

Ask Right + Good Values-Based Branding with Ashlee Sang

Hello everyone. I hope you're having a wonderful day. Today is a great day because we are doing Ask Right and Good. If you are not familiar with Ask Right + Good, it's a conversational series we do as a brand to talk to people we love working with, who understand the mission we're focused on which is, leading better business but also leading a more balanced and better life. So hopefully you resonate with that. I think today's guest actually will also really resonate with you just because her focus is always values based and values based driven marketing, so we really appreciate that. If you're not familiar with the format of this, these conversations are meant to be digestible and short so that you leave feeling inspired and with questions. So here at around the 20 minute mark, feel free to hop in and ask questions, we can answer them throughout. If not, and you're watching the replay. You can always pop in and post questions that we can answer as well.

So yay, Ashlee, we're so glad to have you today! Actually Ashlee is with Ashlee Sang Consulting. And she's one of our Collective members as well as an Impact partner, helping bring people conscious marketing for their purpose driven brands. So, Ashlee, I'd love if you could just introduce yourself and share a little bit more about your agency.

Yeah, thanks so much for organizing. I love, love, love what Right + Good does, and it is so aligned.

So, what I do in my business is, I work with these visionary founders who have a really clear idea of what they want to announce to the world, what their purpose is, what their vision is that they're going to be accomplishing through their business, but they don't always have the words to get everything that's in their head and heart out to the world.

You know, we live with ourselves all day every day. So it's super clear to us but it is not always clear to impact partners to sponsors to our customers, right? Like the exact people that we want to serve. We are not always super clear at how we can best serve them. So that is where brand messaging strategy comes into play. And that is how I approach my relationships with my clients. It is really starting at that foundational level of, "Who do you want to be as a brand? How do you want to be perceived because that's all branding is? What are those messages surrounding your values and your audience and where they intersect, that are going to resonate? How are those words those messages going to grow your business and ultimately grow your impact that is the goal?"

So I do intensive around brand messaging strategies. And then I also do some marketing consulting around all the other things once we have the brand messaging strategy in place.

Wonderful. Thanks for sharing that.

I know something that I ended up talking a lot about with Right + Good is that the words that you shared the like branding, the marketing, the messaging, the communications, not everyone understands the nuance between like, what all of those things are. So when do you feel like

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people usually find you like how would you identify that someone has the problem that you can help with like I get it as a business owner.

I work in comms. I don't call Ashlee whenever I need breathing help, but like, what kinds of questions are clients asking when you tend to find them?

Yeah, so generally you need a brand messaging strategy. Like the external process of it, you need it all the time. But you need to work on it. Generally when you are launching something new, brand new business brand new audience you're trying to reach brand new offer that sort of thing, to really getting in, check with how does this align with my values? How does this align with my audience. All the things.

More often I work with people who have already had success and momentum, like they're very happy, great business, they're a few years in, they have some really amazing clients. They have some really amazing impact that they've had, and they're ready to level up. They're about ready to redo their website. They know it's not aligned anymore. They want some strategy behind the website.

Now they're not ready to redo their visual branding. They want something to bring to their visual branding designer and say, "This is what I want you to represent with the fonts and the colors and all the things." I don't do any of that visual stuff. I do the intention behind it. I do what is it that you want to be known for? How you want to make people feel especially so it's really either that launching something new, super excited to put it out into the world with intent, or ready to level up. I've piecemealed this I have DIY. Or maybe I did hire someone originally and I just needed some fresh outside perspective. That is my role, and that's how I'm able to help them. Yeah, that's so great to differentiate that because I think, you know, for a lot of maybe the mission driven leaders that we work with, I find that a lot of those people begin that work because they have a passion to solve a problem not to run a business, not nonprofit, not to figure out the administration and the brand messaging, you know, it's our jobs and your job to help them you know, take like you said what was in their brain and put that to paper so that other people can really absorb that message. If they're not able to see them in person? Yeah, we're so close to it, right. I mean, I struggle with this in my own business because it's hard. It's hard to niche down your audience is hard to figure out the exact pain points that you're solving and how to actually convey that. That is why you need consultants. That is why you need partners. That is why you need a business bestie whatever it is, that is why you need someone else because we are all just so close to it. There's just no way to feasibly and effectively do it on our own. And there are many people that know how to do those things. That's why That's why other people I think what's really interesting about owning my own business is and I'm sure you probably feel the same way is over time realizing at a certain point you get to enough success that you have to start investing in yourself to go to that next level, like you said, it's not a scrappy thing where you're building everything all by yourself, like you said, maybe the level one version of that. And to get to level two, it's a

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scaling process that does require like you said, partners maybe to help get that perfect messaging across

Yeah. And that scrappiness is like what's so fun? For many of us, right? And it's our baby and it's our vision. And that was part of the challenge, right? But that's a part of what we love about entrepreneurship. But there is something to be said for not just doing what you've always done. If you want to get results right if you want to be expanding or growing or if you want to not be working 100 hours a week in your business or whatever it is, then you do need to change something up so you know whether that's investing in a systems person or a content creator or some sort of strategist, whatever it is, whatever your needs are, eventually you do need to change something

up. Yeah, absolutely. And the rewards that come on the other side of that investment, like a reward of working for you. You know, I think it's really hard to under or to oversell, you know how just like competent you feel in your business. When you feel like the message you're putting out there is really consistent. It's like hitting the mark. Every time you find yourself in those conversations. It's so much easier to convey what you do and talk about what you do because you feel really excited about the words you helped, you know, Smith together to put that message out there.

Yeah, that's why I love the process. It's so personal. And I love that it is it is CO created. It is everything that like the guides that I produced for grandmas screenshot if you guys right like it is everything that they were feeling and wanting to convey. The the client they the founder, but they just didn't have the words even though I pulled the words directly from our conversation, right? It's all about distilling it. It's all about oftentimes founders feel like oh, that tiny detail isn't important. No, that is your differentiator. That is what makes them special, right? Or they know that they're living out their values, but they didn't even place a name to what their values are. That sort of thing. So honestly, even more than like the deliverable itself, like oh, now I have a brand messaging guide that I can fall back on every time I need to update my website, copy, update my social bio, create your content, whatever it is. Even more than that. It is the process. It is the clarity that comes from someone else reflecting what you think and feel. And that's sort of priceless in a lot of ways and that way you have the confidence to show up persistently in your message and in also the mission that you're that you're working toward. And that clarity is is really really hard to find. So once you do

I totally agree. How did you get into this world of brand messaging? I know your story, but I love it. Do you mind sharing a little bit about your background and how you decided to focus on working with mission driven clients?

Yeah, so like so many of us. I am an accidental entrepreneur. I was vaguely interested in like taking a baseball class and undergrad and I just was like always too afraid or I heard they did group projects. So I just decided no, no, I don't want that. So I come from the international development sector. I worked in Senegal in West Africa. My local San Luis flag back there. worked there for four years and that is where I learned so much about every facet of communications. I was an executive assistant at first. So I learned a lot about NGO management and sort of those executive level decisions. I was in the room even though I wasn't making the decisions, obviously. And then I learned a lot about branch and media relations and donor relations and taking these really boring field reports and converting them into blog posts that someone in America or Norway or wherever I actually want to read and making a story out

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of that. And I learned about internal communications and brand management and how hard it is to convince people that this is important that we have a cohesive brand. And so that that is where I really learned the foundations of communications. And then when my husband got his green card to PSN, Italy's we moved to the US. I figured up in DC or New York, which are the international development hubs, plenty of immigrants in both of those places. But we ended up in central Illinois where I sort of grew up and I was actually really pleasantly surprised to see that there's a thriving nonprofit and small business sector in my town. I was completely unaware of growing up. So I ended up working with a local Habitat for Humanity and their restore which I am obsessed with. Love for something I didn't even know this thing existed in my town. And so it was really cool to be doing lots of community relations and social media and just all things three occasions. For habitat and restore. And I've been freelancing on the side because we weren't sure when we were going to be able to move. They don't tell you when you go through the green card process in case someone didn't know that. So I wanted something in the works and also it was great supplemental income. And I just ended up loving it. And so the beginning of 2019. I just decided, You know what, this is what I want to do. I want to take this freelancing full time. And so I found out very quickly that running a business is very different than freelancing on the side I found that I actually really enjoy all of the problem solving and all of the connecting with fellow entrepreneurs and all the things that come with running a business. So I was working a lot with local nonprofits and small businesses because we're gonna have to travel a lot faster that way and that felt really comfortable. But all the while I really into the conscious consumerism movement, I have been for probably seven, eight years now. And so I decided, you know, what, if my goal is impact, my goal is to have vicarious impact. So I want to support businesses that are having amazing impact. And by injecting myself in this small way, I am able to then have an impact myself because they're going to amplify that impact or triple trickles back to me, that's the vicarious impact that I want to be having. So at the beginning of 2020 I really leaned into the online space, because I knew that there wasn't a ton of social impacts happening in my town. I did get to work with a free Fairtrade store in my town, which is really cool. But rent when everyone else was also turning online, is when I happen to also want to be in these online spaces. So that's really, really double down on this idea of values work and audience work and aiming to work with people who have a very clear vision of impact in mind. And so the path to brand messaging specifically, was also sort of accidental, of course, it was a very organic progression, but I was doing lots of Dinefwr you copy and content, and sometimes folks would come up where they needed a brand messaging strategy or some sort of related strategy. And I realized, Whoo, that's what I like to do. I'm much better strategy than the actual sort of churn of content. And also if my goal is impact, I was getting hired for a lot of blog posts, social media posts, etc. that had no strategy behind them. So they were spending money on me and I'm spending my time creating these things. They didn't have much intention behind them. So I really like the idea now of working with founders at the strategy level so that all the future people that they hire are all the time that they spend on their content, content creation or what conferences to attend or who to hire. Anything is founded in something and that's something for me is values. So that's sort of been the progression of where I am now, who knows where I'll go next, but that's really why I like to work with people and how I found my way into this little sphere.

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Yeah, thank you so much for sharing. I love when everyone is really just honest about their path because suddenly, you know, all those disconnected dots make more sense when you look at the big picture. Before I started working for myself. You know, maybe even before that, as a young graduate, I would aspirationally look at people's LinkedIn or their careers and be like, how did they get this job? How did they go from here to here and realizing, you know, following that passion and the energy that's there, more similar than seeking titles or certain organizations and roles, you know, how that can create your own version and you can both end up in the same place. And that's what I love about all the entrepreneurs that I work with is that everyone is it seems like it's somewhere different than they may have guessed 10 years ago, but they're so close and they've created their own version of it. And I love that alignment because like you said, you just follow these things that seemed interesting and inspiring to you. And now you've made your business that way which I think is really incredible.

Yeah, for me, it's really important to stay open to opportunity. One of my core values is this idea of exploration and open mindedness and not being boxed in and so sometimes that leans towards shiny object syndrome. And sometimes that really allows for things to come into my life and need to seize opportunities that are way better than I ever could have imagined. I had zero intentions or goals of being an entrepreneur or doing anything really what I'm doing now, and even in my personal life, things are better than I could have planned for myself. Yeah. So this concept of just being open is really, really important.

Absolutely. Thanks for sharing that. I think to wrap up this conversation I would love for those that are watching and maybe haven't been through a formal brand exercise, or maybe they didn't have the best experience before I sometimes hear that. How do you typically work with a client like what does that process typically look like? And yeah, I would just love to understand that a little bit more especially online.

Yeah, so I have found that working online and remotely has not been a barrier at all. If anything, it just allows for us to be connected in so many other ways. Like I just worked with someone this morning who's in Italy have worked with her you know, or would have been much more difficult to work with her if the beauty of the internet so I found that it hasn't been a barrier at all to work remotely with people. And I have as I have honed my offers and my process I've been focusing on intensives so I like it because it preserves my time. I do have a newborn. So I have very little time. Can also it attracts people who are action takers. I don't like strategy for the sake of strategy. A strategy is only as good as it is implemented. So I don't want to be doing strategy work with someone, even if they paid me \$1 million. I don't want that money if they're not going to be using the strategy. The whole goal is impact. So that's why I work in intensive so I do one hour quick wind consulting calls. And that's not necessarily around brand messaging. A lot of times that's around values actually. Literally grinding it without defining and refining those values. But if you really need anything under the sun, I just did one about how fast can you review my pitch email, what sort of podcast many pitches and that sort of thing. So those are when our containers to be working on whatever marketing means or questions people have. My main foundation foundational offer is a one day intensive. So that is the messages that matter VIP day and that is really there's a pre questionnaire. Someone sit down and reflect and it's sort of long, it's pretty robust, and they just sort of bring down everything. And then we get on a call together for about two hours. And we go through line by line, because I find that people speak differently than they write it. Right. Especially if you are not awesome with words or you feel like

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you aren't great at words. It's really useful to hear what they say and also see what they write and sort of distill both of those descriptions together, pull them apart, ask a lot more questions about what's there, what's not there. Ooh, that's a really golden nugget, like lean into that sort of thing. And then I created a brand escape guide for them. And we go over that together as a wrap up call and then there's a follow up call for a second empathetic accountability because again, I want it to be leveraged, I want it to be used and sometimes you just need things to sink in a little bit. So that's the one day intensive and then I have a few other offerings in the works like a half day and a 90 day but the one hour and the one day are really the core way I work with people.

Yeah, and I like that. I love those focus sessions as well to your point because I think it requires someone to be really serious about making changes. And the way that the accountability timeline works through that is really, really wonderful. I also love what you said about distilling between what they say and what they write. I kind of jokingly say that the worse they write, the better they speak or other words they write, the better they speak. And it's almost the art of just helping them understand that, you know, if you if I literally transcribe what you're saying, like you're doing, you're older, you've clearly worked it so like let's figure out how to put it into a package that everyone can use and have one source of truth so that everyone's branding and messaging is consistent based on the great message you've already put together. So it's it's fun to work with people everyone makes the experience very different like you said, so yeah, and it's so personal and and it's really cool because the process works, whether you have a whole team that needs to be on board, or whether we were only on your own and you need to show up consistently every time because if you say what you do differently every single time, like depending on who you're talking to. It's going to be confusing and you're going to be hard to refer that sort of thing. So I just love how universal processes.

Yeah. That's wonderful. Well, thank you so much for joining us today for those who've tuned in. Thank you and thanks for your questions or comments. We'll be sure to check those out. Again, we've been chatting about values based messaging today and branding. So if you want to work with Ashlee, I want to find out more about this topic. Ashlee, where can people find you?

Yeah, so your am on LinkedIn is under my name, not under my business. But also my website is Ashlee st.com. Ashlee with two E's saying like sing a song. And then if someone wants to sort of get a peek into my framework, I do have a free download surrounding brand messaging and that consistency checklist so that yes, you do actually implement. So that's accent athletes.com/stand out and then I am sort of most active on Instagram. At Ashlee send consulting.

Thank you so much. And thank you everyone for joining. Again, this is part of that ask break and good series. We actually have one more session before we take a little bit of a summer break. The right and good consulting HQ is relocating so we're taking a little time off for that and we'll keep you tuned in as well. But you can view the replay of Ashlee's call on LinkedIn or online at aspirate and good.com and we're excited to keep bringing you these conversations. Thanks again Ashlee. Thanks so much.