

THE **small** BUSINESS BIG **MARKETING**

show

INSANELY EFFECTIVE
MARKETING

Episode #452
**How to get Elton
John as a client**



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Steve Sims Interview Transcription

Steve

So what he does is he has, him and his husband David Furnish they have a Elton John AIDS Foundation and what this is. Is a charitable group that actually raises money to find a cure for AIDS which I will say proudly today they actually cured the second person ever that had HIV. So to say that it's actually is becoming a cure disease yeah they solved one person. And today they announce a second person has actually been cured. That's a massive milestone but they have a charity event every year and it's around the Oscar weekend is actually on the same Sunday. And here's how it works. Here's how it came up first about. The Oscars is held in a place called the The Dolby Theatre used be called the Kodak Theatre but they change names. There's only about these 800 people that can sit in it when you're looking at it on TV. The fish eye lens. It looks like a massive auditorium but it's miniature. And when you realize that you've got a soundstage in there and you've got these what they call octopus arms to be able to get the better cameras flow in through the crowds you lose about a third of the audience. So it's a very very small location. So what he did was he set up the rights and he got permission to do a live telly feed. Straight at the Oscars. He'd be in this fella called Elton John. Yeah. So what Elton John and his crowd actually decided to do was they were going to throw what they call a viewing party. So the Oscars in L.A. because they wanted to be filmed. They wanted to be a live in the East Coast. They do it early afternoon in the West Coast. So it actually starts at five o'clock in the evening so everyone starts turning up for the Oscars at four o'clock gets seated at five o'clock. They're in the Oscars and the Oscars finishes at 9:00. So what Elton's party is starts at 4:00 in West Hollywood which is the center of the LGBT community here in Los Angeles. But they have these massive marquee that's put together by abb productions which is a fantastic group. And what they do is they allow people to turn up at 4:00. They walk down a similar it's not red. We have a white carpet. Get that photographs. Loads of VIP and celebrities and predominantly all the people that are not up for an Oscar. So you've got all your film stars more important not more importantly but more saturated. You've got a lot of music TV and athletes that go so you've got the David Beckham you've got the Aerosmith. You've got all the latest pop stars you've got the people from the big hit TV shows in the moment. This is us. A million lives. You know all these different major TV shows go along so you get a much bigger crowd. You've actually got a bigger crowd at Elton's party than you have at the Oscars.

Tim

How is that list put together Steve?

Steve

What is two things that happen. There's a lot of supporters and people that are on the board which I'm also on the board that actually support and so Elton's got a lot of friends. He's got the Beckham's he's got Seal Miley Cyrus so he's got a lot of these friends. OK so the star power Elton camp has. OK. They bring that in droves. My job is to get the high profile people that want to come along. Have a good time. Pay good money to have a seat but also

they're open to donating further either through the cause direct or through the auction items join that event. So you'll have maybe 20 percent of the people in that room. All face is that you know. And then you'll have the rest of the people are either managers and agents of those people or bigwigs that have the money to throw around to be in that room. And that's my job. My job is to get the spenders in that room. So it's the most famous people that you don't know that have more money than some small planets that I'm the one that brings into that room and the party goes from 4:00 in the afternoon and this is the beautiful thing. Where was the Oscars goes from five to nine Elton's party goes from 4:00 in the afternoon. And I left this year at 10:00 to 2:00 in the morning and it was still going.

Tim

No doubt I'd mentioned it is still to be going now. I want to talk more about that party. But how did you get that job in the first place because look at the end of the day this isn't the Hollywood Reporter podcast. This is a marketing podcast and I've got to make sure we get some business learnings. How do you get a client like Elton John?

Steve

So it's it's actually dead easy. No one wants to be hearing. But I'm going to tell you the exact same thing I've told you on every single podcast and every interview and every stage I ever been on. If you bring no value to a relationship you have no relationship. So when I saw the event years ago and I was involved in it like eight years before I became official five years ago I was watching it and a lot of the people that came like any party. If you imagine your local jeweler and they want to have a cocktail party to get people to buy more jewelry. The first mistake they do is they get in all the pretty people. Now the pretty people come along sponge drink all the champagne and then go off and haven't bought anything. And sadly a lot of those pretty people they don't have the money to be able to afford it. They just won the gene pool lottery and they look good for the photographs. So my job was to I was looking at it and I'm looking at it thinking there's a lot of fluff in this crowd. There's a lot of flakes that are doing good because he's helping their social feed but they're not supporting the cause. It's the wrong people in this room. So I went forward and I actually said to.

Tim

Hang on hang on just just pause there. You just went forward and said to him being Elton?

Steve

No. So what I did was I actually approached the foundation first stop. OK and I contacted the foundation and I think it would be accurate to say I was not received well. Cause let's be blunt. Anyone who's ever seen me you've got two hundred and forty five pound Neanderthal walking up to an LGBT community.

Tim

Thinks just walked off a Harley Davidson.

Steve

Yeah and I'm stood there in funny again. Yeah. You doing it all wrong. And of course they're

looking to me going well he's not one of us. Why the hell would he come forward. You know what so was he gonna say that we can't don't you. And there was a lot of don't you know who we are kind of personalities in that room you see before you actually get to actually stand out eye to eye with Elton John. You've got to go through all the ringleaders or the key holders all of the people that out on the peripheral you've got to get through them. There's a lot of gatekeepers. You've got to get those.

Tim

I think we've called them Dobermans previously.

Steve

Dobermans with the pink fox. So that was the crowd I had to get through.

Steve

How do you get through them?

Steve

Value.

Tim

I imagine Elton's got a lot of Dobermans. You talk value. Just give me an example. Can you identify. You have to name names. Feel free to. To dobermans. Between you and Elton. And what value you brought to them so that they said yes you can proceed to the next floor?

Steve

Well you meet. Let's let's be blunt let's call it out for a start. There is a guy that has been married for 33 years to the same woman with with no piercings and tattoos and looks very much more home on a Harley than he does sitting at a desk with 13 gay people.

Tim

That's you.

Steve

OK. So that is a real contradiction for a start. So what you've got to do is call out the elephant in the room and say hey I'm here and I don't fit. What's worse than me not fit in is the people who you got in your room. And I'm going to call it as it is that you've got the wrong people in the room. But I'm here to give you a solution you see a lot of people when they go to anywhere they call out the problem. You know they go full and they go Oh God your putting on a lot of weight Oh my God you did that event. God it was terrible. The sound system was appalling. When you go into any environment straight away these people especially when it's obvious that you're not one of them. You know there's a friction. And the trouble is also you'll get in the puppy dobermans and they always says the baby rattlesnakes that the bite first you'll getting all of these people that just get the leg in the door of the foundations of these causes of these events. That job in their head is to put you down which helps them step up. So you step in there and you go hey if you go in and you go

your sound system sucks you need to follow up with quickly. But I have a way of giving you superior sound system. I give you a way of enhancing the experience of your event. We are from two different sides of the table that could make what you do go from great to exceptional. And when you start going in with a joint focus with a joint passion in making what they've got from fun to fantastical that's when they get you on board you meet in the middle. And quite simply what they refer to as a common ground and some of those puppy dobermans that have worked up at those ranks are now some of my closest friends because we are both fighting for the same cause. So you've got to get into the conversation showing that hey we wear different colors we look different we don't fit in so many different ways other than the sandpit that we're playing in today as the joint cause to make this fantastical.

Tim

Beautiful. And I'm going to look up the dictionary and I think fantastical is a word but it certainly has wonderful syntax to it. So you have got through all the puppy Dobermans the bigger Dobermans. Tell us about the moment you get in front of the man himself.

Steve

Well the man himself was probably Scott and Dave Furnish because those were the guys that run it. Those were the last hurdles before I finally got introduced to sir Elton. And of course I'd already been working. I'd actually been working for a couple of years for the foundation before I was finally introduced to the man himself. It was as though they were checking me out to see what I could do. So bear in mind my relationship with that that community was for eight years and was only the last five that I actually became out on the chair on the board and actually got listed in the invites and I actually got my name up on there and took two years of an official contract with the people before finally I got in front of the man himself and was able to shake his hand. I had to earn my stripes before I actually met the man himself.

Tim

So many business owners simply are impatient. That's a long time to finally crack the egg isn't it. What do you say to those business owners that just want that instant gratification that instant result?

Steve

Well the the egg was actually was given me protein and food before I got to meet Elton and here's probably where a valid lesson is from here. A lot of people get very very impressed the fact that I've worked with Elton John. OK. The people that worked underneath Elton John are doing 99 percent of the work. Elton turns up to the event. The menus have already been done. The security. He's not looking after any of that. So I'm already making sure that my job is good from these people. Because guess what. There's about 200 people that look after that event. They also look after about 20 to 30 other events ranging from fashion shows Leonardo DiCaprio's event in San Trope the amfar gala in Cannes. They look after so many different events that if you can show your cup in that event you end up in all of these other ones. So there's a lot of people that said to me Oh it was so great you got to meet Elton. Believe it or not I got so much more out of the event form connections contracts

clients before I met Elton. Elton was very much an icing on the cake. If I had never been introduced to Elton John.

Tim

Wouldn't matter.

Steve

It would not. Profitably. It would not have mattered. OK. Image. Yes. It certainly helps me having some pictures taken with him and people know I've been with the man.

Tim

I almost unfollow you on Facebook it was getting a bit embarrassing.

Steve

It was wasn't it. But it certainly helps. But for money credibility stature distribution and let's be honest as a business owner we don't want to be in one stable we want to be able to be out in many many different playing fields. Working with this crew gave me the credibility to be able to work in so many other sandpit. So the trouble and I want to focus on this. Don't look at the shiny object. Look at the substance over shine every single time Elton is definitely the shiny object. A star on the top of the tree. But the rest of it how so much substance that I could feed from I focused on that over the shiny object.

Tim

Nice I like that. When you did get in front of Elton whilst it was really just a formality I suppose to finally meet the guy who's heading up this fantastical event and all these other events. Whilst it's a formality there is a great opportunity that you could say something and completely tip the house of cards over right. So do you go into that meeting with Elton with what kind of mindset? What did you want from that meeting to walk out going Elton thinks I'm a nice guy or what?

Steve

What a good thing is I again. I'd already been working with them unofficially about three years officially two years. So I already had some stripes on my shoulder by the time I got there and the people that were introducing me to him were credible voices in his ear. The way to go and this is the man that's been doing this. This is the man that's been supporting. This is the man that's been involved for the last X amount of years. So it's the classic referral structure that I've always played with. If I tell you I'm brilliant its marketing promotion and it's all those kind of things. But if someone that you trust tells you those things it's gospel. So with that introduction he already looked at me as someone who was credible on a support or an achievable value to the conversation.

Tim

Nice. What's he like?

Steve

He is a diva and certainly deserves to be so. He's also a gentleman that really loves his art. I don't think he likes all the pandering and the shaking hands and I know he hates bloody photographs. You get people come up to him and shake his hand and then oh can I get a photograph. He's like no he doesn't care about that. He wants your music to resonate. But he really doesn't like the selfie crowd. He doesn't like to show off. It's funny as a major performer that he is. He hates fake show boats. So he hates all these people that turn up and go oh yeah I've got a million followers let's get a picture he's like I could not care. He wants to release somebody. He wants to know the why he's doing mentioned it makes you want to swallow a little bit and wants you to remember a location you were at. He wants you to remember or it triggers a romance you are having at the moment. He wants his music to do all of the showboating for him and that to be that it to stand out and let's be blunt the guy is getting on a bet and has never since day one missed a year of performing. Never once. He's been on the road every single year of his life.

Tim

I saw him in Tasmania in Hobart which is the little island Tasmanians that along the bottom of Australia Steve I saw him last year. He played only three regional towns in Australia. I'm not quite sure I think it was some tourism promotion. He in the fifth song paused and he said excuse me I'm gonna have to leave the stage and throw up. And he walked off the stage did what he needed to do came back on stage and played for another two hours ago.

Steve

The guy is. He's one of the greats. He's one of the greats unautotuned unfiltered is what it is. Raw talent. He's one of the greats. Let's be blunt. You know you had Michael Jackson who sadly is no longer with us. Okay you're Frank Sinatra no longer with us. Eltons one of the last greats he's got one name for Christ sake. Elton and you exactly know who he is and he is one of the great great great that even if you don't like Elton John or his music there's a tune that triggers a reaction because he's been with you all the way through your life somewhere

Tim

You do the viewing party that's a success. That's during the Oscars. There was another party you organized which was the one that caught my attention although they're awesome. Pretty amazing pretty fantastical. You did something at the Louis Vuitton store in Rodeo Drive for Elton which is pretty amazing. From what I understand that's a three story retail outlet with a whole lot of expensive product and you're having a party there for Elton John.

Steve

Yeah. It's so to be accurate. His party has about 14 hundred people. We throw a private party on the Friday night and we invite the VIPs that are going to that party. Every year we've kind of had some fun. So it's a much more smaller event although it's just under a hundred and fifty people. It's a nice sized crowd. And every year we've had a bit of fun of where it's been. We've been in the Foundation Room of the House of Blues before it was demolished. We were on if you ever saw a TV show called Sur it was on Lisa Vanderpump

in her restaurant. We actually took over the restaurant and actually held the party in the restaurant which was a common set for a TV show. And we just played with different things and last year we actually took over. And people don't even know exists there's a penthouse above Tiffany on Rodeo Drive and the penthouse actually it's got no terrace but it's got these windows above it and it looks out over Rodeo Drive and it looks across the street to a private terrace open at terrace on the roof of Louis Vuitton and I enjoyed doing it at the penthouse but the penthouse was quite small. OK. We had about I think was like about 40 50 people at that event. Okay. Small venue small locations small people small numbers. So I actually spoke to Louis Vuitton. I said I had it over there last week last year. And I said I want to take over your penthouse.

Tim

The Louis Vuitton?

Steve

Yeah. Louis Vuitton is headquartered in New York. So I had to speak to them and they didn't know who I was. I found out most people don't know I'm a big deal to about 10 people in the world. So they didn't know who the I was so I contacted them I said look I want to do this terrace party. I know you've never heard of me. I'll get a few people to be in charge here. Yes of course I had Tiffany and I had some other people reach out we'd done. So I'd try to get people that were in that kind of wheelhouse that they would recognize. Contact them we'd go hey we've had these people out here and then of course you drop a few links show that you're actually on the list of chair with sir Elton John for the party blah blah blah. They went from allowing me the terrace to shutting down the entire three storey flagship store and they went it's just yours. We will supply all the drink order champagne. I stipulated that I have to have old fashion so they made up an old fashion for me. They had an artist come in to draw on the bags and they gave us the whole three floors for three hours on Friday night for a private party and private viewing of their new collection at the Louis Vuitton in Beverly Hills. It was pretty sick and amazing. I have no idea how I am going to trump that next year. Yeah I should say the year before I had the penthouse at Tiffany. This year I took over three story building so I don't know what I'm going to do.

Steve

I think one of the learnings here in the very first interview I did with you but you just organized an event at the Accademia a museum in Florence where you had in client dine at the feet of Michelangelo's David statue with Andrea Bocelli singing between courses when you talked about getting access to the accademia it was really not as hard as we all thought. You made the phone calls you asked and sometimes it's as simple as that isn't it. Because it sounds like. I think when you were explaining it last time not many people have asked to do that and you went through some hurdles and but you got there. And likewise here I mean it wasn't as simple as ringing Louis Vuitton saying hey how about it. But sometimes we just need to ask right?

Steve

So here's here's a story which is sad in its truth. There was one guy that I kind of got the

sense didn't like me from the accademia no shock. How could you not. But the guy when I first turned up because I wanted to close down the entire museum he looked to me as this guy that just kind of spent rich people's money and didn't respect the culture. Fair enough. This was a guy that Joe and put in the event together. I actually avoided because I didn't want the friction. It was all being put together. I didn't need to speak to him because I'd already gone above his head. But Joe in the event. This tells people what a dick I am. Joe in the beginning of the event Andrea Bocelli's in the corner just like warming up his throat. The piano there playing his sounds on his piano. Just laying the table and order the candelabra or the light to go the flowers being laid out. It was a beautiful scene. And I'm stood there probably about 15 feet to my right is this guy that I could sense didn't like me and as I say this is me being a dick but I wanted to just kind of like prod him a little bit. So I called him and he came over to me and I said I had no liability in this conversation now. So I turned around on what do you think. He was like it is beautiful. It was beautiful. I said Oh did you ever think they'd be like a table of six at the feet of Michelangelo's David. And he was I dunno I didn't. And I said do you ever think that Andrea Bocelli would be in here and serenade while they were eating their pasta. He's like no. And I'm feeling chuffed with myself and I admit it now that it was a dick move but I wanted I to poke the guy because there was a few times he gave me little glances the kind of aggravate me but I couldn't say anything about it because I needed this to come off and I thought to myself. Now I'm getting my revenge as I say real dick move and I turned round and I went so how come this happened and I was expecting him to admit. Well no one has the connections you do. No one knows how to negotiate as much. And the guy just turned away he still had his arms folded. Turned around and look at me. No one's ever asked and it killed it. That was me trying to. Can I get one over him. He just gave me the knockout punch and I suddenly realized that we're all so frightened of the big elephant. The big deal with a big dream that we avoided like the plague and focus on the ones that we can settle on that we could achieve so we can pull off. Now that guy we went out afterwards we drank we ate Florentine steak and I've stayed in touch with the guy ever since but I went back to L.A. and actually commenced for about six months randomly phoning up locations venues artists celebrities that we had dealt with. And I said I know we did this five years ago. I'm actually researching I want to ask you how come we did that. And the answer came back the exact same well no one had ever asked us to do it or no one had ever proposed this today. And you got the cheeky little stuff at the beginning. Well you knew people but it all came down to the exact same thing. No one had ever had the balls to walk up toe to toe and go Hey this is what I would like to happen and this is what I can do for you if you allow it to happen. So I brought value to every venue dream desire that I'd ever pulled off. But the simple fact is the first thing no one was doing was actually asking for it to happen.

Tim

Not hard.

Steve

No no no no. But scary as shit. A lot of people will go I like to throw a party on that mega yacht. And then they will proceed to tell you all the reasons why can't be done by them. And one reason why it should.

Tim

Going back to your party at Louis Vuitton. Clearly it went beautifully well. The quid pro quo for that Steve just to understand was that clearly they wanted Elton to throw a party in their store. That was good for them. It sounded like what they wanted to do with 140 guests or so that you had who I'm guessing are all sort of either a listers or well-heeled individuals that nobody knows but could buy a small planet. Louis Vuitton wanted to showcase their product. So is that the kind of deal that was struck or did also Louis Vuitton want to promote the fact that Elton was having a party in this store in Rodeo Drive.

Steve

Well that party the Friday night parties always thrown by my company for Elton. So Elton never turns up on that. Okay. He turns up on the Sunday he's never been to any of our Friday pre parties this party. I literally just bring in the richest most unknown people you'll ever meet. And so what's in it for Louis V is they got to mingle with one hundred and fifty of the world's most powerful people and they got to bring out those special little pieces that aren't often showcased anywhere else in the world. And as it's a flagship store they've got like the. Well this is only one of three in the planet kind of items. So when we left funny story when we left about 10 o'clock and started 730 in evening. We left about ten thirty as we will leave in the store and they start to lock up in the corner was one of our clients and I said to one of the people that helped us put the party together with Louis I went oh shall I go and get my client and they said we would prefer if you didn't because she started spending about an hour ago and has not stopped. And I said well hey if you're happy. And so I went out and I said you having a good time and she was like I'm having a wonderful time. It was a pretty woman moment. She was being served champagne and just blowing in the store. So the what's in it for a client for Louis Vuitton is bringing the right clientele introducing them to what is Louis Vuitton. What does Louis Vuitton do. What makes them spectacular. What makes him stand out as a brand. So there was a lot of engagement and education for our clients on what Louis Vuitton actually is. And of course a lot of our clients fell in love with that and then wanted to cement the relationship and the night of experience by going home with the two ton of LV products.

Tim

Steve you never cease to amaze me mate. Like you said earlier what's next. Even you don't know. But I can't wait to find out. It's a great story. I know you've already written one book the art of making these happen. It's awesome. I'm sure there is a book at some point in there mate where you are going to change the names to protect the innocent but talk about all these incredible events and and interactions you've had with interesting people along the way. That's in development right?

Steve

It's got to be careful how you do it. Because I have a great relationship with the guy that took over that one the academia but every time I tell a story I get a text or I get a little Facebook Messenger or somebody know that I had the podcast. I'm glad my checkbook helped your story. You've got to be a little bit careful because even though you may change

the names that people are going to know so you can't reveal too much.

Tim

Correct. Hey buddy thank you.