



Episode 51

How to use marketing and PR to drive your business





Mirjam: [00:00]

Welcome to Designer Discussions. Today we have a very special guest. It's Kerrie Kelly. She is the CEO and creative director of Carrie Kelly Design Lab and award winning California interior designer, author, contributor, product designer, multimedia consultant. And she helps national brands reach the interior design market. And obviously, Kerrie is a very professional marketer, has gotten probably more PR coverage than anybody I know. And we want to hear about how she managed to do all of that.

Kerrie: (00:36)

Thank you for the intro. And so much of that has to do with you and everyone sitting on this podcast right now.

Mirjam: (00:44)

Really, we'll have to dig into that.

Intro: [00:38]

Welcome to the Designer Discussion Sessions podcast. Tune in each week where we discuss marketing, branding, PR and business advice for design professionals.

We're opening the Designer Discussions Marketing Studio - a monthly series of in depth, actionable content to guide your marketing, PR and business development. We want to help you transform your business and elevate it to work with your dream clients.

Mirjam: (01:07)

As before, we hit the recording, but we were just talking about how you and I have met in a different lifetime for me, at least when I was at Kohler Company and I was fortunate enough to be part of this project that you were a part of and a handful of other designers where we Collar partnered with Benjamin Warren cousin Pinot. And you all designed a kitchen each. And then it got built out in the color photo studio, which is massive. People can't even picture what it looks like. And then there was a big photo shoot and a big media campaign. It was spectacular.



Kerrie: (01:36)

That was a really great memory for sure. Like a highlight of my career. And just for some of the things I know you want to talk about today, I feel like Co Centino really was a pioneer in working with designers, not only to develop products, but to speak designer to our design community and then have it also reach a consumer market as well and be interesting and have all those buzzwords behind it and trends and things. They really embrace that and had us travel a lot and work on projects, getting designer input. And that's been key for a ten to twelve year relationship with them.

Mirjam: (02:27)

And I was going to say it's, one of the things I wanted to touch on a little bit too is the brand partnerships. But since we're already there and I agree with you, I really think they've done an excellent job. And I love to see because I see it on Facebook and other places. It's still the same people. So all these relationships you build with brands and in the marketing space, some of them can really last for a long time. It's not like these influencer deals that are paying me so much money. I do this and then I never want to talk to you again. But those are real relationships for sure.

Kerrie: (03:04)

And Cosentino probably wanted to get this over with a long time ago. Maybe we're like, oh, here we are. But no, it really speaks to the loyalty and how important that is with these brand relationships. It's not just for me personally, it's not just a one off. These are products that I specify. It's the only way it could truly work. We don't specify other materials unless a client is asking for it. That is our go to product when it comes to countertops indoor and out and cladding buildings and floors and the whole thing. So, yeah, there has to be an authenticity there. And with Cosentino, that's definitely true.



Mirjam: (03:36)

I think that's amazing. And honestly, that's what I always teach people. You have to like the brand if you want to work with them. Right. It's all about authenticity, and then it goes both ways, and it can be going on for many years. Yeah. Who knows? We'll talk again in another ten.

Kerrie: (03:47)

Yeah. See where we're at.

Mirjam: (04:04)

Having that level of brand collaboration, that's something that you work your way up to. Right. That doesn't just happen overnight. And I'm really curious to talk to you a little bit about when you first started your business. It's like, when did you realize the importance of integrating marketing and PR and sort of what was that trajectory and how did that become more important? How did you do it?

Kerrie: (04:49)

Yeah, it's interesting. I remember going to school at Cal Poly. I went for interior design, which was under the home economics Department. So if you follow me on Instagram, you'll see some cooking on there, too. So I'm always thankful that my teachers also told me how to scramble eggs as well as pick colors and do things like that. But I remember walking across campus and there was this Gal on the green belt, and she was just reading this book. And I'm not a big reader at all, but I thought I really probably should tap into English and writing. It was so romantic what she looked like she was doing to me. And I knew she was an English major. So when I went to Cal Poly, I really kind of locked that into my brain. And after graduating and working for Ralph Lauren, I wasn't a reader, but I was a writer, and it would come out of my fingertips. I would see something, especially with Ralph Lauren and being a real lifestyle brand, I would see something and see it as a trend or see it as something that was classic or timeless and want to talk about it and kind of put it together for people in an easy way, which our tagline is everyone deserves great design.

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Kerrie: (06:09)

So that kind of approach and just make it very accessible to people. And I know I feel like design can be very intimidating. Not everyone can hire a designer. And so part of that was how can I package information and get it to people? They may not hire me, but I could put it on a blog. And there was a point. And this is all before social media. There was a point for the Sacramento Bee where they asked me to write a home column for them. So I had several columns that I had written for our home section. And someone said to me, you should package that and pitch it as a book. And the columns could be chapters. Whoever that person was, I really need to think, because I just did it and literally went to Menlo Park, went to Sunset magazine and books when they had the book side of things and said, here's all my content. When I had a book together, and it was a time where they were not sending photographers out to take pictures of things they didn't have the money for. It actually, half the building, the lights were out. So it was just like a sweet spot of time. And I said, I'm a member of ASID, an organization at the time that had 26,000 designers. I know you're not out and about paying for a lot of pictures, but what if we had a call for entries? I'm happy to provide some of my photograph work, and I would love some of my friends to get published. I know they'd be interested in that. So we had this call for entries, and we published a bunch of certified designers. So Home Depot, Sunset Design guide back in 2009 was published. And I feel like the content is still relevant today. It could be updated, of course, but that basic information is still relevant today. And sometimes when I'm interviewed and such, I tap into that. But I think, number one, being able to write about design and be able to provide the imagery have been key things that have helped in my relationships and understanding on the brand side that we need to be able to speak designer to market it in a certain way. You may have a great product, but if you can't speak to it in an effective way, no. One may ever know about it. And my husband is so sweet, he just brought this over. So we're talking. But I mean, look at all of our ASID friends in there. It was a cool deal.

**Mirjam: (08:09)**

I actually did not know that. And I didn't know they had a book division.

Kerrie: (08:42)

They did, and they don't any longer, unfortunately. But the other magazine is still great, unless California girls appreciate the company.

Mirjam: (08:50)

And I think that's awesome. And it just goes to show us you went to them, right. It's like they may not have had the idea. So I think it's always critical for designers to understand that there is a proactive element. You can't just sit back and wait for the media to come to you and want to cover you or put you in a book or in the magazine or on TV. It's like if you have the desire and you have an idea, it's like just go ask them, right?

Kerrie: (09:24)

Yeah, especially in TV, I would say too. Well, I mean, across all now that you say that, but local television, I'm.

Mirjam: (09:31)

Sure I saw some of your constant segments. Yeah.

Kerrie: (09:34)

Constantly looking for content. So become that expert. You tell them, don't be afraid to.

Mirjam: (09:42)

Put yourself out there. I think that's awesome. Yeah. I was going to ask you about the TV angle a little bit. And when that started and how you did they see some of your other coverage and did they come to you or did you suggest it to them? How did that. Yes.



Kerrie: (10:34)

This most recent collaboration, it's so funny. We were talking about this the other day. That was a cold call from them. Hearst TV reached out and said, we're producing a show with Good Housekeeping, and there's \$5,000 and there's 24 hours and here we go. I was interviewed in a way similar to this, and I just kind of let it go. And I was walking getting on an airplane, and I answered that last call before I got on the airplane. And they said, we want to do this with you. And we just got done filming a couple of months ago now, and it will come out this summer. It's called Designer for a Day, and it's just the pilot of it right now. And hopefully we can pass the baton to other designers. And there could be a Designer for a Day in Boston, in Philadelphia and even Sacramento again, potentially. But we were able to transform master bedroom space. And the family is very happy. It's a good reveal. And the thing that was required for me was having it be realistic. It can't be that we renovated your bathroom or your kitchen. And those things were pitched to me and I was like, no, we're going to do your master bedroom. And if it's 24 hours, \$5,000.

Mirjam: (11:02)

Yes. We've all seen I remember the days of the extreme home makeover.

Kerrie: (11:30)

Yes. Moved out there.

Mirjam: (11:35)

That's a whole other level. But I love it. Just keep it real. And I love that they called you. But you're such a prolific creator and you're always happy to put yourself out there. And I'm sure you're always responsive when you get these requests. And then the media, they really appreciate that you provide good content. You're responsive. It's just fabulous to work with. And then the opportunities multiply, right?

**Kerrie: (12:04)**

Yeah. I love being able to help our design story and educate. And I'm not about the drama of it. I'm about how can we educate it and how can we get good products in front of the right people. So, yes, and I do love working with PR. You know this about me. I love having those conversations and answering the questions about it, because it is something that I'm passionate about. And I feel like if I don't know the answer, I know someone who does.

Mirjam: (12:32)

Yeah. I love that. I knew that about you.

Kerrie: (11:30)

That's how we get along. You're the same way. It's very true.

Mirjam: (12:35)

Right. PR people and media people love designers. And anybody who's responsive. Right. Because we don't necessarily have the knowledge, but we depend on you to provide it. And the more willingly and the more timely you provided, it's like it's the best thing that can happen to you.

Kerrie: (13:15)

Yeah. Sometimes it feels like a tennis game and it's up to each other. And when that person hitting back and forth with you, it's just so lovely. It just makes for a great game.

Mirjam: (13:27)

A great match, and it's amazing that you enjoy that. And I think that's the part of PR and working with the media that a lot of designers and everybody else underestimate, but there's a lot of work involved and there's a lot of back and forth. It doesn't just show up in the magazine or on TV. It's almost like creating a design project. Right. There's a lot of back and forth, and you have to be willing to do that.

**Kerrie: (14:15)**

And I've always appreciated that editing mind. I always felt like they were providing information, but they were elevating what that could be by asking more questions, getting more specific, getting more focused. And I realized that very much so in working with the book where I was having this information, we were picking the photos and that sort of thing, and then the editor would ask me a question, and it was like, oh, I never thought of it that way. So it's great again to have that back and forth.

Mirjam: (14:27)

That's awesome. I love it. I want to talk a little bit about because you have always been very active with the ASID. Give us an understand. And so is Maria. And I know you ladies have been on a panel at some point together and help me understand a little bit how being part and taking leadership roles in organizations like that can help with your business development, your marketing, your PR side of the business.

Kerrie: (15:02)

Yeah. Do you want me to answer that, or did Maria have a burning?

Mirjam: (15:05)

I did not sure. She had something bad to me.



Kerrie: (15:07)

Okay. I've been a member of ASID for 30 years. So again, going back to the Cal Poly story, I was a student member and really relied on my membership early in my career, even working for Ralph Lauren, where someone I'd be in a client's house, and they would ask me a question about, oh, I'd like to do this. And I just remember saying whether I knew or not. Absolutely. And then again, oh, my gosh, calling my ASID pal, how do I do this for Cal Poly, the tagline is learned by doing. And that literally played into it. ASID allowed me to really learn by just saying yes. I always had someone that I could tap on or tap their shoulder to help me through it. And then over the years, just service. I was President of our local chapter and then went on to be the chair for Design for Aging Committee. And that really dipped my toe in the national level and then became a spokesperson for them and just served as chair this last term. I'm past chair. I have like three or four more months left, but I will have been on the board for five years.

Mirjam: (16:05)

So do you feel like having those types of positions within ASID? Has that helped on the PR side of things? I'm like, do media come to you because they know you are in that position? Does it help your visibility within the media space? You think for sure.

Kerrie: (16:46)

That was never really my thought process, but it just kind of shook out that way. And I think by chairing a national committee, it started out and obviously designed for 18 years ago and even now was a very hot topic. So I was speaking to that, and then they asked me to be a spokesperson, which I'm like, okay, I don't even know what that is. And so there was some training along the line of national level. And that's where some of those, like Wall Street Journal and Forbes relationships came together. And again, people having a deadline and knowing even if you told me last night, we're going to get your deadline in the morning, I understand the urgency of that, and I appreciate that. And usually because of all that we've written, we've written for Home Depot. I mean, I have thousands of articles I've written for Home Depot. There's somewhere I can tap into for its foundation and then bring it up to date and be currently to it with photos.



Mirjam: (17:05)

Yeah. And I'm sure that's why all the Editors love you. People tell me this, too. It's like they say, well, if I come to you, I know you're going to get me what I need, right. And that's what they appreciate, because if they come to you or you say, I'm going to get you this, but then you don't deliver on time. It really can screw up their process because they truly are on deadline. So you have to live up to the promises that you make, right? Absolutely. And they'll remember that. They'll always remember that. So I think that's amazing. And I think there's a lot of tips already built into a lot of the things you said. But if you were to give advice to a younger designer who might be starting out or has been in the business for a few years and who's interested in sort of amping up their marketing and PR, so what is your best advice that you would give them?

Kerrie: (18:46)

Photograph all your work, create that library. Not only do you want it for your portfolio, but even if you can't write, you can hire someone, hopefully a friend. You can trade services to take photos of your work. And I think so often that is our we know on Instagram for sure. That is our method of communication, even with our clients when they're telling us, oh, I'm modern and then we show them a picture and they're like, yeah, right there. Okay. That's traditional. I mean, this is how we communicate through imagery. So not only is it valuable for your portfolio, for your client conversations, it is a real shoe in when it comes to media contacts and providing that extra extra beyond the interview.

Mirjam: (19:44)

And when you said photograph, we're talking professional photography. Yeah.

Kerrie: (19:49)

I mean, unless you're an amazing photographer, I mean, portrait mode is a fabulous thing. And the iPhone often. I can't believe the images that it captures. I would say that's bare bone bones. But if you could hire someone professionally, it just takes it next level.



Mirjam: (20:04)

So document your work.

Kerrie: (20:19)

Absolutely. And even for us on our photographable projects, sometimes you're not rocking the world on a project. You're really just doing the functionality for clients. So you may not photograph it, but the ones that are photographed and beautiful and have a story to tell, and sometimes the ones that aren't so beautiful also have a story to tell if you can package that in any way. We have a segment on our website, on our blog called Dress Nest, and it breaks down how we achieve the look and what the client asked for. And again, I think that if someone were to tap into our website, they may find a buzzwordy story there, and that helps get it out there.

Maria: (20:55)

My question is about working with design clients. I feel like most interior designers keep their heads above water and make the pay by working with their clients, but then find themselves not allocating time to sort of build this side of their business and who they are. Do you have some advice that you can give people to help them understand that you have to make time for that aspect of your business?

**Kerrie: (21:23)**

Yeah, I do think if it's not an outlook, it doesn't happen in my world. And so I do definitely block off that time to package these things. But the cool thing is when you have, like we talked about earlier, that brand relationship where I know and I specify Sherwin Williams Paint, I'm specifying Coccantino countertops. This is my test and appliance. Whatever it is, when it all clicks, you're doing the work with the client while creating content because these are your brand partners and that's who you believe in. And when people come to you, they know what to expect. As far as getting a look, we're probably not going to do an eclectic design and probably lower on the mid century modern design. If you go to our website, you get a sense that, yes, they have an edited aesthetic, but it's pretty warm, pretty transitional, warm modern, sometimes traditional. So you're getting a sense of when you hire us, what we're going to deliver. And again, I kind of like the in tandem where we're creating these beautiful homes and satisfying the design needs and the pictures we know are going to be relevant to our partners.

Mirjam: (22:36)

That's a great balance to strike. And it happens. I mean, like, the way you're explaining it, it happens almost naturally, right? Yeah.

Kerrie: (22:45)

And I think that's why it feels more authentic, too. You talked about authenticity. I think it's real. We're not just making up that we love these three paint colors. We truly have a fan. Echo McKay top ten. But I've been doing this 27 years. So those things come over time. You don't just come out of the gates, but our industry has evolved in so many ways. Like, who knew that any of these things we're talking about would even be a thing? I didn't even know I had a Dell web experience in production homebuilding. I didn't even know that was a thing. In graduating College, it was residential design or commercial design. And now there are so many other shiny objects to tap into.

**Jason: (23:45)**

So you had talked about for our newer designers that we have a lot of in the audience that you would take images of all of your projects. So what I'm asked a lot is where would you market that? Because there's a lot you could talk about email, social media, website, SEO. Where would you start? If you have to do all this over again, you have the content. Where would you market it?

Kerrie: (24:01)

My highest level of interaction with both clients and other designers and brands is Instagram right now. And maybe while I was building up my website to feel like I had enough to show there, I would start an Instagram and just file away until I could get a website up and going. And then if I could wrap some text around it in a bigger way than just a post, I would start blogging. I will say back again, like ten or twelve years ago, right in line with Cosmontino Brezo, there was a group of us, and we're still our tight today. The blogger, 19, reached out because we all had blogs. We were talking about design, we were talking about products we loved. And they reached out to us and they said, hey, we'd love to take you to New York. Jason Woo is creating a line. We want to take you to Fashion Week, get inspired by Fashion Week, and then come back and tell us what you think about the new products that we're developing. And at the time, Brass was definitely not a thing. And we were like, we think Brass is coming on blind.



Kerrie: (25:11)

And over the years, it definitely evolved into that. But we feel like we're able to give that input. And so that all came from me having a blog, Brizo seeing it and 18 other people having a blog. And early on and they saw that and we were off to the races on this magic carpet ride and have been ever since. My relationship with Breeze is still strong today. I mean, the loyalty and when you have memorable experiences like what I just described, it doesn't leave you now. It's in your blood. And it's easy to specify Brizo and Delta because I know more than just the catalog. I know the people that are making the product and I have some input in that and we have that back and forth of asking opinions of each other. So I think, Jason, to answer your question, start small but definitely documented and you never know what can come out of it in a much bigger way. My mom has always said that your design career has been a patchwork quote, and I think you're kind of seen as we talk how who knew that this would lead to that and it builds out further and further over time.

Mirjam: (26:32)

I think that's beautiful. And I'm sure you're not done yet, so there's more to come back and change. Well, Kerri, thank you so very much for coming on. I really appreciate you sharing some of your experiences and giving some tips for listeners. That was it for today's episode of Designer Discussions. Carrie, if people want to know more about you, where do they go? Where do they get more information?

Kerrie: (27:05)

Kerriekelly.com has it all, so it's all laid out there for you, however you want to tap into us and I just so appreciate you having me here today. It's one thing to talk over email or be on a panel together, but to regroup and see you, Jason and Maria and Mirjam, it just brings a smile to my face. So thank you for having me.



Mirjam: (27:24)

Thankyou.

Outro: (27:29)

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