

Making A Real Estate Agency Look Like A Fashion Label

Tim: Lukey, Lukey, Lukey, welcome back, my friend.

Luke: How are you, Timbo?

Tim: I'm very excited, mate. Welcome back, listeners, to Episode 11. Before we launch into who and what is Episode 11, it is an exciting episode because we are launching a new product...

Luke: Shortly.

Tim: ...called...shortly, yeah, not in this episode but in episode, but in episode, what do we call that, 11.1?

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: The one after this anyway.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: Probably 12. It's called Spotlight and, listeners, it's a result of feedback we've got from you and it's all about you and it's a pretty exciting little product, it's highly personalised.

Luke: Yep. And it will be confidential as well.

Tim: Well, yeah, confidential for those who decide to take up the offer.

Luke: Yeah, yep.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: So it's called Small Business Big Marketing Spotlight and we will be launching it in the episode after this, so stay tuned for that. Now, Luke, Michelle Skoglund.

Luke: Yes.

Tim: Aqua Real Estate.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: She's breaking all the rules.



Luke: She has broken all the rules, Timbo; she's set herself up in a crowded marketplace.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: And we're going to hear about how she differentiates herself from the crowd.

Tim: I reckon it's an episode all about point of difference and without further ado let's hear what Michelle has to say. What fascinates me about Aqua Real Estate is that you have...how old is the business, like six months, 12 months?

Michelle: It'll be coming up mid September will be 12 months.

Tim: So 12 months old. You decided at some point to open up a business in a marketplace that has eight in a small village, small beachside village in Melbourne, in a marketplace that has eight shopfront real estate agents and probably another eight who are operating out of their home. Fairly crowded marketplace I would have thought.

Michelle: Very.

Tim: What was the light that went off in your head that said, I reckon there's just...I reckon there's room for another?

Michelle: I think it came from personal experience in looking to buy property myself. And I come from a customer service background and I worked for the Hyatt chain, I worked for Qantas for ten years.

Tim: Hostie?

Michelle: Yes, I was a customer service manager.

Tim: Not a hostie?

Michelle: Not a...well I started as a hostie. And I just found that I never sort of got any type of customer service when I was looking and I found it really frustrating because I was ready to buy and I found no one ever called me back and there was that old style mentality of if you want the property you'll chase, but I was so...I was one of those buyers that I just needed a little bit of encouragement and I would have...I could have been pushed because I really wanted to buy. But at the same time I wanted to do my research and I really wanted to explore the market and I just wanted some feedback because I didn't know Mount Eliza. My husband who's not...he's from Sweden and when he first came to Melbourne he ended up in Mount Eliza and he saw this beautiful big old yellow house close to the water and he just thought, wow, this looks such a beautiful place to live. And when we met, he said, "What do you think about Mount Eliza?", I said, "Where? Where's Mount Eliza?", thinking it's in the mountains. And anyway so then we just, you know, went down there and, yeah, we thought it was beautiful. But I'd always known more of the Peninsula with the Sorrento and down that way.

Tim: So you'd identified a gap, when you were looking for a house in the Mount Eliza market, that you just weren't getting...there was no customer service and there was like, here is an opportunity to create...despite the fact that there's 16 other real estate agents doing what you're thinking of doing.

Luke: Sixteen? It was eight last time.

Tim: Well there's eight with shops and eight...

Michelle: Eight shops.

Tim: ...from homes.

Michelle: Yeah.

Tim: Don't get picky. And so like...

Michelle: Say 16.

Tim: So you identified a gap and filled it, that what you've done?

Michelle: Yeah, absolutely.

Tim: What I reckon you've done too, and one of the reasons we've got you in here, because we interview people who we think are doing great marketing, is that you're not like the other eight...let just focus on the eight with the shopfront real estate agents in the village.

Michelle: Sure.

Tim: You're not like them.

Michelle: No.

Tim: Okay, so tell us about that, that's courageous.

Michelle: Yeah, well what I found was people were attracted to my style of selling, which was just customer service, which was giving people time, giving them product knowledge, explaining what facilities were available and, you know, I really did know my market. Because I spent three years trying to find something myself, I got to know the properties, I got to know the marketplace and I was also one of those typical families that's moving from town who's looking for a different sort of lifestyle for their family, a more affordable one, sort of a little bit more freer, where you can buy half an acre or three-quarters or, you know, and your kids can just climb trees and have fun. So I basically decided that it's time for me to go back to work, I'd had three children, and I was one of those mums who was sort of a little bit, you know, wondering well what am I doing tomorrow, am I going to have coffee or am I going to play tennis or hang on I just...

Tim: Some big decisions there.

Michelle: Big decision. And I just could see myself thinking...it was fun to do it for, you know, four or five years and I gave my children what they needed, what I felt they needed and what...I loved it, but then it was time for me to go back. And so I went and got my agent's rep and I got a job with a local agent and I got into this business and I thought, God, you know, I could do so much more if I had my own business. I could really develop something here, a concept. So I decided to...

Tim: And you obviously believed in it too, because I think many people would have thought, oh, yeah, I could do it better than them, but to actually believe in it and set something up that is so vastly different. I mean, we'll put a photo up in the show notes to show what your office looks like, but just describe it because, you know, every other real estate agent in the world I'm sure looks the same but you've kind of challenged that a bit, haven't you?

Michelle: Yeah.

Tim: Tell us about your office.

Michelle: Well what I decided was, it was a personal choice, I thought here I am, I'm going to be sitting in an office, it's going to be really difficult for me to go back to work, especially with the type of jobs that I've had previously where I could sort of go anywhere I wanted, you know, flying and I sort of...I wasn't restricted to certain business hours. And I also felt what do people...what are they looking, it's highly competitive in every industry and presentation's a huge factor and I wanted someone to feel relaxed but also to have a bit of an edge, that they're dealing with the top end and that's predominantly my marketplace, so I decided...it just all fell into place pretty quickly, I found a shop, decided to decorate it to where I feel comfortable.

Tim: Interior decorate it, I think...

Michelle: Interior decorate it, yes. But really when you look at it, you're selling people's homes, you're selling homes, and most people love buying good looking, you know, they love...when a home's decorated beautifully, it's nice and neutral, most people can see themselves in there, they're just like, wow, this is great, can I afford it. So with my shop I wanted to draw people in and I wanted them to sort of look and think, what is this shop, is this, you know, is this a real estate shop or is it a furniture shop.

Tim: What you've actually done by default, and whether you know it or not, I look at it and go, you've created a brand, you've created a brand that people would be proud to have the board, the Aqua, the business is called at Aqua, you'd be happy to have the Aqua board out the front. It's like a...it's almost like a clothing label, you know, that board and the logo. When you see all the other logos of the real estate agents around the place, they're just real estate agent logos.

Michelle: Yeah.

Tim: But you've almost taken a fashion strategy and not a real estate agent strategy. And I don't know whether you know that or not but I look at it as a marketer and go, you know, you've nailed it, funky wallpaper, really nice antiques, even the colour, you know, the colour aqua...

Luke: If you didn't have the advertisements for the houses in the front window...

Tim: Go and buy a chair.

Michelle: Yeah.

Luke: It really doesn't look like a stuffy old real estate agent.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: All right, we're just going to pause Michelle there for a second to talk about visual image and also to remind everyone that I am actually in this show.

Tim: Hello, Luke.

Luke: G'day, Tim.

Tim: What are you doing here? Are you part of this show?

Luke: Yeah, well so far I've let you do all the talking.

Tim: Yeah, I have, I've been a bit sort of...I'm excited.

Luke: You are excited.

Tim: Michelle is doing really really good things. And I think it's really important that we...clearly this is not a show about real estate, but how this...the kind of stuff that Michelle's sharing, there's some learnings in it for all small businesses and how they go about their marketing.

Luke: Yep. And she's certainly created a couple of different points of difference compared to the other people in the street.

Tim: Just visually, I mean, we're going to have to put some pictures up on...in the show notes, because clearly you and I know the kind of visual image Michelle is creating with her business Aqua. But I guess, listeners, what the point is here is that don't underestimate the power of your visual brand, because it's so powerful and it can make you look so big, you know.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: If you get it right, if you get your visual image right, you know, the logo and the look of your business, it can actually make you look big and very important, Luke.

Luke: Yeah, differentiates you from the rest.

Tim: Correct, correct. Yeah, you might not want to look big and important, but it does give you a sense of credibility and I've just been dealing with some logo development for a couple of clients recently and found a wonderful wonderful wonderful designer who just does beautiful logo design work and

translates it across all the various touch points of the businesses, but not only does she create great looking logos, there's a really strong idea in there too.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: Which I think is important.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: That might be for another show, but I just think what Michelle is doing is just so incredible. That notion of creating like almost a fashion brand for this...

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: ...this real estate business is quite interesting.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: Because it's a big point of difference. And I think this show is about point of difference.

Luke: Indeed.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: Yep. All right, let's go back and we'll hear a bit more from Michelle.

Tim: Lovely.

Michelle: It's interesting that you picked that concept up about fashion, because when we went and we were trying to find a graphic designer, and this was all new to me, I had no idea who even to use for a brochure and it's not printed on a lot of brochures, you know. I look at the big brands like the Kay & Burtons and the RT Edgars and obviously they do well, and you look at, it's such a boys club too, it's very masculine, the branding. It's professional but they're all the same. You know, it's navy blue, it's, you know, bold text but it's quite simple. So then I decided, right, I'm a bit more...I'm another level than that, I'm not part of a boys club, I'm really a strong sort of independent woman but there's a feminine side as well which I, you know, which I do successfully portray I think because I can...I understand both sides to people. And when I went to the graphic designer, he said what do you like and I said well, you know, without sounding corny, you know, I really am drawn to labels and fashion, you know, like most women I think and men. You know, you sort of have a look and you're drawn to it, marketing is really clever. So I got up the Ralph Lauren website and Gucci and all these really strong brands and they were so simple.

Luke: Who's that at the door, Timbo?

Tim: Lukey, it is...it's the designer. This is a really interesting point because it's about getting your creative brief right.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: And I think so often...I'm amazed at how many...when I brief something into a new designer, often they don't say, oh here's our creative brief form, can you fill it out.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: In fact I often ask.

Luke: Yep. Having been a web developer/designer in my previous life...

Tim: Yep.

Luke: ...it's something that I learnt to develop fairly quickly over time is that to...you need a...as a designer you want a succinct comprehensive brief.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: You don't want someone saying to you I'll know it once I see it.

Tim: Oh, no, no, no.

Luke: I wish I had a dollar for every time someone told me that.

Tim: Yeah. But also as the small business person briefing in design, you know, if you haven't got that kind of...if you haven't been trained in how to brief...

Luke: Yep.

Tim: ...it can be quite hard. And I think what Michelle has done in highlighting a couple of...like I like Gucci and I like Ralph Lauren, it actually shows where she's coming from from a design point of view and that provides really strong direction.

Luke: Yep. I think another good way to do it is start a scrapbook, start...

Tim: Oh.

Luke: Look through magazines...

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: ...whether they be...

Tim: Wonderwall.

Luke: Yeah, yeah. And start cutting out things that you feel are perhaps synonymous with your brand.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: Or with your style.

Tim: I think...because this is...once again this show is all about point of difference the more and more we get into it, and that's about like saying to the designer, when you're briefing in whether it be a logo or a brochure, a website or whatever, identify, like here's some things to do, here's three things to do, Luke.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: Okay. Identify your business' personality, and that is what are those three to five words that best describe your business.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: If I met your business at a barbecue, you know, would you walk away saying, gee, that business is blah, blah, blah, you know, exciting, funny, influential, whatever it is. So come up with those personality traits.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: Okay. Brands that you like, tell your designer, I love these brands. Whenever I get someone designing something for me, and it's always the same person now, but he knows I love Apple.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: So he knows that if he borrows some design cues from Apple...

Luke: Or she.

Tim: Or she, yes, absolutely.

Luke: More recently it's been a she.

Tim: It has been a she, yeah, new designer.

Luke: Anyway, sorry, third.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, well thank you, Luke, for reminding me of that because I forgot that designers could be both female and male.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: That's amazing. And the third one is...so, personality, brands you like and if your brand was a public figure, who would it be.

Luke: That's a tough one actually.

Tim: Yeah. Well I'm not asking you to answer it.

Luke: Right.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. So, you know, we maybe talk about that later.

Luke: Yeah, correct.

Tim: It's like it's a really good way of saying, you know, my brand embodies these particular traits and when you say about a public figure, mention a public figure, it's a good way to bring it to life.

Luke: Mmm.

Tim: Mmm.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: So love it.

Luke: God stuff.

Tim: Back to Michelle. That's brilliant. I mean, even that way you briefed the designer is actually...we're pumping Michelle's tyres up here a bit too, aren't we?

Michelle: Yeah, thanks guys, thanks. I appreciate it, it was worth the drive.

Tim: Yeah, no, it's all right. Find some negative questions on that list, Luke.

Michelle: I'm sure there's some...

Tim: It's interesting because...

Luke: Usually our interviewees walk out of here crying...

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Luke:after they have a chat with you, Tim.

Tim: Oh, no, but I think...look, you know, real estate is such an old tired industry. I mean, I'll say that as a marketing person...

Michelle: Oh, it is.

Tim: ...I look at it and I go, gosh, can every real estate agent just line up outside my door because I'd like to give you all some free marketing advice. Because it does my head in, it's just so...

Luke: Just on that, Michelle, what are real estate agents doing wrong, so what are they doing wrong that obviously you're changing, what are the things they're doing wrong?

Michelle: Well they're just; I suppose they're portraying a typical real estate agent. They're not showing their individual style and who they are. And they're feeling that they need to all look the same, drive a BMW, you know, if you're going to cliché it.

Tim: What do you drive? Oh, I know what you drive so...

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah, no, I'm very...I'm quite conservative; I've got a safe family Audi.

Tim: Yeah, very conservative, no bling in that.

Michelle: No, I don't have flashy wheel hubs or anything, it's...

Tim: Okay.

Michelle: But I'm old enough to have a nice car, I think.

Tim: You are.

Michelle: Yes. I've worked hard for it, yeah.

Tim: So what are they doing wrong, what are your competitors doing wrong?

Michelle: Oh, I just don't think they're putting anything into it.

Tim: No.

Michelle: I don't think they put themselves into it. I think they sit behind a desk and they've got a phone and they expect the business to come to them.

Tim: Yep.

Michelle: What I'm finding is, and what I always did, and I know how I like to be treated, is that I like to meet someone and like at a Saturday open for inspection, people are coming in and out, you really don't get time to know them or they know you. So I really try to, midweek, do one on ones with couples, find out what they're looking for and then take that next step of visually trying to put them into a home. And I think the biggest difference that I do is that I try and qualify my purchaser to save them time. And I will, you know, I've got my own way, I've got a huge database and I make sure it's a current database and I ring people regularly and I, you know, I do my best when people ring up and say they're looking for a home, you know, I...we really...there's a few different systems that we've got in place because no one's perfect and you can sometimes miss people, but we've...I've got an assistant who backs me up as well and we have a great database of going back, you know, into our current purchasers. And over the past six months, just ringing people and finding out are they still in the marketplace, have they found what they want, have they changed their direction, because initially...

Tim: Do you do most of that calling?

Michelle: Yes.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, so it's a very personal thing.

Michelle: Yeah.

Tim: Customer service, Lukey.

Luke: Pretty important and it's obviously one of Michelle's main points of difference.

Tim: Oh, yeah. Yeah, well she's playing on the fact that she was...she's got massive experience from previous employment. I think she talks about how she worked for Hyatt and Qantas.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: And it's about actually learning from what you've done previously I suppose.

Luke: About six months ago, Tim, you and I were in a similar situation, both trying to sell our houses.

Tim: Yes.

Luke: And both expressed frustration at the level of service from real estate agents.

Tim: Lack of service.

Luke: Lack of customer service.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: And a quote that I always remember...

Tim: Just in case the one who ended up selling my house is listening, she actually did a really good job.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: But, yeah, in fact...

Luke: The one that was selling my house, initial one that was selling my house, didn't.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: And it makes me think of a quote...

Tim: Yes.

Luke: ...of yours, Timbo.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: And that is, if there's nothing you have to tell them, call them and tell them...hang on...what...you tell me, what is it?

Tim: If you've got nothing to tell them...

Luke: Yep.

Tim: ...call them and tell them you've got nothing to tell them.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: Which is just basically about the fact that people are wondering if you're still working on their case or their job.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: Or, you know, are they...

Luke: It lets...

Tim: Are you thinking about...

Luke: It lets you know that you're thinking of them.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. That came from the fact that I used to be the marketing manager at a large travel agency in Australia and I used to get complaints from customers coming through from the stores and it was the fact that the agents in the stores never rang the customer and said, hey, look, I'm still working on that question you asked, I just haven't got an answer yet.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: Which is quite valid, it's just as valid as ringing and saying here's the answer.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: You know. But customer service, I wrote a blog on it this week...

Luke: Blog post, yeah.

Tim: ...by coincidence, a blog post, and just saying like a lot of those stack them high sell them low retailers don't offer very good customer service.

Luke: Yeah, yeah.

Tim: I got canned a bit actually. I wonder whether some staff members of the ones that I mentioned had read my post. But, you know, I just think that, you know, just because you're selling things cheap, for example, I mean, what's a smile cost?

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: Or a bit of eye contact. Or just spending time to understand your customers' needs and maybe even reiterating it to the customer as you come back to them with a solution.

Luke: Yeah, doing what Michelle's doing and calling the people that she's dealt with previously, regularly...

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: ...to see if they're still in the market.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: You know, showing that she's still thinking of them, she still cares and invariably that will pick up an opportunity.

Tim: Showing the love, Luke.

Luke: That's right, everyone needs love.

Tim: Lovely.

Luke: Back to Michelle.

Tim: So your Hyatt and Qantas set you up for some pretty decent customer service kind of training.

Michelle: Yes.

Tim: What are your top three?

Michelle: Well first of all is to listen to the purchaser. So take down notes of what they are actually after. Find out really what their biggest needs are and what's priority for them. So you generally get people who always shop above what they can afford and it's just human nature. So you've always got that wish list. And I tell people, I'll never say to anyone you're dreaming, you're never going to be able to afford that, but I say do your research, spend time, have a look, and then you might have to start taking a few different items off the list. Number two is offer advice of where I think they'd be best suited, if they're happy for that. And just constant...and the third one is constant communication, just keep in contact with people. And say to them as well, look, if you haven't heard...I'll say to some people, if you haven't heard from me, it's not with me forgetting you, it's just that I haven't found what you're looking for.

But check my website, check, you know, the other realestate.com or whichever tool you use to look for property and we'll keep in contact. So email is fantastic. I mean, 70% of the marketplace statistically say they use the Internet.

Tim: Yeah.

Michelle: And, yes, the Internet is great, but gee there's a lot of people who still don't feel comfortable with it.

Tim: Really?

Michelle: Yeah. And I still recommend...

Tim: What age are they, what age bracket is that?

Michelle: There's a lot of women in their sort of late 40s, 50s, 60s. And men, a lot of men who are maybe retired now, sort of refuse to use it.

Tim: Wow.

Michelle: They just don't feel that comfortable.

Tim: Okay. And tell me (22:02) sales, I know, Luke, you've probably got a question, am I keeping...

Luke: No, no, go on, go on.

Tim: ...you from talking?

Luke: Yep, go on.

Tim: You're not getting sad? What is...what's the big close, how do you close a sale? Tell us a bit about the sale strategy here, what's your big closing line?

Michelle: Well the cliché with most real estate agents would say, oh, I've got a number of people already interested in the property. The best way to sell a property is to show the buyer that there is competition. So you really want at an open...and I find at the moment really there's not a lot of tyre kickers, which you'd call, around. The people that are looking are generally looking. A lot of people have put their lives on hold, you know, with the economy, and have...and felt very unsure whether to, you know, borrow money or to, you know, to sell and buy. So with properties now, and when I'm selling them, it's just...I mean...

Tim: They sell themselves. Lukey, this is worth stopping for. Because there's a fundamental marketing concept being talked about here which the intellectuals would call scarcity.

Luke: Scarcity, indeed.

Tim: Yep, act as if there is a limited amount of what it is that you have to offer.

Luke: With...

Tim: Go on.

Luke: It's easy enough for Michelle when she's selling a property of which there is only one of and they're...

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: ...fairly unique.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: So how does someone make their product scarce, Tim?

Tim: Well I just think you've got to make it look as though, and maybe there is a scarcity, which is a good thing, but if there isn't, you've still got to make it look as though there is a limited amount of what it is

you have to offer. And even if you're a service provider, I mean, you've only got a limited amount of time.

Luke: Yeah. I notice that you've done something similar on your website, Tim.

Tim: I have, I have, funny you should mention that, Luke.

Luke: With your coaching.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. So like I offer coaching packages and I...I can only at any one time have ten clients who I provide marketing coaching for. So on my marketing coaching page, so if you go to TheIdeasGuy.com.au, listeners, and click on marketing coaching on the front page there, I do say to avoid disappointment you might like to email me to see if there are any spaces available. Because I do only have ten spaces, because that's the amount of time...

Luke: Well you haven't actually got ten available at the moment, do you, Tim?

Tim: No, I don't, absolutely not.

Luke: No.

Tim: In fact right now I've got a couple. But that floats, you know, in between having none and having a few. But you've got to create that sense of scarcity and make people want...

Luke: Online marketers seem to do it very well, even if they're selling an eBook, by having a limited time discount.

Tim: Yep, yep.

Luke: You know, first 500 copies are going for \$57 then it's going to jump back up to 97.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: That's creating scarcity so.

Tim: And of course there's an unlimited amount of eBooks.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: But it is, you can apply a filter of price across that and create scarcity of certain price or for a certain time you get an additional something but it's a great strategy.

Luke: It is.

Tim: All right. Well we shall go back and to the end of Michelle's interview, I think we're nearly at the end, aren't we?

Luke: Yep.

Tim: Hey, Michelle, thanks for coming in.

Michelle: Pleasure.

Luke: Thanks, Michelle.

Tim: You've got a nice dinner to go to now.

Michelle: Yes, I have, hopefully.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Might be cold by the time you get there. But thanks for sharing.

Michelle: That's a pleasure. Thank you for inviting me in, it's been great fun.

Tim: And our listeners should go and have a look at aquarealestate.com.au to see what we've been talking about.

Michelle: Thank you, yes.

Tim: Buy a house.

Michelle: Yes, come and see me, anytime.

Luke: Indeed.

Tim: Thanks, Michelle.

Luke: Thanks, Michelle.

Michelle: Thanks. Bye.

<http://smallbusinessbigmarketing.com/customer-service-point-of-difference/>