



How a movement took over LinkedIn

Anna McAfee, #LinkedInLocal

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Transcript:

Bailey (00:07):
Welcome to our show.

Bailey (00:14):
People building extraordinary communities. I'm your host, Bailey Richardson. I'm a partner at people and company and a co author of get together how to build a community with your people. And I'm, [inaudible] get together correspondent and the VP of content, the community for matter. And T T R a new media and community platform built on fixing the manufacturer divide in the U S we'll be launching early next year. Each episode we interview everyday people who have built extraordinary communities about just how they did it. How did they get the first people to show up? How did they grow to hundreds, even thousands, more members today we're talking to Anna McAfee on May 22nd, 2017. Anna put up a simple everyday post on LinkedIn to see if anyone living in her hometown of Coffs coast, Australia, which he just returned to after years of living abroad, wanted to get together.



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Bailey (01:08):

The goal was to get to know the people behind the profiles and Anna included the hashtag LinkedIn local 15 people would make it out to that first cost coast event. But the online response was what would change Anna's life. Three other people, all strangers Alexander Galvez in London, Manu Goswami and New York and Eric Eklund in Brussels raise their hand to also host a LinkedIn local in their city. The idea became four people, four cities in four different countries. As Anna says, no one could have predicted what was to happen. Post requests started pouring in from around the world. The founding team was soon running after hours trainings, six nights a week to help new cities ramp up for two years. And on her co-creators led, mentored and manage the LinkedIn local global community at its height. LinkedIn local had more than a thousand hosts and had rallied over 300,000 human beings in 650 cities and 92 countries all throughout Anna fostered this community without formal support from LinkedIn, walking a tight rope between an unexpected organic community that was blossoming and the priorities of the platform.

Bailey (02:19):

These people use to find each other in 2019, Anna stepped away. And we're going to dig into that on the podcast today. And she's recently coauthored a book about her experience, how a hashtag changed the world. Nia. I wanted to talk to you to cohost this episode with me because we both sat on the other side of the table from communities like LinkedIn local back when we worked at Instagram and YouTube, I'm wondering what stood out to you from our conversation today with Anna? Well, it really brought me back to the early days at YouTube when organic communities would spring up around the brand and we wondered how to handle it. I'm thinking of the first time that I heard about VidCon and YouTube space creator conference. I remember that a team we initially

Mia (03:00):



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Kept it at arms length. Part of it was wanting to see how this would turn out because they had really big ambitions for the event. And the other part was this belief that the YouTube community is a self-made meritocracy that didn't need us as the kingmakers to thrive. So in those early days, the brand felt like it had to take a back seat to what was happening on the actual platform. And you can even see that in the design of YouTube, how generic it is and how it is developed to let the creator do the talking and to really shine. So I feel like what happened with LinkedIn and LinkedIn, local followed perhaps the same path where initially the brand kept it at arms length and then gradually saw the value and wanted to get more involved.

Bailey (03:36):

Nice. Would you give to anyone navigating this kind of situation?

Mia (03:40):

I think these kinds of real world events and splinter communities, whether generated by the brand or by the community itself are so integral to strengthening bonds and helping people feel more invested in the community that they are literally helping to build. At this point, I think this kind of organic traction is something that any community manager would see as a sign of a community's health, assuming that the entity really upholds the same values. So if you notice this happening in your community, I would say embrace it. When I look at how burning man has navigated this, their community grew out of a single event in the desert. And like they could have kept this exclusive, but instead they encourage people to take the principles, take the cultural guideposts and add some of their regional flare cause you've got wiggle astrol in Argentina melting man in North Dakota, Kiwi burn, New Zealand.

Mia (04:24):

It's so cute to you would love it to, because each event has like different versions of the man or the effigy and different rituals around burning the effigy. So by empowering the community, Bernie man



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really helped a singular remote event turned into like a global community. I would also say, be really clear about what is, and isn't okay with regards to the usage of your logo and your name and your brand assets at Flipboard, we provided assets and guidelines that people could use to promote the non-official event like a Twitter chat or even our designer might offer feedback. It might also be really important that community not username and make it really clear that it's been unofficial that's on you and your team to make really clear with the community organizers. Finally, I would say, send schwag or figure out other ways to show these people some love they're doing the good work for you. Think about how to say thank you or find out what motivates them and give them more of that.

Bailey (05:17):

I love that before we jump in in 2019, Ana stepped away and we're going to dig into that on the podcast today and hash it out. She's recently coauthored a book about her experience and it's called how a hashtag change the world. All right, Anna, should we do it Anna, welcome to the podcast. We're so excited to have you here and I want to kick off right away with my favorite question. What do you think it is about you, your upbringing, your personality, your life stage that made you interested in community?

Anna (05:46):

For me, it's always been about the sense of belonging. I'm actually an only child. So I think right from the get go, I was always seeking out other people and peas. And I was in a situation where, you know, when you don't have siblings, you are forced to do that. And that was a really great thing for me because it taught me a lot of communication skills. And so throughout my life, I've sort of looked for places that I can belong as so many other people do. And, you know, in the case of the community that we're having a discussion about LinkedIn local, my, where I was at that point in time, I had two young kids, very young. I think they were one and three at the time. And I wasn't feeling of great sense of belonging within, you know, that whole mom community.



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And I was seeking some adult conversations and I went to the place that I knew that I could let something that I knew and I'd always kind of relied on, which was LinkedIn. And so the community built from there, but it was really driven by that search for a sense of belonging, which for my whole life, I think I've sought and will continue to seek.

Bailey (06:48):

I don't have children, but Mia, I know that you went to burning man with like a newborn didn't you, you just went like straight out there after having a kid.

Mia (06:59):

Totally. I actually went there when I was seven months pregnant and then soon as I recovered yeah, I took my kids there when they were four and six and yeah, like, and I was also looking for a sense of belonging and sense of community there. And actually surprisingly, I found it, there was a whole kids and family camp area that I've connected with. So

Bailey (07:18):

Hard pivot this podcast conversation and talking about the parents and community in burning man. And one thing that you shared with me when we first met was that you had lived all over the world and that you'd been a recruiter. And so LinkedIn was a place where you had a lot of fluidity and comfort and maybe had a lot of relationships and it was a place you went to, to intentionally seek community with people you hadn't known. And I'm curious, you know, can you tell me a little bit about that first post that you put up with the hashtag LinkedIn local and, and what was going through your mind and happening in your life that motivated you to get a group of people together in your town?

Anna (07:58):

I had been connecting with a lot of people, you know, through location searches on LinkedIn, finding really interesting people that I'd never



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met at events before, or didn't seem to go to normal events. And so I found this great group of people, but also had been discussing with people how inactive LinkedIn was in my city, which is Coffs Harbor. And this is a small city where 70,000 people, someone said it, this was in an online discussion. Well, if we've got such small numbers, why don't we all just meet up? And I thought, great, what a brilliant idea let's do it. And so a week after that, I put up a post and said, Hey, you know, I'm going to organize, you know, a local elite and local meetup, you know, date time who would like to come. And I just encourage people to tag their connections who might be interested.

Anna (08:45):

And it was meant to be a purely local post. And at the end, right before I hit the little post button, I thought, Oh, maybe I'll put a hashtag on this cause were never a thing on LinkedIn. And so I thought hashtag encourages participation. So I put the hashtag on and the post went out and locally, I got a great response, but quite crucially in terms of the actual grassroots global movement, there were a few people around the world that saw that. And that became, you know, Eric Eklund in Brussels, Alexandra Galvis in London and shortly after, not that post, but a subsequent one, swish Goswami in New York, we became the kind of co-creating team of this global movement because we all just started in four cities, in four countries across the world, just from simply this one post. How did you think about structuring that first meetup and what were your goals for it?

Anna (09:41):

It was extremely simple. It was to get to know the people behind the profiles. And I think I'd put that in the messaging as well. On the actual event, bright, it was a free event. It was a catch up for coffee. It was simply just to meet the faces behind those online profiles. And that there wasn't really a lot of structure. I knew it would be small because of the size of city, but, you know, I was ready to facilitate some sort of conversations if it needed to happen. And it didn't, people just turned up and were so it's amazing when you put



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people together in a room. And I think a lot of people feel that you need, Oh, well we need icebreakers and we need, you know, all these different things. And yes though, they are great, but sometimes there's an energy in the room that just doesn't need a facilitator because it, it just, just being there for the right purpose can create the conversations and create that energy that, that people need to, to connect with one another.

Mia (10:38):

Do you think people are so starved for real world connection these days? That that's part of it?

Anna (10:42):

Absolutely. I, you know, there are, and I've heard this time and time again from LinkedIn local hosts, there are thousands, not tens of thousands of networking events happening in cities, you know, all the time. And particularly from a business networking perspective, it's very, it's very false. It's very, you know, here's my business card, handy business cards around the room, walk away and expect a sale. And it just, it particularly in that business world, this is where I think the appetite for LinkedIn local just became so, so great was that, wasn't what it was about. People just wanted that authentic connection.

Bailey (11:20):

I read in one of your writings that you use. I feel like this is something that only a recruiter would know how to do, or someone who really knows LinkedIn would know how to do is that you use the sales navigator account, which is sort of like a premium LinkedIn account to do a postcode search and see the level of activity in your local area. So you were saying that in this post, just to give the numbers out and that's the city you live in 70,000 people, there were about 23,000 people or who had accounts. And about 280 were quote unquote active. And you were able to see those people behind the profiles in a more specific way than I think the average person would know how to do it.



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Anna (12:06):

It was just, it's what I knew. I had been involved in the early two thousands. I had been involved in recruitment. I was living in Scotland at the time. And within the industry, I was training a lot of recruiters. And when LinkedIn came along, we suddenly went from, you know, CV or resume data that was sent to us to suddenly live data on LinkedIn. Suddenly you could see people moving jobs, you could see who had just started a new position or somebody who had finished up a job. And that was a huge disruption in that industry back in around 90, sorry, 2007. And so, so yeah, so I have known how to use LinkedIn from that period and have used it for myself as well as trained a team of recruiters on how to use that. So sales navigator was part of that. So it's just to know the active numbers and know who to connect with, but the mindset behind that is really around locals.

Anna (13:04):

And particularly at the moment, I think in the world, not so much, three years ago when this was set up, but local is so central to who we are right now. And it's where you're going to find that face-to-face connection. If you're craving it, it's often from a business perspective where you're going to find new customers, particularly a lot of businesses are largely dependent on local support. And I think we forget that in global terms. So local was really central to me and where I was at the time. But I think for a lot of hosts that came along, it was a way to lead locally. And for me as well, it was about becoming that leader at a local level. And either putting your city on the map or showing that, or educating local people on, on be it LinkedIn or something else, it was a way to have not only, I guess, that leadership, but you know, an identity around, you know, forming a network of people and the social capital of the comes with, you know, being a leader in that local environment. And there's a pride in that having, I guess, a sense of pride in where you live and the city as well.



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Bailey (14:11):

We've gotten to talk to a bunch of different chapter communities. You start to see how many, how much value comes into the chapter leads life, because they get to be sort of like at the center of a wheel with many spokes, something that you said to me really stood out when we were talking. It was just about how LinkedIn is perhaps the most like people-centered platform. Would you mind sharing, sharing kind of how you see the platform compared to the other ones out there.

Anna (14:36):

The algorithm on LinkedIn, and even though it's evolving is really driven by the content by people, not so much by companies, LinkedIn and trying to change that a little bit, but it's very much driven by, you know, those. So you, if you put the same post on a company page, as opposed to, you know, your own profile, you're going to get a lot more from your own profile. And company pages obviously will grow over time, but on those followings will grow higher than say an individual's network. But the algorithm still prioritizes people looking at say Facebook, their revenue model comes largely from business advertising. LinkedIn's revenue model comes from only about 20% of it is based on ad revenue. The algorithm is not driven to constantly will help platforms not driven for ads. LinkedIn make their money from selling those premium subscriptions, which are attached to people as well as recruiters. It's very much been about people. The essence behind that is people do business with people, people, and getting to know people.

Bailey (15:40):

It's about people finding other people and being able to enter into deeper relationships with them.

Anna (15:45):

LinkedIn really does a lot of people out there have the same perception that this is a jobs platform it's been changing quite rapidly since I'd say probably since around 2017, it's really becoming



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more of an authentic marketing message. It's more of an it's. I mean, it's one big virtual networking room, not Y Y quote, that I've heard many people on LinkedIn say it, and it's true. You can go through your newsfeed and you can find some great people to meet the same way you would meet in a physical room. You can walk up to someone say hi, I start a conversation. And that's really what LinkedIn is about, but it does still because of its traditional roots in recruitment. And because it's, again, still a large part of their revenue, those recruiter models are driven by, by that side. I want to go back

Bailey (16:32):

LinkedIn local by one year in, after you post this hashtag LinkedIn local had showed up in 250 cities in 36 countries and 450 hosts. And co-hosts had helped you extend this post, this idea all around the world, which is just a really rapid speed of growth for any chapter organization or anything run locally. How did you empower those first other people to do it? Did they need any resources or training from you? What did you have to do to go from this? Hey, I'm just going to do this in my local area too. I'm now going to empower other people to do this.

Anna (17:12):

So the first people I met, which were Eric in brussel, Eric Eklund and Brussels, Alexandra Galvas in London and swish. Goswami in New York. They absolutely did not need any of my help at all. We had a call and we just exchanged a few ideas. What are you going to do at your event? You know, this is what I'm going to do. And we exchange those ideas and we each did one. So it was kind of almost a friendship forming. None of us actually knew each other prior to this,

Bailey (17:39):

It kind of blows my mind that your post got that far and wide to people all around the world. You didn't know. That means it was a pretty resonant posts. I call them co-creators



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Anna (17:50):

Because they absolutely were, you know, I was the one that put up the first post, but LinkedIn local would be nothing without them. And there's a really interesting, I don't know if you've ever seen, we probably have the Derek Sivers Ted talk.

Bailey (18:02):

Oh yeah. I saw you reference that. I know no one could beat him in terms of pudding, how to start a movement into like a 32nd, like description I'm like someday, maybe I'll be that good at communicating what this work is now that's the best. Yeah,

Anna (18:17):

Absolutely. There talks about the fact that the leadership is actually the first few followers. No, not the crazy person who did something strange. And that was absolutely right in my opinion, because what happened with LinkedIn local and why? One of the reasons I think it spread so much was those first few of us obviously started. And, but we were very open to say, Hey, if you want to start one in your city, reach out because we had gone out with the mindset, well, let's help each other. Let's, you know, exchange a few ideas. And very quickly, within a few months we had like, literally inboxes were just full of requests. Like is there one in Montreal is the one in Toronto? Is there one in Belfast? And we were getting requests from kind of all over the world. It was a very simple idea. It was something that just in the name itself, LinkedIn local, I mean, LinkedIn's name on it clearly resonated the local part resonated.

Anna (19:13):

It was something that they could do. And it was something that we offered help to do. So, and that was really loosely done in that we just, you know, had some zoom calls, we'd say, Hey, you know, we're having a zoom call at 8:00 PM EST. This was in the early days. Or Hey, just one, let's jump on a one-to-one call. I can tell you what I've done in my city. You can, you know, so you can kind of learn from



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that. And so that was, I guess, how we formed. We set at the very early outset, we did set some core values amongst the four of us that we really felt were important.

Bailey (19:46):

Tell me about those. What were those values? That's very precious

Anna (19:50):

Was the very, very first one. What we didn't want was people setting up exclusive events. I mean, that's what the whole heart, the whole problem with, I think business networking can be, as it can be quite explosive either in paid models or invite only. So we didn't want that. We wanted it to be very collaborative, not competitive. So, you know, in that very, you know, there's a lot of LinkedIn users out there. So it's trying to create this exclusivity where you're not, you know, you're not willing to collaborate with other people perhaps in your city. We really wanted that collaboration spirit behind it. Authenticity was a core value. And that was really about not making these events about throwing business cards in your face. It was about just coming and being the human being that you are the person behind the profile and not, and keeping it pitch free.

Anna (20:40):

And we're also one of our other values was respect for one another. And that was again about keeping it pitch free. We would respect, you know, not to create these highly sales pitch environments. And lastly, the one thing we did ask of hosts because we were, and we were very conscious at the outset that LinkedIn's name was on this. And we were very mindful not to infringe on any intellectual property. And so we did say that the events had to be not-for-profit. So no one was to make a profit from LinkedIn local. And that largely, that happened from us helping. So we never, there was never a fee to be a host. There was never a charge to have a conversation. We did the entire thing voluntary, and also the events themselves. Either we asked that



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people would kick them free because at the very outset we wanted to work with LinkedIn on this.

Anna (21:31):

We could see how much it was transforming people's relationship with the platform. And in order to, I guess, try and, and not trade on any toes. There were a few things we did, but one of them was to make the events not-for-profit. And so if people were charging because some cities wanted to charge on the basis that they knew free events, wouldn't work, we said, we'll partner with a local charity and just donate the proceeds to that charity, which worked amazingly well in some cities, there's some phenomenal stories that have come out of some cities and the charities that they've supported, but also that the not-for-profit as well, it created an environment where the hosts that wanted to come in just to charge you \$50 a ticket and make money. We got rid of those by making it not-for-profit because it just, they were just one attracted to it anymore.

Anna (22:19):

So it really made that not-for-profit really, I guess, underpin the authenticity behind the events, because it wasn't solely there to make money. It was there to create an environment and a community of people, rather than just a, you know, a one-way cell I'd love to hearing about your values. And I was wondering how, when you, when some of your principles are around diversity collaboration, authenticity, like how do you balance those principles with the desire to really keep tight high quality community? And how do you balance those principles with growth? I think the values actually helped the growth. We were not short of hosts. In fact, we, I mean, LinkedIn local Bailey, you said that the numbers that a year at two years, I know it was at 96 countries and 650 cities. I think that is crazy. That is such a fast scale. We had no resources, so we'd slapped together a process to onboard hosts, to use the phrase, move fast and break things.



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Anna (23:15):

We did a lot of that. We had style hosts, onboarding calls. We had a 30 day time limit with zoom. We had about six zoom calls a week with about 10 spots on each. I was getting messages from people like I can't get, I can't get a cold. I can't get on a call for the next 30 days. And there's nothing beyond 30 days. We were getting, people were getting up at 2:00 AM to get on these calls. What an appetite is incredible. I phenomenal appetite. So growth an issue for us. The values helped us find the right people and curate that experience. And that was why it was such a well curated community. At least in my opinion, is, was because of the values, the values attracted the right people that we needed with resources. It could have been three times. The size. One thing

Bailey (24:06):

We talk about in our book is that you have to be able to put this signal out somehow that this community exists. What fueled the awareness of LinkedIn

Anna (24:18):

Group photos were really big, big one. Some of the phrasing that we use, which was quite strategic, the first one was getting to know the people behind the LinkedIn profiles. People really identified with that. Secondly, and I give credit to Eric Eklund for this, with his hashtag connecting humans, which I think many cities still use on their marketing today. Thirdly, was the type of posts we did, which were of groups having fun. One thing that I guess the planets kind of aligned for us was the first post went out in June, 2017, only three months after we started native video got released on LinkedIn, which is kind of strange to think that LinkedIn, you couldn't actually share a native video on LinkedIn until three years ago. But yeah,

Bailey (25:02):

Like doing that back in 2008, you know,



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Anna (25:06):

Videos, you know, Alex did one in London, Eric did one in Brussels, but many other cities around the world just had, you know, a videographer just quickly throw together some pretty amazing sort of one to two minute videos. And they just brought these events to life. There was this fantastic one that Eric was, you know, talked about, you know, go personal first. Don't ask people what they do for a living. And he was so well put together and people just were crying out. I need this in my city. I'm so desperate for some authentic sort of business networking like help me please. The release of video really did have something to do with how well the movement grows as well. The way it was managed. We were very open to reach out to us if you want help. We wanted to keep the host community together in that we wanted all the hosts in Florida to know each other. We would connect them all after we had calls with them, we connect them with all the cities around them so they could support each other. So we had that real community mindset and community being what was kind of core to the whole LinkedIn local community was the host community. And that's what we were driving that is

Bailey (26:12):

Community organizer, community professional instinct. But I don't think that was really in your background. So how did you have that instinct to do that?

Anna (26:22):

I actually think it probably is in my background somewhere in that I've always been someone who will have a conversation and pick up threads in that conversation and say, Hey, there's somebody I think that you should talk to because I've heard a similar conversation with them. I think you'd have a lot in common with, yeah, I've always been that connector you could see in Florida was a great example, Fort Lauderdale connected to Miami that connected to Orlando that connected to West Palm beach. And you would just put those, those people together in a thread and you would instantly see them. Great. Well,



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actually I can come to your event next month and I'm going to drive down to that. You could instantly see that people were just feeding off each other. A good example was switched, would do a post. And he'd say, if you want to start one in city, reach out to myself or Anna or Eric or Alex or something.

Anna (27:09):

And we'd see in the threads of these, the comments and people like, Hey, you know, I'd love this to happen in Montreal. And if I had just spoken to a Montreal host, I would just jump in and comment and say, Hey, there actually is a Montreal one starting next month connect with Godwin Chan and or people would say, would you help me start one in Vancouver? And we would say, yeah, I've already spoken to someone in Vancouver, let me connect you with them. And we would just literally just put these hosts together and just create those connections. So it's something that I have, I think always just done

Bailey (27:41):

Things we really want to talk with you about Anna, especially just given Mia and my experiences in our past jobs, Mia, as the, her community manager at YouTube and me helping with the early community at Instagram, it's just this tension that can show up. Sometimes between HQ, a big a company that's getting bigger and bigger or already big. And the organic communities that show up to pour their time into activating the humanity of the platform. Mia and I both have had experiences with this with VidCon and for me with Instagram meetups and meetup hosts, but I'd love to hear what was your experience interacting with LinkedIn? When did you first get on their radar?

Anna (28:26):

At the outset, we were very mindful of what LinkedIn would think about what we were doing. We knew their name was on it. We'd been through the user agreement. We've looked at various aspects that we, we knew that we couldn't do one of which was not using the, the official logo.



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Secondly was not registering domain names with LinkedIn in the URL. So we followed as many rules as we could find. We were keen to work with LinkedIn HQ. So we started in the very early days to try and reach out, to have a conversation with the team at LinkedIn as to what we were doing, get some feedback from them. How could we kind of help each other in a way I'm not sure it was really under anybody's remit or at least we couldn't find a team.

Bailey (29:08):

Were your expectations going into that meeting? What, what did you think might happen or did you think LinkedIn would, would support you sort of unequivocally or where you have no expectations?

Anna (29:17):

We had expectations that they would like what we were doing. This was changing the platform and the way people use the platform, it was creating an enormous amount of very rich and authentic content. 11 months in someone from LinkedIn's team actually reached out to us and said, could we jump on a call? And the feedback that we had on that call was really positive. They loved the events, they loved the content coming out of the events in particular. And they looked at the first conversation was really around how they could support the content and how they could support us. It was in a very nonfinancial way and that was fine. And we didn't expect them to say, here's a bunch of money gone do this, mails you, one of the big checks. We looked at little things like creating a little video filter for LinkedIn local hosts so that they could actually do a video with the little sticker on it that said LinkedIn local.

Anna (30:10):

And that was actually developed and rolled out to about six people and then stopped. And so we were 11 months in 12 months in, at this point, our first conversations were really positive. And I think at that time, Forbes had wanted to do an article about LinkedIn local. And that was actually how they found out about it. At least this



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Anna McAfee, #LinkedInLocal

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particular tape, because Forbes that approached them and said, we want to do an article about LinkedIn local and they'd said bright, okay, let's go and find out. I don't think Forbes ever published that. So it was really positive. But about two months after that, the language changed within the conversation and it largely became about brand protection. One thing we were really struggling with in the host community was people using the logo. We had said to people do not use the official logo. A lot of offices are getting contacted to say, is this an official LinkedIn event?

Anna (30:56):

We were very clear in all of our mentoring processes that people shouldn't use the logo and also needed to really stay on their event descriptions that this is not an official LinkedIn event, which leaked in locals, a user-driven community to get to know the people behind the LinkedIn profiles. What LinkedIn were really just driven by was protecting the legal aspect of the brand. Making sure that yeah, we weren't infringing on anything over the course of 10 months. We had a couple of calls with them. We gave them a bunch of ideas on how they could support us in nonfinancial ways. It's hard to say, what did I expect from them? Because we didn't expect this global movement. We didn't say let's go and build it. A global movement to 96 countries at the outset. It just literally happened. And we ran with it and we loved it, but it was becoming too big and too hard to control.

Mia (31:49):

I was thinking a lot about VidCon and how, when VidCon first popped up when I was at YouTube, but took us off guard a bit and arguably something we should have thought of ourselves, but it felt like a lot more authentic coming from the community. So we were really hands off versus an observer. And then I remember the next year we got more involved in terms of participation. And I went recently on YouTube, like a full-on partner, their logos everywhere. So I'm just wondering if, if you think maybe perhaps LinkedIn was a little bit shortsighted not to see the value of this community and all of this work that you



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Anna McAfee, #LinkedInLocal

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had done for them from your pure passion. I do think it was shortsighted to not support us. After 10 months of conversations, they issued some terms around organizing LinkedIn local events, which fantastically enabled people to use the logo.

Anna (32:37):

It enabled people to use the name and it made it open to, to all LinkedIn users, which it largely was, except that we just asked people if they want it to be part of our host community to stick to the values. What was missing though, from the terms, which I think LinkedIn just didn't understand was the curation and the values behind what we'd done still to this day because LinkedIn local still exists. There's still no point of contact at LinkedIn for LinkedIn local. If you've got a question about it, you have to contact LinkedIn help. At one point, LinkedIn helped with sending people to me, which I find kind of funny. So I think it was quite short-sighted I think a lot could have been done and it would have been an author. I know a lot of people, Shea robot, and would be a great example of this.

Anna (33:20):

She's probably the most of the highest profile for those that know Shea. But I had a conversation with Shea and she said, I thought LinkedIn was this recruiter platform. Why on earth would I post videos on LinkedIn? And she got dragged to an event and we're walking since she didn't want to go. She suddenly turned up at this event and there was this amazing group of people that were going to support her. She just had this fantastic time at this event from that day on, she started creating content on LinkedIn and has run a million followers. Now it was LinkedIn local that flipped that switch for her. I've heard that time and time again. So we knew the value. LinkedIn does have an issue when it is seen as just a recruiter platform, people log into their account, they update their experience. They find the job that they're looking for and then they log off and don't come back for another three years until they're looking for the next job. So they do have an issue with user engagement. We saw LinkedIn local as the way



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Anna McAfee, #LinkedInLocal

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to fix that because it was a way to tie the experience back to the brand.

Bailey (34:19):

And I mean, a massive proof point for the power of the professional lens locally to connect people. There were all these small bills and business guilds and stuff like all throughout human history and, and that hunger is there and they're, they're sleeping on it.

Anna (34:37):

Look at the end of the day events, weren't part of LinkedIn's platform. It wasn't part of the trajectory. I don't blame them for the response in any way. I do think it was a bit short-sighted, but at the end of the day, and I've heard you talk about this Bailey in previous episodes of the podcast, it has to be the right time for the brand.

Bailey (34:54):

I think you have a great balanced perspective on it. And there's so much, I don't know about both both sides. I think I'm feeling like some of my own response to the story kind of flare up in part, because I, I went through this experience of starting a small company with a community, supporting it at those early stages of building momentum and growing that looked like LinkedIn local. We had people organizing events that brought the Instagram brand to life all around the world. People getting together with strangers and taking photos. And it was so inspiring. We felt like it was really like the truest expression of our, and our mission of what we were trying to do as we ended up at Facebook and Instagram group bigger and bigger, all these realities started to show up some of the brand stuff. If people might think this is run by Instagram and some trust and safety stuff, and all of these legal implications started to show up, it was just so hard to see businesses and brands protecting their assets and protecting themselves. And in doing so squashing, some fire for them out in the world, how that expresses a lack of appreciation for all the hard work people put in to organize around these platforms or through these



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Anna McAfee, #LinkedInLocal

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platforms. Like you're saying, you're doing six calls a week and it makes me want that to be recognized and supported. It's like you said, like these platforms are so human in our experiences of them, but they are businesses too. There's complexity to those movements that might pop up within them. And how that overlaps with the company's priorities and goals.

Anna (36:40):

They were purely motivated by legal aspects. And the legal just took over, I think, any decision-making this host that are building brands like big, big events in big cities building LinkedIn's brand Baltimore would be a great example of that. In two years they raised \$30,000 for living classrooms through the, we said for, so yeah, like phenomenal LinkedIn should recognize an effort like that. There's an arm of LinkedIn called LinkedIn for good. I really saw LinkedIn local, somehow being incorporated into that.

Bailey (37:13):

Yeah. It seems like the biggest gift ever to them. So, so center,

Anna (37:18):

They had trademark to the name, LinkedIn local when they reached out to us 11 months in. So we knew like absolutely that they were in the driver's seat and something was going to happen. I'm sad that it took them 10 months. After speaking to us to finally come up with some terms, LinkedIn, local, it really exists today. Any LinkedIn user can start one in their city and you can make money from it. If you want, you can compete with other people if you want. We just couldn't continue with our mentoring. I had to step away leading it because everything we built had gone in the book, there's a metaphor. I use LinkedIn local to me was a river. The formation of a river comes from a few different sources of water and it comes together and it shapes landscapes. As we got this momentum in the news and the virality, the river tilted and was flowing fast and it was connecting communities upstream and downstream flowing through newsfeeds and hearts.



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Anna McAfee, #LinkedInLocal

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Anna (38:13):

Then with the release of the terms, it was pretty much the river had hit the ocean that water just flows. So it still flows, but it got mixed in with everything else. It was this sort of beautiful body of fresh water with the values. It came out into the water and, and that's where it is now. There's a lot of people really sticking to those values. A lot of people doing some really wonderful work and a lot of new events coming in, lots of cities. I put together a free course because when I stepped away, I had so many people come to me and say, I just want your help. I want your help. I want to talk to you about it. And I just couldn't feed that anymore. I put together this, I think it's an hour and 20 minutes free course. Ironically, since the pandemic, the downloads of that have gone up in this craving for offline connection. Lots of cities have moved online and there's a lot going on, but the onus is really on an individual to start one. Now there's no, if you're looking for help, you've kind of got no one to go to except maybe an existing host to say, yeah,

Bailey (39:09):

There's no like 10 posts or like flags to go to, like you, you were in the beginning. I think some companies have community building in their DNA. They're started with it and it feels like LinkedIn just does not have it in their DNA. And you're like serving them it on a platter and they still don't know what to do with it. One of the things that you talk about of maybe one of the big things that turned these rivers into an ocean is this transformation of taking away the curation of the community. It sounds to me like that was the heartbeat of the community was the, the hosts and the way that they actually carried values into their own local communities and led around those values. So I wanted to make sure, I, I learned from you a little bit about how you approach curating and selecting hosts or vetting hosts. What was that process like for the people? However, many, 450 people, more who became,



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Anna (40:08):

But two years we were about to over a thousand.

Bailey (40:11):

Yeah. How did you go through selecting those people? And what did you learn from that?

Anna (40:16):

We were very strategic in our communication, in the outset, in terms of the values, in terms of what we stood for throughout eight months in, we put up a website, which we actually just fed everybody to the website, kind of legitimized what we were doing, even though it was literally a WordPress website built in a weekend, people, they would see it in the news feed and people would usually send them to the website. And that's where anybody who came to me, I said, go to the website, go and book a call. That was kind of our first, first. I always want to say barrier in that if you were there for the wrong reasons, you won't get it. Like what you read on the website. Secondly, there was goodbye, come a host button. And behind that, there was a form and we were very deliberate and strategic in the questions in this form to really attract the right people and get the wrong people to abandon that form.

Bailey (41:06):

How did you do that?

Anna (41:07):

Well, a background in recruitment might've helped this. So yeah, I spent 10 years designing recruitment processes. The form was really, again, to let people know about values, to really encourage them to go to other events in their city, rather than setting one up themselves. I had a lot of tips and tricks in terms of finding other cause it's even still to this day, it's still quite hard to find a, an event in your city. You actually have to do a hashtag search, which is kind of bizarre LinkedIn functionality. We had the type form. And then from



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there we had Zapier and we like to manage a community this size. We literally just plugged in Typeform and HubSpot and Calendly and zoom and then Slack. A lot of it. We either paid for ourselves or just, we did the bare minimum.

Anna (41:48):

Like HubSpot was well, it's free. Let's use it. We had different mentors in different regions by the end. So different people with data, taking different calls that was at a local levels that helped local networks. There were a lot of hosts that wanted to be the only one in their city. And this was really finding the balance between listening to the host and also being mindful that we probably couldn't really refuse people to host legally if they wanted to. So being very value-driven help that curation. There were people that set up events without even talking to us and we would contact them and say, Hey, you know, not in a bad way, but it's like, Hey, we have this whole host community. Let's have a chat. And then I can kind of add you to add you to the host community. And like, we can help support your event, but it was never our you're doing the wrong thing.

Anna (42:36):

It was never a policing system, but I think the values as well, it largely, and it had to, based on our resources, self police and people who set up events and were either pitching at events or just collecting email addresses to on sell to those people didn't ever really host more than two events because people just didn't come back. And that just comes back to, again, this crave craving human connection and people wanted to go and just be a human being. And I think again, and this is what I used to say to hosts all the time. I think a lot of business networking is designed for salespeople and it's all about let's do pitch competitions, even in startup world. It's all about pitching there's this here's my business card kind of thing. The interesting thing about LinkedIn local and what we said to hosts that you need to understand is LinkedIn is full of people who aren't salespeople. They are HR managers, they are admin assistants.



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They are job seekers. They are business owners. Some of them might not even have a business card. You need to design an event that's for the whole LinkedIn community, not just the people who are there to sell something. I think we forget that a lot in that, in those very business environments that all we really wanted to, all people really wanted with LinkedIn local was to continue the online conversation offline.

Bailey (43:57):

What have you really taken away from this wild experience about what community means or how to build one? What's something that stands out

Anna (44:05):

It's made me realize how much I'm driven by people's stories. What drove me was the people who came to this movement. I had one call. I remember within about 24 hours of each other. I had someone who had literally her parents had just both passed away. She'd been caring for them. And she was getting back on her feet. And this was the way she was going to do it in her city was to get out. And then the following morning, I had someone whose cousin had killed in quite a high profile incident who, and this was her way, three months later, mr. Coming out of it. So people were really drawn to this idea for really very, very deep reasons in the book is there's about 60 stories of impact. People would message me and say, LinkedIn life will change my life because of either who they met or what they learned or what it introduced them to something that they could, then it gave them a springboard to something else I'm really driven by stories since obviously stepping away last year, I've written the book as hard as it was enjoyed the writing process.

Anna (45:04):

So I'm doing a lot more writing now and a lot more study on what community is and isn't, and not just community, but connection and storytelling as well. So, I mean, I loved it. I absolutely loved every, I wouldn't change it for a minute except maybe have it end



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slightly differently or not, or even not end at all. But it was the beginning of my community journey. And just to think there is power in what one person can do and ideas can just spread very, very quickly when they're the right ideas. And when they executed well, it's an interesting study of leadership too. It's interesting. What happens to a community when you remove leadership?

Bailey (45:38):

Yeah. W where, where is it at now?

Anna (45:41):

It's part to say with the pandemic, because this is offline connection, but I'd say up until March this year. So that's a year after the terms came out, I'd say LinkedIn local. And it's very hard to know this, and I'm not even sure LinkedIn would know this because it's all based on hashtag searches. I would say it had almost halved in size. So if there were 650 cities, I'd say there were probably maybe three, 350. Wow. Lots of people stepped away because they just didn't necessarily see the point anymore. One, there was no leadership too. There was no values. Lots of cities still started in that time. But I think that was more the onus on, on, on an individual to really step up and do that on their own. There's still lots of cities looking to start, but there's no central community anymore. It's just individual pockets of local communities that exist. Miami have a great group. Baltimore still have a fantastic group, but I guess with the pandemic, many have moved online. Many are on a pause and a lot will come back. I guess, the case of seeing what happens in the world and the next six to 12 months

Bailey (46:44):

It all comes back to what you were saying about belonging. There's something very powerful about these chapter networks to know that what you're doing in your city, isn't alone. And to know that you're a part of a bigger movement or a bigger effort or a bigger impact because there's people like you in cities all the way around the world who are



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doing the same thing, that's one of the challenges without any kind of rope around the community or specificity around the communities, if everybody's in it, then no one's in it. No way. And you don't know what you're a part of.

Anna (47:16):

I've used the analogy of the bigger table and not the tool offense. And, you know, we had a really big table, but when everybody's in, it just becomes hard to hard to keep that Eddy Eddy form of it becomes very watered down.

Bailey (47:31):

The world has changed with the internet 40 years ago. Community meant the people local to you. And we've had sort of this huge door opened in terms of people that we might be able to connect with. I think the world would be a better place if more people intentionally built community or intentionally showed up at communities. And I think that's how LinkedIn local started, right? You took a step to do that. And other people took a step to do it. And it just dominoed from there, I see so much power in that transition from being passive or, or just hoping a community may show up in your life to feeling like you can make one happen. And, and you can realize one. And that's the story I walk away from this with is, is how much power there wasn't you doing that? And it seems like that was very powerful for so many people who became hosts is taking control of that and adding to the world intentionally.

Anna (48:28):

I remember in a host survey, people said that they wanted to feel a part of something bigger. They didn't want to be a standalone host. They wanted to be connected to, they wanted to be able to see people doing this on the other side of the world and support them. And they got a boss from that. So it is, I think I agree with you, community building needs to be intentional.



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Bailey (48:47):

Amazing. Thank you so much.

Mia (48:49):

If you want to connect with Anna, you can connect with her on where else on LinkedIn. Her username is Anna McAfee, a N N a M C a F E. And thanks to our team. Thank you. Rosanna Gabon for engineering and editing Greg David for his design work and Katie O'Connell for marketing this episode,

Bailey (49:08):

You can find out more about the work I do with my partners, Kevin and Kai, as people in company, helping organizations get clearer on who their most important people are and how to build a community with those people by heading to our website people and company. And if you want to start your own community or supercharge, when you're already a part of our handbook is here for you. Visit gettogetherbook.com to grab a copy. It's full of stories and learnings from conversations with community leaders like this one with Anna. Oh, and last thing I'm gonna keep it short this time. If you feel so inclined, please review us or click subscribe. It helps more people find us in the podcast store. Thank you for listening. We'll catch you all next time.

Speaker 4 (49:53):

[Inaudible].