

Interview with Susan Bratton – CEO, Co-founder Personal Life Media

Dave: Welcome to the Elegant Workflow Podcast - A member of the Tech Podcast network Today we are speaking with Susan Bratton, CEO and Co-founder of Personal Life Media. Susan, welcome to the Podcast.

Susan: Dave, I am very happy to be here talking to you and I can't wait to see where this takes us

Dave: Please tell the listeners a little bit about yourself, your background and what led you starting Personal Life Media

Susan: Sure. I am, ah, I would call myself a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, although I don't live in Silicon Valley anymore. It's kind of where I grew up if you will. I started out in the, I started out in the semi conductor business actually and the reason I ended up there is that I became a purchasing clerk for a technology company in Arizona. And one of my jobs as the purchasing clerk was to have the sales people call on me to try to sell me various electronic components. And I realized in that moment that I was on the wrong side of the desk. I wanted to be on the sales side not on the buy side. And I ended up getting a job as a field sales person doing what is called ROW – rest of the world accounts - which are all the crappy accounts that don't spend any money that nobody wants to handle. And so they give it the new kid. And I got those accounts and I'll tell you, I made oh I say probably in my lifetime maybe 500 buddy calls with my various reps on these little rest of the world accounts and I really learned how to sell. And it was a fantastic training ground. Ultimately I ended up moving to the Silicon Valley and starting my very first company that was my own which was a REP firm and I represented magazines. This was pre-internet. I represented some magazines and I sold advertising space and it was In-Tech magazines. And then I ended up getting involved in, I sold that company, and I ended up getting involved, very early on in 1996 in the internet. I started out a company called AD HOME network and we developed the first cable mode that we all now take for granted with, you know, 100 mega bit data transfer rates. Well this was in the time when we were in, you know, 14.4 modems and things like that. And so, I worked for a number of start-ups, it was on a lot of founding teams; we sold our companies to AOL and YAHOO and other companies. And probably over the course of about 25 years of doing tech startups, I just realized that my relationship with my husband was really on shaky ground and we were almost about to get divorce. We really lost our intimate connection. And so we went to a lot of couples workshops and things like that to kind of rekindle our relationship and through that process we realized that there was so much that a couple can do to keep their intimate connection strong throughout the world of careers and children. And that you can actually reverse a marriage that has fallen on hard times by knowing a few simple things and we ended up starting a podcast network together. That's why I am the co founder of Personal Life Media I actually work with my husband Tim who is in fact the inventor of Rhapsody, a really fantastic online music service very similar to what Apple's just announcing recently with their own music service. So we started our company together, I call him the numbers and me the letters, we created a podcast network and we were going to have it ad supported. And we ended up doing 40 different podcasts shows. One of them was my show, Dishy mix because I came from the internet advertising industry and I interviewed a lot of people like you do Dave. And I did a show every week and I really learned how to do an interview style show. And so long story short, we'll come back to learning about interviewing tips because I know you want to talk to me about that. My husband and I realized 2 years in that the podcast itself that business was a crappy business from a revenue perspective. It was a leaky sib. Money in, went money out as far as advertising revenue very hard to

monetize. But what we realized just the people loved our content. we were getting a million downloads a month on our heart connected conscious sexuality content, tantra love making, expanded orgasm and things like that. And so people really love what we were doing and we moved our model, we pivoted our business into information product marketing which is essentially selling online home study courses to people all over the world who want to either rekindle their passion or to make sure that their connection with their partner never goes sour and just keeps getting better and better and better. Because the net of it is great relationships don't make great sex. Great sex makes great relationships and so people underestimate how important it is to have really good quality communication, intimate communication as well as understanding techniques. And so, and people are shy, they don't know where to go to get the information and so having online programs people can do whenever they want to at their own pace has been really heartwarming and positive and exciting business for us. And so that's how I ended up where I am today. We just are in the final throws of a sale for one of our most popular products which is called steamy sex ed where we've sold hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of that product to people all over the world who want to learn techniques to keep their relationship hot and spicy.

Dave: That's quite an interesting history. In fact, I remember at home, and I was jealous because I have my IST online and I thought I was styled back then and obviously Rhapsody like you said it's just the forefather of all these music services that's very interesting that sounds like both you and your husband has been in the fore front on a lot of these. Now podcasting was serial, and podcasting is the in thing and once again, you're many years ahead of everyone who's just starting to learn about podcasting.

Susan: Exactly, yeah been there, done that. I think podcasting is a good ad junk to an existing business but it is not a business. It's a business if you have a great back end, if you can convert traffic but it's very hard to try to get podcasts themselves to be a monetizable medium.

Dave: I agree with you. It's a very tough thing to monetize and I don't know many people other than like the Leo Laporte's and the Adam Carolla's out there who are making significant money in podcasting.

Susan: Yeah and I'm not sure it's significant money. I still think they're just, you know, tech nerds with a low burn rate.

Dave: And I agree with you because they're private companies so nobody really knows what they're making or not making.

Susan: That being said, podcasting is something that can go beyond the labor of love. It can be something where there's some great information that's conveyed. People can learn a lot from it and people are different modalities I mean, you know, my husband and I worked very well together because he is a future thinker who relies on historical data from the past to project the future. I'm a here and now person who works on what's going on today, tomorrow, next week and next month, 6 months after out of the most. And so, that's a modality. And another modality is some people are visual and they love video, other people really like to listen to things. Other people they like to read it. And so I recently did a product launch where I offered 3 free things, they're called free lawns or money magnets in my world you know you get an email often in exchange for giving them a piece of free content and one was an audio book, one was an eBook, I'm sorry, one was an eBook, one was an audio mp3 and one was a video. And you know, people like different modalities and so there is a place for podcasting, there is a place for

the conversation between people, the sharing of information. And for a lot of people it's very, very valuable to them.

Dave: And speaking of podcasting, since we're on the subject. What do you advise to people so somebody wanted to start up a podcast, what are some of the mistakes that you see people doing around podcasting and what advice would you have for them if they wanted to go out there and maybe do a podcast as an ad junk to some type of a product line like what you're doing or just go out there and do a podcast.

Susan: a couple of things – number one, who are you trying to reach, who is your audience and what is the service you're providing to them? So what is this exclusive content that they can get in your podcast that they can't get anywhere else? Number two, what is the significant piece of information that you're going to get that's guaranteed. Number three, consistency, you must be consistent, if you're going to have a weekly podcast, you got to have a weekly podcast. If you go on vacation, do your weekly podcast the week before and then set it up to run. Another one is get to know iTunes and how you can get good album art, good show titles, use the search; you know the search string traffic so that your podcast rise to the top and the search results. Get to know the people at Apple make sure you have, you've done everything you can with titling, etc, etc. put them on other medium so that you have distribution and have more ability to drive traffic into iTunes so that people can easily download them more inbound links to your podcasts so that Apple rank you higher in their algorithms. Do a blog where you have a link to your podcast from your blog with transcripts of those podcasts so that you get SEO quality juice and that drives people to download the podcasts. Do everything you can to get people to subscribe not just to listen to one single podcast by making them a connected web or series of things that makes you naturally want to have them. Keep them brief, add at them, don't be a stooge, get a high quality gasps if that's what you're doing, learn how to interview well, get decent equipment so your mic is good so it doesn't sound like you're doing it from your bathroom. Those are some of the things, there's a commitment to having a podcast because it's a serialized medium that is not to be taken lightly. You can't just jump in and do a podcast well.

Dave: A lot of people think, oh, you just go and you take your laptop and you open it up and you get some recording software off the internet and you start doing it. I actually tried that with a friend a few years ago, we were going to do a technology podcast where we just kind of talk about technology of the week. We found that we were just sitting there, we were in the end ring because we weren't preparing, we didn't take the time the hour for the podcast to really decide what are we going to talk about, what areas we were going to discuss, what's our audience, and all these important things so we did about 3 of them, and we lost interest. And that was that I think there's a lot to it, it's not just something you can do just to whim otherwise you'll lose interest pretty quickly if you don't feel that you're out there getting some distribution and getting people to be listening to them.

Susan: it's a funny medium because it's a phase shifted medium, time shifted medium. You know, you and I are here talking in this moment but someone who is listening is going to be listening in an entirely different moment. It's not a live audience. Now I felt that to be a fantastic training ground for me because I really moved into video. I've got myself video trained, I've gone on television quite a bit and it's really taught me how to connect with people when they're not actually in the room in front of me. I know a lot of people who record video for their products and things like that they'll have an event and invite people so they have someone to talk to. I don't need that. It's super easy for me to connect with people even if they're not there in the moment that I'm talking to them. It can really hold like a state in my body of connecting to people who I

want to help and I'm really driven, my mission is to help people feel really good about their sexuality as their personal growth and it's just a part of who you are and your life force and your zest and your vitality and your connection with others and even your connection to God or spirit. And so as a woman on a mission, it's been super helpful for me to have the podcasting experience in my back pocket.

Dave: Since you've been doing this for so long, you've been doing a lot about the internet, obviously a lot around marketing, what did you notice in this change overall all these years?

Susan: oh there's a couple of things. Number one there are some rules that always holds true, one of them is that there at any given time in the market, there are a certain number of publishers that are who are getting a disproportionate share of traffic and therefore, are the place that you want to advertise. So that that I think is important right now and it's been Google for a long time but Google's going up and down with regard to how hard and easy it is to buy advertising from them based on how, who's in management at the time and what their stock price is doing. Same thing with Facebook, they've aggregated a very large audience but they are, they have had a lot of whimsy around whether or not it's easy or hard to buy advertising from them. So I think as a marketer I have always been oriented toward novelty leveraging early platforms to get a disproportionate share of market presence. And you have to hit that right, you have to hit it when they're getting big but they haven't realized how successful they are and they haven't started to dial it back and make it hard to be successful. Those are like technologically competitive loopholes that you can shoot a hole you can shoot through as a marketer. So I have always like staying on what's the latest is and also watching the trend of marketers or publishers tightening up their restrictions around advertising and making it harder and harder to get a positive or a Y on your media spent. So that's one thing that I see going on especially also and around SEO with Google's algorithm changes and etc. the rules change a lot with marketing when you're dealing with media and publishers and buying audience. And you have to stay on top of that or you can often get your campaigns messed up or shut down you know not converting what have you. So I think that's one thing. Obviously there's been a giant move in the last few years to everyone being a content publisher, marketers being content publishers having a voice, having an opinion. It started out in 140 characters in twitter and moved quickly into blogging and entire content marketing experiences where brands have more of a transparent public presence both from a customer support perspective but also from a branding perspective. It's no longer them running ads on other people's billboards, television shows, websites but in fact creating their own content and owning their brand experience and I think that's going to continue to proliferate. Brands are going to get more savvy about the value and benefit of the content experience that they can bring to their particular customers. That's another piece that I think is also changing is that marketers are thinking much more about being in a niche. Who is my customer exactly and what am I to them and how can I be even more to them so that there's a bond to my brand and they become a loyal repeat customer. How can I expand my product line so that they buy not only this but this and this from me as well and so more and more brands are taking those kinds of things as well as conscious marketing, conscious capitalism, green marketing, that's a big influence now as well on brands. Were moving away from the brands who create products that ruin the universe to brands that are rewarded for making the universe better. And you can see the shift in dollars happening for many companies in that way.

Dave: And are there specific resources you would recommend for people so they can stay ahead of the change in rules or do you just recommend that they spend a lot of time reading whatever they can on SEO changes and marketing changes on the internet?

Susan: I stay ahead of the changes by working in masterminds. A mastermind is a group of people in my business or your business that are similar to you. You would think about them almost as competition. The idea in my business of product marketing is that we can't create all the products that are going to satisfy our entire market. People who follow me are men, women, single, married, gay, straight, you know, everything every permutation, divorced, widowed, not even ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend, 37 year old virgins, you know the whole thing. I can't create everything that's right for them. And so what I do is I partner with other quality companies that produce content that meets my level of quality and I promote those things to my followers and say hey, you know, if you are this kind of a person I really like this and it can help you. And that's an affiliate marketing model and when I do that I work with a lot of people but there are a few people that are I am in a mastermind with and we share a lot of our insider information in a very transparent way about what works and doesn't work for our business of the things that we try because we are very innovative in our industry. And so by being in a mastermind and getting together every quarter or every year or depending on which masterminds I'm in, getting together at conferences and events, were able to give each other and were on list serves together, being able to share that kind of information with our competition but it's not, they're our partners, its super helpful for all of us in understanding where opportunities lie. And so that's the number one place where we get very specific market knowledge about the next generation of marketing and technology.

Dave: you're embracing your competitors and everybody's working together because it's such a big market that sounds like there's plenty of opportunities for everyone rather than competing and work together. Its genius and its simple.

Susan: Thank you! Yeah masterminds are a common thing now, more and more people are doing it and I'm actually in a couple of them.

Dave: And how do you find these, do you just start talking to people saying I have this mastermind group you would be great to have in their or what's the best way for somebody to start up a mastermind?

Susan: you should research it, use the Google, learn about masterminds, maybe join one. And then I wouldn't recommend you start one until you've been in one because there are some good ones and there as some bad ones and they're all running a little differently but you should look at whether your competition is doing one and you just don't know about it.

Dave: one thing that I find interesting and a lot of people that ask me about is there's a lot of technologist who listen to this podcast and everybody said you need to have a personal brand on the internet. You should be on LinkedIn, you should be doing post, and you should be on Twitter and maybe have a podcast like this. What advice would you have for people who are starting to get into this or maybe for people who have been doing it for a while but are not getting the results they like to get?

Susan: First thing I'd say is be careful what you post on Face book. I think it's more about minimizing your risks than it is about maximizing your opportunities because the one thing you post on Face book, I'd like, never post, except for me, I can post about sex, you guys can't. But I would not ever post about politics of religion. I just think it's a bad idea because you're never; you're just going to make somebody unhappy. So of course you should have a LinkedIn profile, My God, what year is this. Hello! Absolutely. If you are trying to earn a salary, get a LinkedIn

profile and put a good picture up there. One of the number one things that I think is a mistake that people make is having a poorly lit, poorly shot photo of oneself on the internet or a LinkedIn profile or what have you. It's very important to have a cleaned up and well presented visage for potential, you know, employers in the future. I think it's very important to keep, you know, I'm an entrepreneur, so I am not even hireable Dave. I mean, you know, first of all, "I'm in the sexuality business" s like who's going to touch me in the 10 foot pole, nobody. And I already run my own business so I'm not really thinking about it in that way but I would just definitely can say to people, the number one thing is your reputation management everything else from there is just gravy. Do you need to have a podcast? Oh No, you do not need to have a podcast. Do you need to have a blog? Oh no, you do not need to have a blog. But do you need to have a nice profile with a good photo of yourself? Rabsorutery. One of the the number one things that we do in our mastermind is that we help each other. The concept of a mastermind is a rising tide floats all boats and so by sharing information we definitely do that but we also cross promote each other and I have promoted for other people's offers for years and years before asking them to do anything for me. So but then again and I want to say there's a caveat to everything, sometimes you just need to call somebody up and be like hey dude, can you do me a solid and mail this thing to your list? Because I think it's going to do really well and I know I haven't done it for you yet and I totally will, you know but, this is what I need from you right now. One of the things I think people get really scared about is asking for the help that they need to be successful. And so I would just encourage you to you know you cannot achieve anything without the help of others and is being able to be clear on what it is you're doing and why you need their help and what it is that they can do for you makes it very easier for people to help you. People love to give as much if not more than they like to receive and so that is one thing I would say to someone coming up in the ranks is look for ways to help others but don't be afraid to ask for help.

Dave: I think people forget about like you said, they get shy, I don't want to ask, I haven't done anything for this person yet.

Susan: once you get in the mindset of giving and supporting and helping people and you've just helped so many people, when you help it doesn't matter if that's the person you've helped or not, you know how many people you've helped and supported and it makes it a lot easier to ask when you need support.

Dave: Speaking of support, I noticed you've created a lot of infrastructure around all the work that you're doing rather than going out and using things that other people have created and what led you to doing all this yourself? Is there some reason why you didn't just want to use what was already available?

Susan: We use a combination of our own technologies and off the shelf products but most of them are our own in satiation of them so you know we didn't build our own shopping cart, we used alter cart, we used click bank for part of our offerings. We didn't use Kajabi we built our own landing page generator out of ruby on rails. We used that for something because it's really nice and stable and it does get hacked like you know if you used the lead pages, everybody knows that's all for affiliate marketing and so Facebook kind of depercued makes it harder, we don't use get response 360 or an eye contact or a mail chimp we have our own insantiation of ARP reach, we run our own mail servers etc. so we have a bit of a Hodge Podge, it's not a Hodge Podge it's just a collective of roll our own and integrate existing good pieces of technology to build our business. We need to be an island because we are in the sexuality content space, computers and algorithms and generally people until they spend more than 3

seconds looking at our content can't tell the difference between it and pornography. Anything sexual is just lumped categorically into the bad puddle you know and so we have to run our own email servers and things like that because no one's stopping and going, oh is this heart connected conscious love making or is this just nasty old porn, you know. So we had to become a bit of an island in that way and build our own capabilities because we can't risk our business to people who suddenly look at this and say, "Wait a minute, what? This email is about lovemaking? Shut it down." You know, we can't just risk our business for that. Most people in smaller business can certainly cobble together and make amazing things out of existing technologies without fear of getting shut down. So I'm a bit of an aberration in that way. But I'm also and very lucky to have worked with the inventor of Rhapsody. He's a good technologist we have a great CTO. We have a great engineering team and we work with our team all over the world. Our email team is in the Philippines, our engineering team is in India and we just brought people in and worked with them for years and trained them and they just got better and better and better at our business and even a year ago our team just like really got integrated and started really working together. Our business went to a whole new level. It's a combination of having a good tech infrastructure and really investing in people in the long term and creating a family environment. That's been a good combination for us.

Dave: Have you found that there's, any issues around spam considering the type of content that you're sending out?

Susan: We have a very elaborate system of different technologies and services in place. The first thing is that it is so easy to unsubscribe from our emails that we try to make it easier than hitting the spam button. The second thing is that we segment our audiences very well. We give them the ability to choose explicit or non explicit content, for men or for women, for in a relationship or not in a relationship so we do a lot of segmentation. We really work on our IP management and our sender, our IP reputation and our sender score. We clean our list all the time. We mail to people who open our emails and slowly and surely drop people off who don't. And the people who signed up, you know, there's double opt-ins, there's just like, there's probably like 40 things in that IP and that's an understatement about what it takes to run an email business with a 99% deliverability that we get to the inbox. It's taken us years to get good at this and were constantly innovating and that's the other thing, our competitors copy our stuff all the time like we'll do something and we see other people doing it all the time. And so we just out innovate. We're just always innovating around our emails, around how to get people to know, like and trust us so that we can help the people who want to be helped and so that's very, very big for us is a reputation and trust and consistency going back to how you were talking about podcast. We mail 5 days a week – Wednesday thru Sunday. Hopefully, you're going to get a good email from us you like 5 days a week. You're not going to open them all, but you're going to open the ones that are relevant to you based on the subject lines. We do split test variant tests on subject lines. You know, we do as many things as we possibly can with the team we have to be an excellent, to be someone, who really sends super great content to your inbox that's fascinating, life affirming and gives you actionable things for free that will make your pleasure and connecting better than it was before you open the email. That's what we do, that's our focus. We do a very good job of onboarding people slowly to the reality of what we have available for them. And they tend to mostly like it and if they don't it's super easy to unsubscribe.

Dave: So is there anything else you'd like to say to wrap everything up?

Susan: the only thing that I want to say and I say this whenever I have the opportunity to stand in front of a microphone is that every human being is born a sexual being and your sexuality is

your zest for life so much of it. And we end up being disconnected in our way of being using so much technology now and to just spend more time looking at people in the eyes and touching people and hugging people whether it's your partner or your nephew or your mother or what have you but Trying to stay embodied and connected to yourself and others in light of us having so much gear now, technology in our lives becomes more and more important in living a life that serves you and brings you joy, brings you pleasure and connection. And so that's the only thing I would say you know like go out and give somebody a hug. Don't forget that stuff. It's the fundamentals. I did want to say one more thing and that was my website, its PersonalLifeMedia.com. That's how you can find me. We've got tons of free content on there. There's all kinds of free reports and even if you don't have 2 pennies to rub together, its okay with us, we just like everybody to come along for the ride. So check us out at PersonalLifeMedia.com if that's something that has called to you in our conversation today.