



**Episode 85**  
**Brand Partnerships**  
**through the One Room**  
**Challenge**



**Jason: (00:00)**

Hello and welcome to designer discussions with Jason, Mirjam and Maria. Today we are joined by Emily Dunn, and she will be talking about brand partnerships through the One Room challenge.

**Intro: [00:10]**

Welcome to the designer discussions podcast with Jason, Maria, and Mirjam. Tune in each week where we talk about marketing, PR, and business advice for design professionals. Are you wondering where to start marketing your interior design business? We are opening the Designer Discussions Marketing Studio, a monthly series of indepth 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. You are going to want to hear this episode. Jason is going to tell you how to get your new website paid for and include all the bells and whistles that you're going to need for 2023. Let's get out there and let's update that interior design website.

**Maria: (00:57)**

Emily, what company are you with? Can you tell us a little bit about what you do for the companies and what company that you're with?

**Emily: (01:00)**

Yes, absolutely. So I am with the home decor brand McKinsey Childs, and we call ourselves tradition with a twist. And we have been around 40 years. We are a heritage brand, American made, and now at a global scale with global vendors. But what's really beautiful is we started in upstate New York in the finger Lakes area on this beautiful farmland, and we had our ceramics all produced there in Aurora, New York. And from there, we layered on ceramics, to enamellware, to furniture, and we continue to grow our categories from there. We have iconic proprietary patterns, and we just are a creative bunch of people looking to build and produce items that spark joy within one's life and home space. Your home is your sanctuary. And we create these heritage collectible items that can be passed down from generation to generation. And we're really happy about that. And our products work from your kitchen to your dining room, to your outdoor spaces, to bedroom and bath. And so we continue to evolve the brand, and we're just excited to where it's going in the future as well.

**Maria: (02:37)**

We as interior designers want to know, how do we start and establish great brand partnerships if we haven't done it before? And can you give us some insight on what it's like to be the brand that wants to work with designers?

**Emily: (02:50)**

Yes, absolutely. Brands are so excited to work with designers. I just want to make sure that designers know to not be fearful and to be proactive and to reach out to brands. We love when we get inbound communication from interior designers, home decor enthusiasts, DIYers, as brands in the public relations, social media, influencer marketing space. We just want to build our communities, too, and support one another. And so as a brand, we're looking for people who are open to being collaborative, reviewing goals together, all of us tracking towards the same goals, having the same morals, values, ethos, and just building really strong relationships together. So we're open to getting pitched ideas, and we're open on being collaborative and coming up with one off partnerships and then also working on things like the one room challenge together as well.

**Maria: (04:03)**

How do you currently work with, like you said, the creative community and the influencer community? How do you work with them?

**Emily: (04:10)**

Yes. So we work with the creative community at a very large capacity. We are constantly running campaigns. We run year long campaigns. We run seasonal campaigns, be it across fall, holidays, spring, Easter, you name it. Then we also have our legacy products and items, and we build campaign moments around those two, such as our iconic quarterly chat that will run on quarterly basis. Then if someone has an amazing idea and a really exciting project that they're working on, we'll also work with those partners to be able to create one off campaigns themselves. So we're really, again, open to being collaborative and constantly iterating and ideating with our partners as well.

**Mirjam: (05:04)**

No, I concur with everything that Emily says. I think that's how a lot of brands work with influencers and designers and the creative community. I think you're in a great category where it's relatively easy because your product is mobile. I work with a lot of brands in the plumbing space, for instance, and that poses some additional challenges. But the basic principles of collaboration are exactly the same.

**Maria: (05:37)**

One of the questions that I got on social media is how does it benefit designers to start to establish and want to work with brands? I think most designers are very busy and they're already working very heavily with direct client work, but they want to. They're curious and they want to know how does it benefit them to start and establish these relationships with brands. And they also need to know what do they need to have on hand to start that process?

**Emily: (06:09)**

Sure. Absolutely. That's such a great question. So I think if anything, awareness. Brands have really unique built in audiences as well. We're tracking towards 270,000 followers on our Instagram channel alone. And if you look across our social networks and how much traffic we have coming to our website, our email list, that reaches millions of people. And so as a designer, you'll get so much more awareness, too, whenever we are featuring your content. So I think that's really exciting is helping interior designers get their brands and businesses out there at a wider reach, too. So that's what I think is really, really exciting for people. And then what I'm looking for when people come to me asking to potentially work with McKinsey Childs is a media kit is really, really helpful for us to know what your audience is like as well. So of course, your media kit will have your contact information, maybe your why statement or your mission statement, so we get to know you, what you're all about. And then it also will have a breakout of who your existing audience is today. And having a nice mix of qualitative and quantitative analytics is always helpful. Do you have a blog? Do you have a website? What's that traffic look like type of thing as well. And so when we're getting pitches, we'll be looking out for a media kit. If one isn't attached to the email, we'll ask if you do have one. If you don't, that's totally fine. We'll help you know what we're looking for. And you can do things like take screenshots of your Google Analytics, of your Instagram, your TikTok, your Facebook, your Pinterest, follower breakout, and we can go from there. So that's typically what we're looking for, and we're just excited to not only help grow our awareness and get really wonderful, highly engaging content from partners, but we're excited, again, to build relationships and get people's brands and designs out there as well and help people build their businesses alongside us.

**Mirjam: (08:34)**

Yeah, it's so important. And it really comes down to it being a win win. It's a win win. It's a win for the brand, but it's also a win for the designer. And those are the brand partnerships that really can flourish.

**Maria: (08:57)**

I feel like social media reach has been pretty limited lately. I don't feel like it has that organic growth that it used to have. And I do feel like the collaborations and the partnerships are such a huge way to grow your social media presence and to establish yourself. I personally think that if you can design a room and include a place setting where you're set up with the McKinsey Child's pieces, you would automatically elevate your own brand by associating with an additional high end, high level aspirational brand. Here's my question. A lot of designers are wondering, do we tag the companies when we use their products in our photographs? Is there any benefits that we can create when we do tag those companies? Because we do pay for the photography, we are paying full price for the product. Is there a way we can reach out to the brands when they republish those images and just ask, hey, on my next project, or I'd love a personal piece. Are those opportunities that designers can use?

**Emily: (10:09)**

Oh, my gosh. I wish so many more people would do just that. Please, if you have any content that's featuring any brands that you love, McKinsey Childs or any other brands, tag, tag, tag. Use that handles, use the brand hashtags, use the industry hashtags. We want to discover you, we want to find you. And if you're already organically creating content that represents our brands and incorporates our brands and our products, that's huge for us because we're able to know who you are, discover you, see that authentic affinity for us. And that already is a great doorway into a partnership. And especially if we are going to repurpose that, we definitely have tools in place to make sure that everything is legally sound. We use a tool through big commerce, social commerce, and we will ask, Hey, can we repost this with your permission? Knowing the beautiful high quality photography that you put out there, then we absolutely... If we're posting it on one of our channels, a social channel, that means that we love it and we would love more of it. And so that there's definitely room to work together. And I think that that's really nice, too, because it started organically and authentically. And then we can talk about a paid partnership. And if you're shooting and you have a robust asset library coming through, we can even talk about, hey, we would love to pay you X, Y, Z for a couple of additional photos on your next project, and then we can work up a contract in that way, too. And so I think just being proactive is amazing, and brands are really excited about that.

**Maria: (12:17)**

So one of the questions I asked Miriam right off the bat, because I'm just an interior designer. I don't know anything about brand partnerships. I don't know anything about PR without leaning into an expert and having them tell me. But I would say to Maryam, Maryam, how do I know who to even reach out to with a brand? Who at the company is interested in hearing from me? I mean, it seems like the salespeople wouldn't care to hear from me because they're not making a commission off of me on something like that. But who would be interested in hearing from an interior designer?

**Emily: (12:49)**

Yes, that is a great question because that can be very intimidating. So I think if anything, reach out directly through a DM on social media because you're most likely then having a social media manager open that message or a customer service representative who will then forward it on to the right person. Just messaging directly through an Instagram account or something like that for a brand, that usually works. Then you can also go on LinkedIn and look at who is in the marketing department, the PR department, and you can pull emails that way. Then usually on websites, there will also be a contact us in the footer or brand partnership opportunities on the website footer, and they'll have the appropriate contact email and information there. So there's a couple of ways you can go about it.

**Mirjam: (13:46)**

Yes. No, I think you covered it all. It used to be that everything would be run through the PR Department, but that is not necessarily the case anymore because a lot of brands now have dedicated influencer marketing teams. But if you start at any of those starting points, you should be able to get to the right person.

**Maria: (14:10)**

So one thing I like about the one room challenge is that it's already got a bone structure. It's twice a year. It already is set up. It has what its requirements are of you. It has the timeline already in place. It is the entry starter point for an interior designer who wants to do a space for themselves, show up on social media regularly doing that space, and getting an opportunity to work with brands. So in the one room challenge, what does it look like from your perspective when you get with Linda and sign up to be a brand? And what do you look for when you're looking at people to work with on this one room challenge?

**Emily: (14:49)**

That's a great question. And it's perfect timing, too. As a brand, we've already signed our one room contract. We are part of the sponsorship opportunities. You'll see our logo and brand information as soon as Spring 2023 launches. From there, as a brand, we actually develop creative briefs for our partners, too. And for anyone who's not already familiar with McKinsey & Childs, we have all of our company information there, and we talk about ways to partner with us. And as a brand, we are able to get lists of participants. And so given the plethora of rooms that can be incorporated within the one room challenge, we decided to narrow our lists down to three rooms where we have the best, strongest, deepest product inventory. And so if you, and this is in regards to McKinsey & Childs, but I hope it's helpful as showing how brands navigate one room challenge. If you are doing a kitchen or a dining space or an outdoor space, even if it's outdoor indoor, like renovating, refreshing a sunroom or a porch or something like that, we will get those lists of participants and we, as a brand, can actively reach out and then use you as a participant can also actively reach out to us. And so we will go through everyone's information. We'll look at blogs. I am still such a fan of a blog. The content lives so much longer. They're SEO rich. The experience is even greater. And so not only am I looking at someone's Instagram or TikTok, who even knows what's going to happen to TikTok in the US? We shall see. I'm looking across channels to really start to understand who these participants are, is their brand alignment, and then we go from there. And if it's kitchen, then I'll be able to say, Hey, here's a link to all of our kitchen products. If this is a fit, we would love to go into this relationship with you. Support One Room Challenge, be able to send you product that helps bring your inspiration to life, your design to life. Then we go from there. Whenever it is organic to the weekly cadence that McKinsey Charles is incorporated, say in the kitchen refresh, then we just go back and forth and we have our little set of deliverables and it's fun. And we're there like rooting on the participants that we're working with, we're liking and engaging and watching all of this really exciting process come to life. And so as a brand, we're really excited. I also ran influencer at minted in the past, and I know we did a lot of sourcing of artwork for One Room Challenge. And this is new to McKinsey Childs participating in One Room Challenge for the first time. And so just everyone knowing that internal marketing, social, and PR teams are very excited about this and just here to support the participants as best we can.

**Maria: (18:32)**

And with your reach, you also share the finished rooms on your social media, correct? After everything is done. So the person who partners with you and features your product then gets exposure to your whole entire audience.

**Emily: (18:49)**

Exactly. Yes. And it will be at a really nice cadence. We'll be doing roundups, we'll be sharing as much content as we possibly can across so many different channels. And if someone is doing a quick Instagram story about unboxing of products or shelf styling, we are constantly resharing that, too. So it's a wonderful opportunity for that increased awareness as well.

**Mirjam: (19:19)**

I think one of the big benefits of the brand partnerships within the One Room challenge, too, is the confined time that it's happening because sometimes these influencer partnerships, they can get dragged out and it's really hard to stay on top of things and make sure the deliverables come in from a brand side. But with the One Room challenge, it's the set number of weeks. Everybody is on it because everybody is watching. There's so much more excitement already built into the event than you would normally get. It's a great opportunity for brands and designers. I have a couple of clients that have been sponsors as well. They're not big brands, so it's really attractive for them because they get all this amazing photography, especially that they get to share and support the designer who did it. There's quite a few long term partnerships that have developed from it. It's not that you necessarily only collaborate for the one room challenge. But if the designer likes the brand, everything goes really well. There's a lot of opportunity for partnerships after that as well.

**Emily: (20:44)**

Yes, that's one of the best parts.

**Maria: (20:47)**

To me, it sounds like it's such a win win for designers to want to establish an opportunity to take advantage of the brand opportunities with the one room challenge. And it really does sound like it is the quickest and easiest way for an entry point into it. I know that there are some requirements associated with being involved that you do have to meet, and that's going to be one of the things that you have to know going into it. And can you tell us a little bit about what some of the requirements are that you see on the brand side, aside from just the timeline, being able to complete the project in time?



**Emily: (21:29)**

Yeah, that's a great question. For us, the requirements aren't very stringent. I think that they're pretty flexible, and I haven't had as much insight into participant requirements. But for us, I think it's inventing who our partners are and then we had in that creative brief, I was talking about ideal deliverables. And so it's saying, hey, out of each week, we're not expecting you to every single week be talking about one room challenge and McKenzie Childs, but at least two mentions in two pieces of content is agreed upon as part of this deliverables package. But for us, we're looking to partner with as many people as possible, and we're keeping our deliverables nice and flexible, I would say, from the brand side.

**Mirjam: (22:29)**

And so every brand can determine its own deliverables. So the one room chat, it's actually incredibly flexible. So you can come in and you can create your brief. Every brand's brief is probably different. And the deliverables, typically, they also vary depending on the value of the product that you provide. So if one of my clients gives away a \$1,000 bidet seat or a smart toilet that's even more pricey, then you're going to adjust somewhat. Maybe you're going to ask for image rights if the product donations big enough, or some more mentions or video. That's a little bit more work for the participant, but it's super flexible. I would say even if the brief says one thing, but once you enter into a conversation with the participant, then maybe something else will develop. You certainly don't have to be afraid of having the conversation because there's always a way that if both parties are willing, there's always a way that you can make it work.

**Emily: (23:44)**

Absolutely. I think the brief is just a starting point.

**Mirjam: (23:47)**

People should just go give it a try. By the way, Maria also is a brand sponsor of the One Room challenge. Her design app is one of the services. Is it a service? Yeah, it's an app software that you get to use if you are a participant in the challenge. I'm excited to hear how that's going to go for you.

**Maria: (24:19)**

Yeah, it's my first time doing a sponsorship with the program, but we all need to put together mood boards to get the brand partnerships. So the program does the mood boards for you and you can put together visuals of what your space would look like and share it on social media. And it's all a social media game anyway. It's perfect. Most of the time people use a lot of anticipation and they like to show things and say, what do you think about this or this? And then they like to surprise their audience and it'd be neither one of those two things. That's part of the social media game, just so you get people to interact with you and give you feedback and all of that. I'm participating in it by letting people have two months of use of the program over the duration of the one room challenge so that they can create additional visuals for social media. So that'll be fun.

**Emily: (25:04)**

That is amazing. And I think just to piggyback on that, it's the resources you have access to as well. And I think it's really such a big opportunity that continues to grow. And you're there building your network, being part of something that's really exciting. I mean, one room challenge, I've seen content go viral on Pinterest. And so it really is a cross channel. You're building your network, you're building your social network, your personal network, your brand network. You have all of these resources at your fingertips. It's really fun. You get to flex your creative muscles. So I am such a fan. I think it's amazing. And I as well am excited for everyone who is participating in this on all sides. And I can't wait to meet so many more of you, too.

**Maria: (26:07)**

Thank you, Emily. We appreciate having you on today to talk with us about the one room challenge.

**Emily: (26:09)**

My pleasure. I loved it.

**Mirjam: (26:12)**

So, Emily, if there are listeners out there who are not participating in the One Room challenge, but they might want to work with you, it's like, how do they contact you?

**Emily: (26:23)**

Yes, absolutely. They can contact me through my email and that is edone@McKenzie.Child.Com. And everyone can send me a message if you would like on LinkedIn. And I'll make sure to also follow up and provide all of this contact information so it can be left in the show notes as well.

**Mirjam: (26:42)**

Awesome. Thank you so much. It's been really fun chatting with you.

**Emily: (26:53)**

Yes, likewise. Have a great day, everyone.

**Outro: (26:56)**

We would like to thank Emily for joining us today. And if anybody has any questions for her, feel free to reach out to her. And we hope to see you all here in two weeks on designer discussions. Are you ready to get serious about marketing your interior design business? Our designer discussions marketing studio offers a series of in depth, actionable and done for you 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. Go to [designerdiscussions.com](http://designerdiscussions.com) forward slash marketing studio to get started. We hope you enjoyed this episode of designer discussions and all of the helpful information. Subscribe to our podcast, leave us a review and share it with your friends. We look forward to having you back next week. For more information on the podcast and the marketing studio, visit [designerdiscussions.com](http://designerdiscussions.com) and follow us on.





# DESIGNER DISCUSSIONS

DIGITAL MARKETING,  
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