



Episode 13

How to Enhance the Client Experience with a Whispered Wow



**Maria: [00:00]**

Hi. Welcome to Designer Discussions today. We are super excited to have our friend Kimberly Sundt talk with us today about one of the most important things about working with your client. And it's not about the beautiful space. It's about the beautiful experience.

Intro: [00:25]

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

Maria: [00:30]

Thank you, Kimberly. We are so excited to have you.

Kimberly: [00:36]

Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

Maria: [00:38]

So, Kimberly, can you tell us a little bit about your background and what makes you an expert in the client experience world? Yeah. There you go.

Kimberly: [00:51]

Well, I think we're all actually expert if we really stop to think about it because we're all customers, we're all somebody's clients. And we have all had moments in our head, and we thought, Seriously, is it that hard? Couldn't they do this better? Why do I have to fill out this paperwork every single time I go to my doctor when all my doctors in the same system. I mean, why does the restaurant do it this way? Why don't they put the rubber band around the eggs if they know I'm walking so many different little things.



Kimberly: [01:22]

But I wasn't the hospitality luxury hospitality industry for years. And I think because that's a way of thinking in that industry. I know customer experience is everywhere. If you just Google CX, that's sort of the acronym for Customer Experience out there. I mean, it's sort of the big buzz word the hotel industry. Hopefully the good ones have been having those discussions for years saying, how do we delight our guests? That's what started setting them apart. And I don't think that is the industry that definitely always gets it right. But I do think they've been having the discussion for longer. And I was in marketing and branding and public relations for hotels, and that just became my thing. I mean, this was over 20 years ago, and I was like, wait a minute. We can't create this particular package if it doesn't make sense for our brand and it doesn't have value for our guests. We can't create this great hiking package if none of our guests like to hike just because this particular magazine wants a hiking package. And, Mirjam, you know how we always want to create our PR pitches to fit the publication. But they also have to be true to us. And then I just I find this weird joy, seriously, is so ridiculous and nerdy. But I find this weird joy in empathizing with clients and customers and figuring out where they are and making some type of emotional connection with them, knowing what they feel and what I want them to feel, disappointment kills me. I mean, when I see a customer disappointed, whether it's the woman who has finally lost those £40 and she's gonna go into the dress shop where she could never, ever fit into anything in that shop or someone has just gotten a new client and they're gonna go buy something for themselves in a store.



Kimberly: [03:12]

They never shop in or it's their anniversary and they're at a dinner and they can never afford this restaurant or you've got a friend then from out of town and you're going to take them to this really special place. But the new employee hasn't been trained. You're treated so rudely, and that woman who went into the dress shop she's ignored and she's not treated like someone else who's a regular customer. That kind of stuff will make me start crying on the spot. And so I just started getting very involved in how do we create better client experiences for people? And then I was able to tie it back into marketing because marketing I really believe we most of us who are not in the marketing world. We make the mistake of not looking at marketing and branding as a tool. We buy tools all the time. We buy different apps. Maria, hopefully a lot of people have your apps. We hire people, but we don't look at it as another tool that's going to help us run our business. We look at marketing and branding is something we have to do or something we should be doing. And something as most of my clients feel that they're not very good at. But if we can just get rid of some of the emotion, so many of your listeners, I think, probably have their names on the door. And so when we have our names on the door of our companies, and when it's us, it's our work and our creativity become so emotional. And the marketing and the putting ourselves out there, whether it's on social media or pitching an editor, that's us that we're putting out there. So it's very vulnerable. It's very emotional. And I think one of the best things we can do ourselves for our marketing is to take that emotion, our personal emotion out of it and look at it as a tool. And I'll say something, we'll talk about it in a little bit. I'm sure about making an emotional connection with your customer. That's very different than taking the emotion out of your branding and marketing strategies. So I think client experience is just a way to do that because it puts the focus on your client and not on you, and it just strengthens everything you do in marketing, which we can talk a little bit more later because that was a really long answer to your question, Maria.

**Maria: [05:27]**

Do you think the designers know what their clients experience looks and feels like to their clients?

Kimberly: [05:36]

No. Unless for some bizarre reason, they have hired someone. And this has been very intentional. I think most of us don't know it's not just designers. I mean, when I got into the interior design industry, I was working with some publications as their marketing consultant, and I was creating events and creating producing show houses. And one of the things we learned to do was be the reader, be the guest to be the attendee. So I think most people don't take the time to be their clients and to understand. Jason, you talk about this so well, so often. I love hearing it about you've got to understand your client. And I think on some of your other episodes, you have that ideal client avatar, which is great. And I think you can go in and just do what your client does or if for some reason, you have your new employee do that, especially if they really know how to think, because when you get someone new to do it, then they don't have the same perspective. And they have eyes that people who do this all day long, you just can't see it well, once you're in it, but you can still go in and fill out that discovery call form and see what happens, see what the response is. Send an email and see what happens. Call your voicemail, call your office out of ours and see what that voicemail sounds like. So no, I don't think people take the time line for a good reason because we're busy running our businesses, but we don't take the time to go in and become our customers. And I think sometimes when we do, I do these brand experience audits, and I have, like, a 17 page report, usually when it's over. And this is just online. What the experience is this is what for anyone ever meet you.

**Kimberly: [07:21]**

And I think that can become overwhelming. So I think it is so useful. Just start by filling out your online discovery call form. That's a great place to start. Yeah. I think we don't know. And another great thing is to talk to your clients and after it's all over. So you don't want work for you and what did it because I want to make it better. And I hope we work together again. And if there was a few things that were like. Let me know now because I'm going to fix them.

Maria: [07:46]

Can you tell me a little bit about what a really good client experience looks and feels like for someone?

Kimberly: [07:57]

Yes. There's sort of different levels. First of all, I think a client experience is one where you have asked yourself that this is on the back end. You ask yourself, where is that client right now? And what are they feeling if they're just starting to look at designers and they're filling out a couple of discovery calls, they're excited, but they're also nervous. I think it's very important to know what they're feeling in where they are currently. I think it's extremely important that that experience connects the brand dots in your client's mind. So it's got to be on brand. So you have to know your brand before you create client experiences that make sense for your business. And then finally, I think they must make an emotional connection. So it's something that has enough emotion that they remember it. We already talked about where their feeling as they go into it. But as it happens, what's that emotional connection? People make buying decisions when there is emotion involved, especially luxury buying decisions. So if you don't make an emotional connection, if you just have a little thing after they fill out the contact form that just says, thank you.



Kimberly: [09:17]

And that's all it says. There is no emotion in that make an emotional connection. I have something that I guess you want me to go ahead and talk about the way I like to look at it. We get so caught up in the big walls, the install, the big reveal. I mean, just the big stuff, and that's wonderful. Those are important, and they have to happen and not discounting those big walls at all. But they're a little bit expected. We know they're coming. So those should be grand in tons of confetti and fireworks and the whole works. But what I think is special and what really sort of weave your brand, we've the emotion and loyalty in your brand is something I love to call whispered wow, not the big ones, the whisper wow. So that is, you know, you've all got everyone listening has experienced this. When you get a card or you see something, it could be any industry and you don't go, oh, my God, this is amazing. You go, wow, it's those little tiny moments. And the beautiful thing about creating whispered lows is if you do them one at a time, do once a week. They're little. It usually cost next to nothing to create them. And they all when its whispered, wow, when someone says to themselves not to the world, when they say to themselves, wow, you've made an emotional connection when you throw a going away party for someone, that's a big while. When you take someone out to dinner the night before, maybe your husband or wife or whatever is leaving on a trip that's kind of big. Okay, that's exciting. And it's appreciated. But when you leave a handwritten note in their suitcase or in their laptop for them to find before their big meeting, when you have something waiting at their home, if they're moving, if they're waiting for them, that's when they go, wow.

**Kimberly: [11:32]**

So that's the whispered wow. And that's what I really, really love to start there, because I think it's easy. As for for us mentally, with our businesses do not have to start with everything. When you start with those whispered wows us. Honestly, it becomes contagious in your own mind because you're like, oh, that was good. Okay. Now I can do another one. Now I can do another one. And it also helps your clients remember you because there's been a mother. I like to use one phrase called make yourself memorable and mentionable, make sure you make an emotional connection that they can remember you. And there's enough of a story that they will then mention you. You want them to remember and mention.

Maria: [12:20]

So Kimberly, if I am a nervous person wanting to hire an interior designer and I've gone online and I've looked at multiple websites seem beautiful projects, and I'm considering hiring an interior designer. What is one of the things that I could do as an interior designer to my website to improve the client experience? So if they have more human interaction, what that would be a suggestion that you could make.

Kimberly: [12:45]

I think one of the greatest things you can do. And I know that everyone's going to love it, but your client will is a video. You can do a quick little loom video and send it to them saying, Hi, Denise, I am so excited you reached out and I cannot wait to chat with you. What is in that video? You told them a couple of things that you'd be talking about during your discovery call so that they feel prepared. So let's go back to how how does the client or prospective client feel when they're going into it?



Kimberly: [13:18]

They're excited and a little bit nervous. And this is something that designers always roll their eyes when I say this to them. But designers, you out there listening. You're intimidating to normal people. Okay, we feel like you have these perfect lives and everything is always right, and we aren't good enough. Our homes aren't good enough. You're going to see inside of us and look how organized we are and how we didn't make the right decisions and we painted the walls the wrong color. But you have every single answer. So you intimidate us. So I don't care how successful we are in our own careers when it comes to this. If we're reaching out to you, sometimes it's just like that we're too busy and nothing can intimidate us. But when you know your ideal client, go read Jason's, that PDF has we can fill out that workbook. When you do that, you can't figure out how they feel. And if they feel nervous and they feel like they're not quite good enough, address that in your video, because then what's going to happen when they know what to expect, then they're going to go to that call already feeling a different way. They're going to already trust you. So I really do think those videos and thinking about how they feel, you can really you can start off from a place of trust instead of starting off from a place of fear and on that.

Jason: [14:38]

That is so true. What that has also helped is that has helped the show up rate because a lot of times people will fill out a form and they'll either get swamped or they'll forget about the meeting. But by having that video that personal touch, they are now excited to be on that call and they want to meet you, and they're more apt to actually buy from you, because now they're starting to know, like and trust you one of the questions I actually have for you, Kim, if they're overwhelmed right now, there's a lot of information.

**Jason: [15:09]**

So if you have to say one thing that they could start on now to actually help them in that client experience that will enhance where they are right now in their business, what would you say would be like the one tip to start on right now.

Kimberly: [15:22]

I think if you could get yourself in the habit of asking yourself a couple of questions and then choose one experience you're going to fix, okay? It can be anything could be when you send the contract out. It could be your install. But I would start smaller. Ask yourself, how do you want them to feel? Do you want them to feel confident, smart, relieved. How do you want them to feel in that instance? Don't look at the whole big picture. Look at that instance. What do you want them to do? And when that moment is over, what do you want them to say? It will shift your perspective so dramatically. How do you want them to feel? What do you want them to do? And what do you want them to say? You've probably heard me tell the story before, but when I used to be producing show houses in Atlanta, that was one of the things we did. We revamped the show house experience. And we said, what do we want the guest to feel when they're here? What do we want them to do? What do we want them to say when they all go out their girlfriends afterwards and have lunch? And we whiteboarded that and we wanted them to feel welcomed. And we wanted them to feel like they belonged because, you know what? We also realized that a lot of people didn't feel like they belonged to show houses because they couldn't afford even a side chair much. I mean, they couldn't even relate to the laundry rooms because they were so spectacular. We want them to feel welcomed. We want them to feel that they are a part of it, that they belong there, that they want them to feel welcome.



Kimberly: [17:00]

We want them to get ideas. And we changed our operations afterwards. We wanted them to say, oh my gosh, this was so good. I want to bring someone. So this was so good. My mother has got to come to this. I think I have friends in Birmingham who would come to this. I got so many ideas. I can't hire a designer right now, but I cannot wait to go home and take notes. There was so much creativity at that show house that I'm gonna apply it to my graphic design business. I'm not even in this industry, and I'm gonna apply this. They will remember you when that happens. So we changed things. We allowed people to come back on their tickets for free. And if they brought a guest, we allowed people to take pictures. We did QR codes before COVID. And so QR codes were kind of like dying, so they could get all that information right there on their phones. We made sure they went through the front door, not through the side door. We changed our docent program and changed their responsibility. The docents were been responsible for greeting and, well, welcoming guests into their own homes and bringing the pages of that magazine that was sponsoring the show house to life. So just how do you want them to feel? What do you want them to do? And what do you want them to say when you think about what you want them to say? That's partly my favorite one, because you can say, okay, she's on the phone with her sister after the call. What is she saying and get all those things down and reverse engineer it and make sure that those things happen, that you make sure your call is set in such a way.

**Kimberly: [18:30]**

And if she's not excited, one other thing I'm going to add to that is when people right when they're making the decision to hire you or to hire someone, think about where they are because, like when I have a client pay their deposit. Okay. So they pay a deposit? No, nothing's happening. We might not be having our first call for a week, depending they immediately. Well, not immediately, because I wait till they pay their deposit to actually do this. But I create this welcome packet that's extremely personalized and a video that tells them how excited I am, and they get that immediately. So that a little bit of nervousness when they just pay a deposit, but they haven't gotten anything yet that goes away. So those are the problem. Probably the biggest thing if you get yourself in the habit of thinking about that feel do and say it will become. I mean, you'll be amazed you'll be doing it all the time. You'll be doing it before you go in the meetings. You'll be doing it before you go into presentations. It's been a game can I mean, I've done this for about 25 years, and it's been a game changer.

Maria: [19:33]

So as every busy interior designer is right now, we want to know what can we do to start to improve our client experience? What resources do you have available for us to help with that process?



Kimberly: [19:46]

I've got a couple of different things. I mean, I can go in and do it. And, of course, you can reach out to me for that. But another thing that I'm sure we can put in the show notes is I did a program last year called Brand Power for Interior Designers, and there's a worksheet that turned out to be really valued, and it's interactive in Google sheets. And what it does is it gives you a place to list different touch points, every interaction you have with your client, you can list 100 you can list to. It doesn't matter. And then it asks you different questions. What do they feel? What do you want them to feel? What do you want them to do? All those questions that we've covered today and then it continues on because it even says, okay, you can answer those. And then let's just say you give yourself half an hour a week with your team to do this. Schedule half an hour at a timer bill that worksheet out on one touch point. Then it has some more questions. Okay. Is there something that we can do to make this particular interaction with me easier on the clients? Is there anything to make it easier? Is there anything I can change to make it more on brand? Once I do that, do I have to have a system or process change within my business? Do one within a week or two. You'll have that one and you'll have all those questions answered. Ask your team to do it, too, and then make it a discussion and then do another one. And don't try to do this entire thing at once. I think that is where I would start because it is interactive. You can make it personal to your business, and there's some stuff in there, too. Just kind of help you. So you don't have to go find your notes from this particular episode. You can just go in and just start doing it immediately and schedule half an hour. I think that would be helpful. And I think, you know, we're coming up on the holidays. Well, at least we're coming up to buy gifts for the holidays.

**Kimberly: [21:37]**

And everyone's talking about how we need to do our shopping early. A big thing right now is client gifts for the holiday season, and that could be the one you choose right now. I just posted something on Instagram. It was a blog post I did last year, but I updated it for this year, and it talks about four interior designers how to choose your client gifts so that they're on brand and they connect the brand dots and they make an emotional connection so you can go back and look at that. And that could be a great one to start with, because it's probably top of my mind right now anyway, and you might feel you're kind of getting two things done at once.

Jason: [22:12]

You shared a lot of great information. So for any of our listeners that want to reach out to you, how do I get in contact with

Kimberly: [22:19]

The easiest way is to either go to my website or Instagram. Just send me a DM. It's really easy. It's KimberlySundt.Com, and I think you can probably see my name on this, but it's like a bunt take with an S. Kimberly, S-U-N-D-T. Instagram is at Kimberly Sundt and I'm also on Club House a lot so you can connect there too. I'd love to hear from you, even if it's just a question, send me an email and ask you a basic question. All the emails come straight to me, and I actually love hearing from designers because I'm not one myself, but you are my people, and I just love what you do. And I'm honored to get to work with all of you.

**Jason: [22:55]**

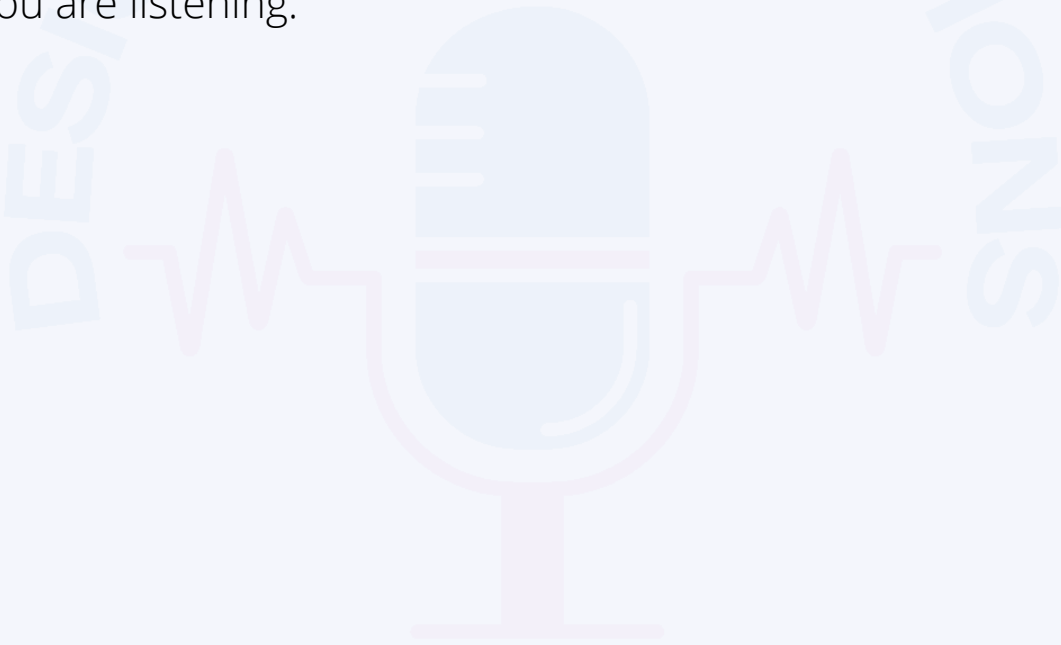
Awesome. We appreciate your time, Kim, and this has been an amazing talk and we hope to see you all next week on Designer Discussions.

Kimberly: [23:04]

Thank you, guys. It's been really fun. Love what you're doing.

Outro: [23:08]

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





DESIGNER DISCUSSIONS

DIGITAL MARKETING,
PR & BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT

