

The Grassroots Podcast

Episode 6 - Connect Prep

Host: Dana Howe

Guests: Maggier Perrault, Chelsea Flynn

Transcript:

Dana Howe:

Hello and welcome back to the Grassroots podcast. I'm Dana Howe, your host and the Vice President of the Grassroots Outdoor Alliance. We're back with episode six and today's agenda is all about gearing up for our marquee event, Connect. If you're a regular listener, you already know that we host, connect twice a year and our fall event is right around the corner 21 days away in Kansas City, Missouri beginning on November 5th with our Retailer Education Day and our Discovery Marketplace event at the Loews Hotel in November 6 through nine is connect including retailer and brand appointments and business meetings at the Kansas City Convention Center.

So, in preparation for the show today, we're sitting down with our top notch grassroots event team to give us the overview on all things Connect. It's the final countdown to Connect and Maggie, our event relations manager and Chelsea director of events are here to walk us through all the details.

1:07

Before we get into some introductions, I'll do a quick overview on some details around the show.

1:13

You know, we've been hosting, connect for quite some time.

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Our first Connect show ever 2015 and we've grown and evolved quite a bit.

1:20

Since then.

1:21

For fall 23 connect in Kansas City, we have 100 and 41 retailers attending.

1:28

That's 395 buyers and 100 and 90 vendors.

1:33

100 and 23 that will be on our connect show floor meeting with retailers through scheduled appointments.

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And then we have 67 brands that will be at our Discovery Marketplace event held on November the fifth.

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We have a lot of work that's going to get conducted over the four days.

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We're together in Kansas City including 9268 scheduled appointments if you're new to the show.

1:57

We do schedule all the appointments for our guests that come to the show so that 9000 scheduled appointments results in the conducting of 8551 hours of appointments at the show.

2:10

And so we try and keep people busy.

2:12

We also try to incorporate a lot of community building opportunities to eat lunch together, learn some things and then also, you know, get the work done.

2:22

So with that, let's do some introductions.

2:24

Chelsea, you're, you're new to our team.

2:26

You just hopped into things right before our June event in Knoxville.

2:31

Welcome to the team.

2:32

We're so happy to have you.

2:33

You want to give us a quick background and then yeah, just introduce yourself in your role here with us at grassroots.

2:39

Sure.

2:39

Hi everybody.

2:40

My name is Chelsea Flynn, director of events at Grassroots Outdoor Alliance.

2:45

Yeah.

2:45

As Dana just said, I came hot to the June event.

2:49

I believe I started three weeks ahead of the launch of, of the Connect in Knoxville in 2023.

2:56

And I come to you with a, a varied experience.

2:59

Started off my career in the outdoor industry, leading environmental education and adventure education, programming and then bled into venue management with some regional parks in Northern Virginia.

3:14

Realized I love events and programming through that avenue.

3:19

I found myself running corporate meetings, traveling the US, planning their sales meetings and trade shows.

3:27

And then most recently got to work for University of Tennessee as well as the Tennessee Department of Education, more on the government.

3:37

So I come with a varied experience here but mostly specializing in in hotel conferencing and bringing people together.

3:45

We are so excited to have Chelsea on the team.

3:48

And one of the great things about bringing Chelsea in in that director of events role for us was, you know, grassroots has been hosting events for a very long time before we had connect.

3:58

We had a buying group only show called the Summit.

4:02

Some of our members have been around long enough to remember both.

4:05

But for our core team, events have kind of been at least a little bit learn on the job.

4:11

And so for things that require that kind of events, specific expertise, it's been so great to have Chelsea's insights for that, you know, things like hotel contracts or reviewing our contracts with our commission centers.

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So we've always had great, great people on the team to do that.

4:29

But Chelsea, he just has that kind of hand in hand experience with that.

4:32

So it's been great.

4:33

Also, we have Maggie, our event relations manager who's also been with the team for a little less than a year.

4:38

Maggie.

4:39

Welcome.

4:39

Thanks for being here today and you wanna give yourself a quick introduction.

4:43

Sure.

4:44

Maggie Pro here, it's been a pleasure getting to work with Chelsea, especially over these last few months preparing for our fall next show and Discovery Marketplace event.

4:53

A lot of, you know, me from your inbox.

4:55

Yeah, happy to be on today and getting everyone excited for Connect.

5:00

Great.

5:00

Thank you.

5:02

So, as I mentioned, November 5th, we kind of kick off all of our events with our Education Day.

5:11

And so I'll give us a quick overview there and then I want to talk with Maggie about all the work that she's been in for the Discovery Marketplace.

5:17

So traditionally, how our show has flowed is as we bring our members together and our retailers together before they walk into the Connect show to start meeting with their brands with a full day of education and meetings.

5:32

So that'll happen on November 5th.

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We'll be at the Lowe's Hotel that 8 a.m. slot.

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We will bring our members together first for our membership meeting.

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So you'll get to hear everything that's going on strategic strategically with grassroots, what's going on with other retailers in the group.

5:47

And then we'll move on from there into our shareholders, meeting our buyers meeting.

5:51

We also host a specific kind of retailer storytelling session that we've termed Wisdom from the Trenches.

5:59

And this time, I'm super excited to host Emily and Brian from Rhodes Rivers and Trails to kind of share with our members, their retailer Secret Super Power.

6:09

And then at lunch, we'll have some opportunity for some discussion sessions at the lunch hour from 12 on until four o'clock, all retailers that are attending connect are welcome to come to our education sessions.

6:21

And so you can join us for lunch.

6:23

sit down and have some kind of structured unstructured discussion sessions over a meal with your peers.

6:32

There'll be some kind of fun surprises along with that luncheon.

6:36

And then in the afternoon, we'll have some education sessions as well and I've kind of shaped a lot of our education this time around customers and employees.

6:46

And so we have Kerri Watson coming back from outside books.

6:50

She's done a lot of stuff with our buyers.

6:52

She works with a lot of our retailers and so she'll be talking about how buyers really influence the customer experience.

6:59

We'll have a session with Tara Kuipers who we partner with quite frequently on employee development and I'll tease a little bit.

7:09

We have some special prizes that are going to be involved in multiple sessions throughout the day.

7:15

We'll also have Wes Allen hosting a session.

7:17

He, he co owns sunlight sports and Cody Wyoming.

7:22

So he's gonna talk about customer experience in the store as well.

7:25

So a lot of opportunity to tune in to some education around employee development and customer experience, but also tons of opportunity to sit with your peers.

7:36

Other retailers learn from them, share best business practices and collaborate with each other.

7:43

And so super excited for that, all the education will close up around four o'clock on Sunday and then we'll move straight into Discovery marketplace.

7:53

And so I'll toss that over to Maggie.

7:55

Can you give us a little background on discovery marketplace?

7:58

Why and how and what people should expect when they attend Discovery Marketplace?

8:03

Yeah.

8:03

So this will be our third season of hosting Discovery Marketplace.

8:07

It's kind of morphed over the few seasons as we're exploring what this event is going to look like moving forward and feel like we're kind of getting into a good, good place with it.

8:17

Discovery marketplace was sort of an answer to retailers need and desire to want to find new brands and new bro products to bring into their stores.

8:26

Connect is a really great resource for fostering current brand and retailer relationships and doing business.

8:34

Discovery marketplace is really good at igniting new ones, finding those little bits of surprise and delight to bring into their shops.

8:42

So we're excited to have 67 exhibitors at our Discovery Marketplace this fall in Kansas City, like Anna said, starting at 4 p.m. in the Los and of those 67 discovery marketplace brands that most are kind of new or emerging brands.

9:00

Some are, you know, pretty established brands but maybe a little smaller.

9:05

Anybody that you're super excited about Maggie.

9:07

Yeah, so we've got a lot of new brands or like you said up and coming brands or maybe just new to grassroots as well.

9:15

Some that I'm looking forward to seeing.

9:17

We've got some great women owned brands like Wild Rye and Tough Cutie.

9:21

One of my favorite brands is also tending.

9:24

I'm really excited to see SKEA.

9:26

They do adventure bandanas and beanies and really fun patterns.

9:31

They have accompanied me on many of my adventures.

9:34

I'm excited to see them.

9:35

Awesome.

9:36

What about you, Chelsea?

9:37

Anybody super interesting that you're excited about too?

9:39

Yes, I spotted this brand at the Spring Show and they are coming back this fall.

9:45

The name of this brand is Flynn.

9:49

I don't love them just because they're of my namesake, but I think they make some really fun attractive hats.

9:57

I believe that the owner of the brand is an artist and loves to put his art on different products, specifically headwear and I am a headwear nerd.

10:06

Yeah, I remember Lynn had their first discovery marketplace experience with us last spring and there was just a lot of buzz around the booth.

10:13

And so if your retailer looking for some artsy cool hats, check them out and all the rest of the 67 brands that will have a discovery marketplace.

10:23

Now, retailers will also be able to find a list of all exhibiting brands on our website as well.

10:28

Great.

10:29

Thanks for that Maggie that web URL for all things connect and also the list of the discovery marketplace brands is connect dot grassroots outdoors dot com.

10:40

Ok.

10:40

That's Sunday, quick rundown on Sunday.

10:43

And then we head into the Kansas City Convention Center on Monday and outside of all of our business meetings and pre-arranged scheduled appointments.

10:55

What are some other show, special events and fun things that you're excited about that we've incorporated this time, Maggie.

11:02

Yeah, so really excited about our community service project for this season.

11:07

Something we always try to incorporate into our show programming.

11:11

This fall will be a project for personal care kit building to help benefit Kansas City homeless.

11:19

This community service project is sponsored by both Keen and oboes, two of our vendor partners.

11:26

So super excited to have those two brands come together to really help make this great impact.

11:32

The community service projects will have those kit builds station out through the entirety of the show, be out near the registration booth, so you can pop on over when you're in between appointments or just need a little break from the show floor.

11:47

Come on over, build some personal care kits and help make an impact in the Kansas City community.

11:53

We also have some fun happy hour opportunities.

11:57

Our Monday welcome Happy Hour sponsored by Mountain Hardware.

12:00

We're super excited to have them sponsor this Happy hour as a celebrating their 30th anniversary, so big milestone for them.

12:08

I'm also really excited about our Tuesday open house.

12:12

Happy hour.

12:13

This is something that's kind of really gained momentum.

12:16

The last show, so really excited to see how that continues to progress as well.

12:20

I love that.

12:21

And the open houses have been something that for a little while we didn't incorporate the open houses and they're kind of backed by popular demand.

12:28

We brought them back last spring last fall, I think too.

12:32

And it's just been that important open time for people to either reconnect with a brand that they weren't able to see in their scheduled appointments or explore some brands that they were curious about and give you the opportunity to kind of have those more casual touch points between retailers and brands.

12:52

And so we do that through the happy hour on Tuesday from 5 to 7.

12:57

And so that's kind of the opportunity for the brands to pull back the curtains, so to speak, and have that kind of casual connection with the buyers while we're on the show floor and then we also have an open house hour after lunch on Wednesday.

13:11

So, if you've been coming to the show for a while, you know that we break for lunch every day, everybody needs time to refuel their body and break bread with their peers and sit down and enjoy some things together and enjoy a meal together.

13:25

But after that lunch hour on Wednesday from 12 to 11 to 2 is unscheduled time for retailers to kind of walk the floor retouch with the brand that they've already seen or go and check in with the brand that they didn't have time to see.

13:39

And so those that kind of open time is really important.

13:42

Speaking of lunch, I wanna touch on something that I'm excited about, which is our lunch and learn sessions that we host throughout the week.

13:51

Again, you know, connect is a scheduled appointment driven show.

13:55

And so essentially the flow of the days is from eight to noon, you're in appointments and then from noon to one, we break for lunch and then from 1 to 6 or on Thursday, 1 to 4 you're in scheduled appointments.

14:08

And so in this busy time, you do need time to kind of take a break and refill your body and, and get some nutrition.

14:16

But we also offer lunch and learn sessions and so on Monday, we have our women's luncheon.

14:21

People really enjoy that session.

14:22

It is an inclusive session.

14:24

Anyone who's interested in attending, can attend Tara Kuipers who does a lot of work with us runs that session and she always does such a great job.

14:31

We get great feedback on that.

14:33

Also on Monday, during the lunch hour, we have our grassroots vendor partner luncheon, which much like our membership meeting gives our brands that kind of full spectrum view on what's going on with our retailers grassroots strategic work that we're, we're working on through the year as well.

14:51

And then on Tuesday, we have a guest speaker who's going to come and speak in the big lunch room.

14:56

Super excited to hear from Phil Henderson.

14:59

He's been a part of the outdoor industry for a really long time and runs a company called Full Circle Expeditions and was the leader of the first All Black American Everest Expedition.

15:09

And so it'll be really fun to hear from him.

15:12

Wednesday.

15:12

We have kind of an open lunch hour, sit with someone new, build some new relationships, sit down and talk with your peers over lunch.

15:19

And then on Thursday, we've brought back our mini film Fest, which was something new last spring and the fun change on that is of course, our brands have some really great film assets and media to share.

15:32

But we've also incorporated a lot of our retailers, films and a lot of that is shorts and reels from their social media.

15:41

Some people do some really funny, really engaging ways on their social media in which they're engaging with their local community.

15:48

So it'll be fun to see some local marketing efforts that our retailers are incorporated into that mini film festival.

15:54

And so that's my two cents on things that are going on in show events.

15:58

Anything that you're super excited about Chelsea?

16:00

Yeah, I've got two that come to mind on Saturday evening.

16:04

We are offering our retailer reception at the Lowe's Hotel that is for our member retailers.

16:11

We love having the opportunity to connect with you guys before we kick everything off.

16:16

So please join us on Saturday evening and then on the show floor, we will have Hikers brew and they are formerly a discovery marketplace brand from the spring that will be on the show floor sampling their coffee.

16:34

So stop by there to give them a chat, taste their product.

16:38

I love that and everybody knows how important coffee is while we at Connect and how much people need and love their coffee at Connect.

16:46

So tons of opportunity to get caffeinated on the show floor.

16:51

Speaking of food and bev, how are final preparations going for the show and, and all those last minute things that you're you're closing up and finishing up or?

17:01

Yeah, we are headed straight down the line, kind of nailing down all of our details.

17:08

One of my greatest passions is feeding other people.

17:11

So picking menus out for you guys has been a great joy.

17:14

We've got some fun themed meals for lunch.

17:18

We've talked a lot about lunch.

17:20

What we haven't talked about is other things that we're providing for you to stay sustained throughout the show.

17:28

So in the mornings we'll have a, what we call an AM break and during that, you can get a little snack, some fruit or some protein.

17:38

And we also have our number one fuel coffee all day long.

17:44

And then in the afternoons, we have our PM break where you can get a little savory or sweet snack.

17:51

We we wanna keep you guys moving forward.

17:54

You've got a lot of work to do on that show floor.

17:56

Yeah, filled up bed.

17:58

Well, and while we're on the topic of food adjacent during our happy hours, something that we did put a lot of effort into this year is for the happy hour bars, there will be non alcoholic options at those bars.

18:12

So if that strikes your fancy, seek it out, we've heard you.

18:16

That's awesome.

18:17

I love that if you're looking for a another little extra snack wing by our comment box, we had one set out this past spring with a kind of incentive treat.

18:27

So we're gonna do that again.

18:29

This show.

18:30

So come by with some good feedback, throw it on index card, pop it in the box and grab a little special snack.

18:37

Yeah, I on that comment box, we're only as good as the feedback you provide So please give your honesty.

18:44

We do just you read them as a team.

18:47

Yeah.

18:47

Yeah, we want to make sure that you guys all know that one of the greatest joys of the comment box is not only that we get to read what you need and what you'd like to see evolve at the show because we do take that feedback to heart and actually make changes and hopefully you see that.

19:03

But also some people put like really silly things in the comment box and as a team at the end of the show, we sit down and go through those.

19:11

And so not only do we get great knowledge from it, we also get good laughs from it.

19:15

So please use the comment box so we can hear from you.

19:20

Ok.

19:20

We've talked about food, we've talked about lunches, a lot of the special events that are happening at the show.

19:27

What can people do to finish up some preparations for the show?

19:32

Let's talk, registration badges, hotels, all that stuff.

19:36

Sure.

19:37

So retailers should be all registered and good to go at this point, brands and reps.

19:42

You still have time to preregister.

19:44

I'd highly recommend doing that.

19:47

Makes it a lot more streamlined for you when you arrive at the show on Sunday or during the week.

19:52

Means we already have a badge printed and waiting for you to pick up to register.

19:56

You just need to reach out to the vendor organizer at your brand.

19:59

They can get you added to the Connect platform.

20:01

Awesome.

20:02

Perfect.

20:03

Yeah, and our retailers are registered through our scheduling.

20:07

But one thing for the upcoming fall show, that's a little bit different is where our retailers can do their badge pick up early on in the show.

20:15

So that Saturday and Sunday, Chelsea, you want to talk a little bit about that change?

20:19

Yes, I'd love to.

20:20

So on Saturday, if you are a member retailer, you will be able to pick up your badge at the retailer, reception at the Lowe's Hotel in the Mermaid meeting room.

20:33

So that is Saturday evening on Sunday morning, retailers can pick up their badges at the Lowe's Hotel before entering into the education space, which will be the City ballroom and then Discovery Marketplace.

20:48

Vendors also will pick up their badges on Sunday at the Lowe's Hotel in the city ballroom area as well.

20:55

Then one difference is on Sunday for vendors who are setting up their booze at the Connect show floor at the Convention Center.

21:06

Please pick up your badges at the convention center starting Monday.

21:10

All badges will be at the Convention Center.

21:13

I love that.

21:14

That's gonna add just like this added little bonus convenience to the retailers because I, you know, always what happens is, you know, they get up on Sunday and they're excited to head to the education, but they haven't picked up their badge yet.

21:26

And so they run, they run all the way over to the Convention center to grab their badge and then come back, try and get in time for the membership meeting at eight.

21:34

So thank you for, for incorporating that.

21:36

What about hotels?

21:37

Hopefully most everyone has booked by now, but let's give people an update on hotels and, and if they haven't yet booked, what did they do?

21:47

Or at the time of this recording, both the Hotel Phillips and the Lowe's Hotel block have closed.

21:54

Not only are they closed because of cut off date, but we have surpassed our booking.

21:58

So thank you all for getting in there early and booking your hotels.

22:02

If for some reason, you have not booked lodging for yourself yet, we do have an option for you a res travel.

22:12

They are a trusted partner of both grassroots and conference direct.

22:18

So that service is linked on the connect dot grassroots outdoors dot com website.

22:25

You can also email me directly at Chelsea Chelsea at grassroots outdoors dot com and I can get you that link.

22:34

It operates similarly to like an Expedia or a hotline where it's gonna give you the best rates for hotels in the area.

22:42

So we've got options for you and I think we, we should probably do our quick PS A on some kind of scammy phone calls about hotel bookings.

22:52

I've had a lot of retailers, reach out to me about this So do you wanna address it real quick?

22:57

Yeah, unfortunately, just as we have as individuals started receiving gob of scam phone calls throughout the day.

23:06

This has hit the event industry as well and many conferences including our show have started receiving phone calls from scam call centers.

23:17

see saying that they can get you better rates or can book your room on your behalf.

23:24

If someone is calling you about booking your room, it is a scam.

23:29

We do not provide your contact information to any of our trusted partners.

23:35

It is very much a one way use this link or you call to book.

23:39

So trust if you're receiving a phone call about booking your room, you should not provide them any of your personal information.

23:46

Yeah, our hotel partners will not contact you directly.

23:50

And so if a company contacts you to book, just know that it is a scam.

23:55

We're sorry that that's happening.

23:56

Registration badges and hotels covered.

24:00

What about meeting preparation?

24:02

There's a lot that goes into it.

24:04

And as Maggie, if you didn't know Maggie has a background in retail, very experienced, she came to us from actually one of our grassroots stores as a buyer.

24:14

And so she has a lot of insight here, Maggie when you were a buyer attending.

24:18

Connect, how did you prepare and what were some of the key things that you would recommend retailers and brands do as they're leading up to the show Sure.

24:25

So around this time, you know, a few weeks out from the show, I'd be reviewing my schedule with my team who's attending.

24:31

just kind of reviewing which brands we're meeting with, maybe doing a little game planning, but also be collecting sales reports and any sort of numbers or data that is valuable to both me as a buyer, but also to reps and brands.

24:44

It's a good insight for them to have as well and helps improve that relationship.

24:48

I'd be emailing my brands kind of setting some expectations for the meetings as well, giving them a quick little glimpse at how our shop business has been doing through the season and then sharing over some of those sales reports as well so they can compare that against our store.

25:03

The other thing I would do as well is download digital workbooks ahead of time right now.

25:09

We're in the process of collecting those digital workbooks from our brands.

25:14

Not quite yet available for retailers that should be soon.

25:17

It's really important to download those ahead of time just so you go into your meetings just prepared and confident, not flustered about trying to get that workbook to download in the moment as we know Convention center Wi Fi can be really hit or miss.

25:30

So I definitely recommend downloading those workbooks either at the hotel the night before or even before you fly out to Kansas City.

25:37

Yeah, thanks for that.

25:39

And I'll add just a little bit of context on that, you know, connect is mostly a digital workbook type of show.

25:46

And so you'll see buyers walking around with their tablet or ipad, whatever device they're using as a team.

25:53

o'ryan and our team are actively working with the brands to collect their digital assets.

25:59

So anything from price list to workbooks, and we build that into a password protected site where retailers can go and retrieve all that information and prepare their devices.

26:10

Sometimes it does take up until just before the show to collect that information from the brands because our show is in the early time frame.

26:20

And so a lot of the brands are coming right off of their sales meetings.

26:23

And so they're finishing up those final details around what's actually what they're actually gonna be showing you at the show.

26:30

And so making those final edits to their workbooks and then getting them uploaded for us for you to have available.

26:37

And so again, do as much of that preparation in advance as you can, but we'll also have resources for you at the show, including an airdrop station to be able to prepare your device.

26:49

But yeah, the last thing you want is to be walking into your 9 a.m. appointment trying to download the workbook on Convention Center Wi Fi, which sometimes can be overloaded and, and busy.

27:00

So best best to try and do some of that stuff in advance if you can.

27:05

So I think we've covered all the quick hits on really important things as we wrap wrap up this episode.

27:12

I li I want to close it out the way we do a lot of our grassroots podcast episodes with a note of optimism from each guest, Maggie.

27:20

What note of optimism do you have for our connect, connect attendees?

27:24

Yeah.

27:24

My note of optimism is, you know, we've got the show coming up.

27:28

It's shaping up, be another good season.

27:30

It just makes me really optimistic about the health of our organization and our community, both of our retailers and our vendors.

27:37

I love that Chelsea in the wise words of Bill and Ted's excellent adventure.

27:43

I'd just like to say, be excellent to each other.

27:46

I cannot wait to be in community with you guys and be fully present for my second show, looking forward to it and I'll also add mine, which is, you know, I'm just really excited and optimistic about bringing our community together again in Kansas City.

28:02

It's our opportunity twice a year to, to be in person with you to really commune with our, our members and our brands and our reps that really make this industry a really special place to be and so really excited about that.

28:16

So, thank you again, so much Maggie and Chelsea and of course our entire grassroots team for piecing together the very complex connect puzzle once again and to our listeners Thank you for tuning in.

28:27

If you've been hanging out with us, you're next now, completely armed with all the insider information to make your connect in Kansas City a success.

28:35

For extra details and more information, you can head over to [connect dot grassroots outdoors dot com](https://connect.dot.grassrootsoutdoors.com).

28:41

If you need to do some final review of your schedule or if you need to get registered, you had to connect app, connect A PP dot grassroots outdoors dot com.

28:53

And for easy access to all this information links including show floor maps and more, we have a link tree and also that link tree will be a QR code on the back of your badge.

29:03

And so all this stuff will be totally at your fingertips.

29:06

And that link is link tree, [linktr dot EE slash grassroots connect](https://linktr.ee/grassrootsconnect).

29:14

Thanks for getting ready with us for connect.

29:17

And until next time, Viva la specialty.