



Episode 53

Designer Discussions Success Story - Melinda Dzinic



**Jason: [00:00]**

Welcome to Designer Discussions with Jason, Mirjam and Maria. Today we're joined by Melinda Dzinic from Euro Design Build.

Intro: [00:08]

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.

Maria: (01:27)

Are you wondering where to start marketing your interior design business? We are 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. So, Jason, when the incoming phone calls start to slow down and there's less requests for design work, why is the knee jerk reaction to run a Facebook ad? And is that the best way to. Go about marketing a design business?



Jason: [00:42]

So today we're going to have a continuation of the success stories we have been having with designers and how they have had success in their own business that may apply to our audience. How are you doing today, Melinda?

Melinda: (00:56)

I'm doing absolutely fantastic, Jason. And I have to tell you, you did an amazing job with that pronouncing, that last name. So I'm impressed, buddy.

Jason: (01:06)

I was practicing it.

Melinda: (01:10)

Good for you. I was wondering how you were going to do that. I'm like, Oh, my God, here it goes.

Maria: (01:18)

I said to Jason, I go, you're going to do that right? You're going to say that name right?

Melinda: (01:23)

Oh, my God. It's intimidating. The minute that you see the D and Z together, you're like, Holy cow, what do we do? Yes.

Jason: (01:33)

It's a beautiful name. So, for our audience that does not know you, if you could just let them know a little bit of history about who you are and also EuroDesign.



Melinda: (01:43)

It would be my pleasure, Jason. So Melinda Dzinic and I am the co founder and CEO of Eurodesign Build. Euro Design Build is a residential kitchen and bathroom specialty company that actually decided, well, we decided about 15 years ago that we were actually going to take our business, the design build portion of the business, to an experience center because we wanted to make sure that we had a place for our clients to be able to experience what it is that we're actually talking about. So we are not open to the public, but we are open to the trade and we're open to the actual design of our clients that we're serving. And we have been in business since it has been quite a journey. It's been an amazing journey. I will tell you, I have a love hate relationship with this business. I absolutely love what I do, I love the people that we work with. But I will tell you, it's a pretty stressful industry to be in. So if you could tame the chaos in this industry, then I think you can go a long way.

Jason: (03:11)

You actually led into my next question about the love hate relationship. So can you talk about some of the challenges you saw in this industry that you thought Euro Design Bill can solve?



Melinda: (03:43)

Absolutely. Thank you for actually asking about that. So one of the things that I quickly found out was that there's too many players in this industry. And so for someone who's a perfectionist like myself, it became pretty difficult for me to be able to find satisfaction. Right? And when you're working with such a large group of different people, you've got your client that you're trying to serve and you want to make sure that everything that you promised them or everything that you work so hard to help them envision, that you can help them create, that gets delivered. And so the delivery portion is where we all somehow in the middle, lose it. And so you're trying to bring in the plumber, the electrician, the cabinetry manufacturer, or the installer, for that matter. Did everyone understand the blueprints? Did everyone get the memo? And so when the plumber was doing the work that he or she needed to do, and I say that only because I have a female plumber, master plumber. When we're specifying the functions of a shower system for a master or primary suite, we have to make sure that the plumber, actually the installer, the journeyman, knows exactly how he is going to make that specific valve work. And that whole process of trying to once you make those mistakes and the process of trying to avoid the mistakes led me to a journey where I had to work really hard in order to come up with a communication board for each and every person that was actually on what I call a team. Whether they're working for you as full time employees or whether they are your trades that you're working with all the time, the actual communication system that you create, what is it about this project that's unique and special? What exactly needs to be done? It is those details with the blueprints that we actually decided as a team we were going to take it to the next level. So we introduced a step by step process in everything that we do. Everything from the first phone call to how we interview that client, to when is it that we make a decision to go and see them in their home? Are they the right client for what we're doing? To the actual design process itself based on how we do things? We have three design specific design meetings with milestones at each design meeting that actually gets the client to the next step gives us an opportunity to be able to have the information that's critical that we need in order to be able to get ready for the next design meeting.

**Melinda: (06:43)**

When we did that, we started seeing less chaos. Attaining the chaos in this industry is really key. The industry is phenomenal. I love my career. I love everything about it. But the stress level can actually get you, especially if you are a Type A personality like I am. And my entire team is a perfect reflection of me as well. They're all Type A too. And so we like to drive the situation. We like to make sure that we show up for success, we like to make sure that we set our team up in the field for success, that they know what they're doing as well. That's what I saw early on in this industry that I thought was kind of pretty important that we handle. Otherwise I was going to go absolutely out of my mind or to an early grave.

Jason: (07:51)

I'm glad that didn't happen. And I love the process. I love the process. So on the side of the challenges and what are some of the obstacles you may have had in growing the business?

Melinda: (08:05)

Growing the business? That's actually a really good question. Thank you for asking that. Growing the business was back then, I think was a little bit easier than what it is today, believe it or not, because house was a different house.com was a completely different platform. And so it was a platform where house served the designers and the contractors within the industry. And they offered a wonderful tool for the end user to kind of go and search and see if they could find their right company. Whether it's design, build, or whether it is a company that's actually led by a designer and she or he has a team of professionals that they always work with that gives them the opportunity to create the success that they want for their clients. That was an easy platform. And I used to get probably one to four phone calls from an already established I don't want to say established, qualified prequalified client that would literally call and say, hey, I found your own house. I went to your website. I really like your style, I like your communication. I like your process. I have this project to do, and can you go ahead and do it?



Melinda: (09:05)

And then I would go into my process of interviewing and going and seeing them today, that's pretty different. And so we're all kind of out there and we are creating too much noise within the industry. Too much noise means we're all shouting loudly what different things are for the client. And they're confused. They no longer know who to listen to, who not to listen to. I think it's critical that the designers today become a little bit more focused when they choose to hire a marketing company that's going to help them with their marketing solutions. That marketing company speaks the same language so that we're no longer just creating noise. We should be creating solutions or giving solutions to clients, to problems that they may already have. That is when they're going to listen to what we're having to say. Most of us never wake up one morning and say, good guy, I want to go ahead and spend \$100,000 on a new kitchen just because, or I'm going to spend as it is today for \$40,000 on new appliances. They have to have a pain that gets to a point where it's so bad they can't take it anymore that they say, whatever it takes, I want it done right. And so back then, I literally have to find many different ways to introduce myself to a community. And so whenever I was blessed with the opportunity to work in the right neighborhood, one of the things that I used to do back then was literally send out within the next one block or two blocks in the surrounding area, people that would actually walk. I would introduce myself and I would actually go and put a letter introducing who we are, asking for them to simply let us know if they see anything that's too noisy or if our team creates a disturbance, whether it's with traffic or anything, it's more of it. I'm here to eliminate a problem for you. We're going to be in your area working for a neighbor of yours. We'll be here for the next six to eight weeks. We know the noise is going to get loud. We know you're going to see a lot of trucks go in and out. This is going to be difficult. You can expect to see the following things happening from this hour to this hour. And if this doesn't work well for you, please reach out to me, let me know what that is, and I will see if we could redirect our schedule.

**Jason: (12:05)**

Enough with the challenges and the obstacles. Let's talk on the positive side. So you are very involved in a lot of trade associations and you win awards all the time. So if you could talk to our audience about the trade associations that you're involved with and for designers, why they should even be involved in trade associations.

Melinda: (13:04)

Oh my goodness, what a great question, Jason. Thank you. So I truly have been a member of aside, I am a member of NKBA, NARI, HBA. And one of the things that I found out pretty quickly right at the beginning is a female in an industry that's male dominated. It became very difficult to gain respect. For me, HVAC became a little bit more difficult because they're a little bit more of the old boys, good old boys, where I found a home and people that actually embraced who we were and wanted to find out what is it that we do and how they could come and help. For the people that are members of NKBA, huge. If your specialty is kitchens and bathrooms, you've got to be a member of NKBA. And then, oddly enough, the same members that are NKBA are also, in many cases, NARI members. And so those two really work very well together, and we're only as good as our weakest link. And so when I go to these trade networking events and participate in what they do, if not every month, then I do it every third month. It is important that you become immersed and involved in your community. You will end up making friends that are going to be there when you need them. And trust me when I tell you, you will get to a point where you need them. And I'll give you a perfect example right now. I always remember my processes for everything and how important they are. Well, I failed to take a step for one of my own processes, which was we're starting an entire house project. And one of the things that we decided to do is to eliminate kind of two side windows and duplicate a double window that's actually attached. Window that's Pella. So one of the things that I did was I asked the homeowner, can we go ahead and actually work with the same window so we could put it 3ft next to it? Now it's going to be an open environment. We'll build cabinetry all the way around, put a TV in the center. Amazing. Well, he went ahead and gave me literally the bid that was given to them by Pella. Okay. Pella Windows and Doors. Fabulous company. And apparently when they measured, they measured incorrectly and they installed a smaller window than the opening.



Melinda: (16:04)

Okay, well, guess what? When I ordered I ordered off of their paperwork. Instead of asking for Pella rep to go, my Pella rep to go and take a field measurement, even though this will be a new framed opening that we're creating, we need to duplicate the one that's next to it that will be in the same room. So needless to say, I ended up with the window double windows that are actually an inch and a half larger in both horizontally and vertically. And so I can't live with that. Okay? That's a mistake that I can't live with. So I reached out to my Pala people and I simply said, guys, I made a mistake and I need your help. Now we are post COVID and they are having 18 week lead times. I've already started the project. I do not have the luxury of waiting for 18 weeks. Do you know what Pella did for me? Pella went ahead and literally my Pella Rep, who's now a manager for Pella, simply said, I will find a way to make this happen. He personally went out of his way, made it happen, called the right people, that he needed to push a new window order in so I can get it in four weeks. That would not have happened had I not had built a relationship for so many years with Pala. So building relationships in our industry with each and every person that is in the industry, whether it's a window company that you don't know if you're going to ever use that particular window, door company, it's important that you build a relationship with them, which means find out who the leaders are of that company and make an appointment. Take them out to lunch, find out who they are, how did they get involved in the business and why? What can you do to make a difference in their life. When you make a difference in their lives, they will always be there to make a difference in yours.



Melinda: (18:04)

Of these awards, what has made a difference, I think, for us to win these awards, and by the way, there are many that I choose not to even enter anymore because I don't have the time. I wish I could. And so those that are close to my heart, I always do, but I need to have a team that actually dedicates their time to doing it. But the most important thing that a designer, I think, should do in order to win an award is documentation. So there are several things, and this is important. I've been a judge for many different competitions across the country, and I've actually seen the difference between a good presentation and a bad presentation. So a presentation that is well written, well documented, meaning you have the same angle of before photos as you encounter challenges throughout the construction project, you take the same angle photos, and then you take the same angle professional photography. At the end of the project, when it is finished, you have to be able to tell a story with pictures in addition to telling a story with words. And most judges are judging approximately 30 to 50 projects. Okay, we don't have time to read an essay as much as we would like to, and there are some that are written incredibly well. It's really important that everything is bullet pointed. Just remember, we're all looking at it from the same perspective, and you're competing with ten other projects in your area. And just think about it. If you're going to be competing against your region, you're looking at competing against 30. So that means in the same category, 30 people are actually presenting their story and their projects, and most don't really realize it's really the details that make it. So you may think when you look at that picture of a project, well, that isn't an awardworthy project. You don't know what all went into making it and presenting it. They told the story in a much better way, or they solved a much bigger problem that you did on yours. And then it has to be realistic, because we have had entries that have gone in where the most amazing work was done for a very tiny budget, and we don't know how they did that for that small budget, because it isn't realistic. It's like if you tried to squeeze your project into that category so you can win, you can't.

**Jason: (22:04)**

On the trade association size, because you're always winning awards, and Miriam Will grew with me. That the amount of publications, and that only amplifies your brand. So if you can give us just a little insight on what you do that helps you to win a lot.

I love that these are all nuggets, and I've judged a few competitions. Everything you said is on point, and I hope our listeners are catching that, because that's all great information.

Mirjam: (22:21)

I do have a question, actually, because I'm a big supporter of obviously applying for awards, because it helps with exposure, it can help with PR. It has all the good things. So when you said there's a few that you really value, like to name names, it's like, what are the awards that you think are really valuable for a business to participate in?

Melinda: (22:46)

So the awards that are really valuable are going to be kitchens of a particular category. And everything that we do, let's say NKBA, is square footage and pricing NARI is about price point category. And so when we are in the industry, we're working, is it a kitchen that's going to be \$75,000 to \$100,000? And it said that's what you're really competing with. What's the difference going to be in that \$25,000? And believe it or not, most of the kitchen that you're looking at in the category from 75 to 100, there really are right under 100,000. And so when we're looking at a kitchen at \$75,600, let's say we're looking to see, what value did that particular category, that designer with their construction team actually deliver? And many times, it wasn't the price that got you to that next point. It was really the ingenious way something was actually overcome or created. So price points are the category. Bathrooms are really big. All of us have a kitchen. All of us have a bathroom. And in all honesty, that is the sweet spot for any designer. But before you just go out and just start designing kitchens and bathrooms, make sure that you have a really strong affinity towards understanding construction of cabinetry layout, lighting, appliances, plumbing, things that the end user is going to truly value as the years go on, as they're using that kitchen.

**Melinda: (24:46)**

Because whether they are going to enjoy the process or hate the process, every single day they're going to think about you. I think about myself every single day. I was the designer on my kitchen just recently. And I will say this. I think every designer needs to design her own kitchen. Specify the things that you believe in. You will learn a lot about yourself and about your product that you thought was amazing, the best that isn't, and those that are, you will really know why. I'm pretty strict about which plumbing fixtures we recommend. We hardly ever recommend plumbing fixtures based on their aesthetics or just performance. Our designers have to go and train with the plumbing manufacturer to find out what is it about them that makes them produce a quality product that's built the last. And I had a particular brand that I always actually installed and recommended, like their function. I believed in what they produced. Well, here's what happened. Something happened during COBIT. That product is no longer the same quality that it was before COBIT, and I now have one in my kitchen, and I hate it. Oh, my God. Every single time I do dishes, I literally bathe in it. Because test your product. And so one of the things I have to keep doing is I am going to be testing more plumbing fixtures in our showroom as well as my home and our designers. So that's what we're going to do. And just because one manufacturer has been dedicated to creating the best product that's on the market for 20 years or 50 years, get one now just to see how things are going. And are they really producing the same quality of a product that they did before?

Mirjam: (27:03)

I think it's very good information, and since I have some background with plumbing manufacturing, I completely understand. But I think what you said, too, is like for you in terms of the awards that you apply for. It's usually the trade association awards that you are part of. And I think that's not always something that's top of mind for designers, and it's really good for everybody to know that it's very valuable for your business. So thank you for sharing that.

**Melinda: (27:46)**

That is very valuable, where as ID does the design competition, and you're looking at the design of it, and that's incredibly valuable if you want to establish yourself as a leading designer. For me, it was much more meaningful to establish myself as a design build firm specializing in kitchens and bathrooms. Once I figured that out, then it became pretty easy for me to kind of go into that direction, because I wanted my end user to associate themselves not just with the design, but with the quality of the work they're going to get. So that's me. Good question. Thank you for asking.

Maria: (28:03)

I just wanted to comment on how wonderful it is that you look at not just marketing as something to serve your business, but through the act of serving others. You execute perfection and marketing for your own business. And just that story of going out and reaching out to the neighbors and those elite neighborhoods that you're already working in and leaving them a note saying, I am not just serving this one house down the street, but I will serve all of you through the actions that I'm doing now. And you can see, as my project is going, that I'm doing an excellent job. And then they see that evidence, and then they know that you truly are a wonderful service provider for their area. And just the way that you put that together was perfection. I mean, that is like the Ferrari of marketing. It was just excellent. And I just want to say, wow. Thank you for sharing that with us.

Melinda: (29:33)

Absolutely. My pleasure. Thank you so much. I appreciate you saying that.

Jason: (29:38)

One thing I want to comment on, that I don't hear a lot from designers is what you say all the time built to last. I don't hear that a lot. I hear about quality. I hear about the look, I hear about the feel, I hear about aesthetics. I don't hear a lot about built to last. And that's very important. You'll hear that from a lot of people in Europe in the manufacturer's era, but you don't hear that a lot from the manufacturers here in the States. And that's vital. And that's one of the things, honestly, that sets you apart. You didn't really touch on that, but if you could touch a little bit on that, I think that'll be good for our audience to hear as well.

**Melinda: (30:46)**

Thank you for asking that question. I think that's pretty important. Jason when we have a client that comes to us and says they've got a budget of 100 or 150 or 50, it doesn't really matter how much. We as designers have to think about what's the best way to spend that money for them, because not very many people have the luxury of spending \$150,000. I am one of those people that simply says, is it even feasible to accomplish a quality project using quality products that we can trust to last? Because whether they're looking at this, whether they're going to live there for five years or 20, it doesn't really matter. The quality that you put into the products that you specify and you guide and nurture through the installation is going to have to last and serve that family for X number of years. And everything that we do, I want to make sure that it isn't something that's disposable. Our team goes out and does a whole lot of research on the products that we recommend. And if we're recommending it, then it is Euro quality, euro standard quality. And that is something that our clients appreciate, because they know when we design a space, it's more than aesthetics materials. As a matter of fact, when we meet a client, the first thing they want to talk about is, oh, I want this white kitchen with this white countertop. They're talking about the materials themselves. However, they don't know what material is the best one and the most durable one for a kitchen, considering how they're going to cook, are they going to use it? Which appliances are the ones that are going to serve them for years to come? Long gone are the days when ten more were built to last 30 years. Most everything today is designed and built to last three to seven years, unfortunately. Okay? And so it breaks my heart to think that someone is going to have to spend \$100,000 in seven years to redo the whole thing again. And so I believe, thinking about the layout of the space, designing it for a purpose to be done and for family to kind of live and grow up and build memories and relationships. And then once you have that layout nailed down with your client and it is going to serve them for the way they want to live, then go ahead and figure out what is going to be the best product that you can go ahead and specify that's going to be there 50 years from today.

**Melinda: (30:46)**

And guess what? Whether you choose to do something specifying poor quality or the best quality, your weakest link, you will be remembered by your weakest link. And so I always say, we're not bulletproof. What is our weakest link going to be on this project? There will be something. And so it's not that we're not going to ever make it. Trust me. We make mistakes. It's how we choose to handle those mistakes that sets us apart from the rest.

Jason: (34:07)

So true. So you talked a little earlier about it's harder to market now and to grow now than in the past. So for some of our newer designers that are listening, what would you tell yourself if you were new in the design game now? What will help you grow?

Melinda: (34:28)

If I was starting out, if this was, let's say, 25 years ago and I was starting out and I didn't know what exactly to do, I would first find out, what is it that I personally really wanted to accomplish with my business? And then I would want to see if I could find a company that aligned itself to speak the language that I'm speaking in order to reach that clientele. Now, there are many different factors in marketing, and there is no one simple formula, okay? The ingredients to success is you need to go ahead and touch the client on every aspect. You need to have a really good website for that website to be found and discovered. You're going to have to have a team of experts that specialize in SEO work, search engine optimization, a team that speaks your language that will help you get out there and be noticed. Someone like Miriam who is going to know how to help you get noticed when you do win an award, okay, communicate that to the public that needs to hear it. The other is print media that isn't out. It's not out. And you need to make a decision. What is your budget? What are you going to be able to afford to do that? What is your market? And so it's a combination of everything. Social media is another venue that you can go ahead and use, but it has to be consistent. It has to be the right language that you're speaking to reach your top target audience and be prepared to spend money. Nothing is cheap today. And so my recommendation is a new designer that's coming out, and that's actually wanting to establish herself and her brand or himself and a brand. They need to be considering spending approximately \$3,000, possibly four and \$5,000 per month in order to get the recognition that they need and to build that name for themselves.

**Jason: (36:07)**

We appreciate your time today, Melinda. So if anybody on our audience wants to get in contact with you, how do they do?

Melinda: (37:28)

So the best way to get in touch with me would be and I'm a little old fashioned, so please forgive me yes, the phone call is the best way. So call my office, speak with Andrea, and get on my schedule, because I would love to have one on one with anybody that has any questions, whether that is on a zoom call or an actual phone call. Feel free to go ahead and email me at melinda@eurodesignbuild.com. I welcome any questions, and I welcome the opportunity to actually help anyone who would like to actually take their business to the next level or who is starting out. My goal at this point in my life is to be the best mentor I can to others who are in this industry just because I had to pay the horrific price of learning. They don't have to love that.

Jason: (38:08)

Well, we appreciate your time and we hope to see everybody here next week on Designer Discussions.

Jason: (38:14)

Wonderful. Thank you so much for having me. It was such a pleasure. Take care.

Maria: (38:20)

Are you ready to get serious about your marketing? 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.

Outro: (38:39)

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Designer Discussions. What was your takeaway care to share your thoughts and tag Jason, Maria and Miriam on social media. You can find them on all platforms@designerdiscussions.com. Don't forget to, like, subscribe and leave a review or comment for this episode. From wherever you are listening.com.



DESIGNER DISCUSSIONS

DIGITAL MARKETING,
PR & BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT

