigitalneighborhood.com.

TJ

Awesome. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate you jumping in and doing this with us. You're awesome. We've also talked about it but I still think The Digital Neighborhood is the best name ever. It's just great.

Krissy

So it just like it came up... I was sitting in a hotel room in London. And like a tiny one. Yeah, real small. And I was working on a on a virtual summit talk that I was doing. You know, in our context where, you know, in the

missional context, we're sent out into our neighborhoods, and that's how I feel virtually. The name for the talk was "How to Leverage your Digital Neighborhood." And it just, I just decided, like right there. I don't want to do what I'm doing anymore. Yeah, I'm like sitting in London. Oh, by the way, on the other side of the river from Westminster. But, I don't want to be doing this anymore. I want to I want to teach other people how to do this.

TJ

That's awesome. That's awesome. Yeah, it's a great name and I love the embodiment of what it means to kind of be neighbors. So I think it's awesome.

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