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BOOK MARKETING: How to Make Your Book an Awesome Online Course Interview with Dr. Kelly Edmonds

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books.

Today, my special guest is an expert online course designer. Dr. Kelly Edmonds has years of experience in the teaching and instructional design field. She has three degrees in Education with focuses on adult and online learning. She helps entrepreneurs and corporations create, design and teach online-based courses. A leader in the e-learning field, she's won seven educational awards and presented at nearly 30 education conferences while helping thousands of people learn better through research-based instructional design. She's deeply inspired by the impact that effective instructional design can have on individuals and institutions, and her aim is to further students' knowledge, and help them feel supported as they embark on a new educational territory. I love it. Kelly, welcome and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor. Welcome to the show.

Kelly Edmonds: Thank you very much for inviting me. I'm honored.

Susan Friedmann: Kelly, I've taken many of your programs and I just absolutely love the way that you put everything together. You are a true master building these e-courses, online programs, but what does it take to convert a book into an online course or program?

Kelly Edmonds: It takes quite a bit and I'll be honest about that. There's a lot of marketing ploys out there like, "Take my program and I'll teach you how to whip up a course," and it takes quite a bit. It takes just as much to create a course as it does to write a book. So a lot of thought needs to go into it, a lot of organization. You have to get the right tone. You have to worry about how much content you put in. Too little, people won't get enough information; too much, they'll become bored or overwhelmed. So to design a course, you need to figure out what, first of all, the experience you want to take people through. That's what

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courses need to be. They are one step away from just that one-way communication and information providing of a book to engaging.

So now they can engage a little bit more with the content. They can engage with other people in the course including the instructor if it's facilitated. You can almost make your book come alive a little bit. When I design courses with my clients, like a five-week course, let's say, for example, it takes us close to three months to create it. It's not so much putting together the platform to put the content up into it. It's massaging that content and creating the right activities and getting the visuals and maybe doing an audio piece or video piece. So it takes a lot to actually create the content that goes into it, a dynamic and engaging online course.

Susan Friedmann: Would you recommend that somebody start with something smaller and maybe like an ... Even a mini course, because here they are, they've written this book and they put so much blood, sweat and tears into it, and now to think about a course that's going to be so complex and, as you say, bring their book alive. But can they do something smaller that isn't too scary?

Kelly Edmonds: Absolutely. I coined it as this mini power course. I have a tutorial on how to create one of those. So they could take a part of their book, a really interesting chapter. If you want to take, for example, like a leadership book, maybe there is this really interesting strategy or method they would love to work closer with their audience with, show them a little bit more, have them apply it. So, yeah, definitely, you can have one or two lessons online besides 10 or 12, for sure. It just needs to be poignant or significant type of nugget that you're trying to share. You could provide it for free for a little bit in terms of just getting people to sign up.

Then the nice thing about a mini power course or a small course is you could collect data from your users, from your participants on what they liked about it, what they didn't like about it. You can freshen it up and then you can charge money for it. Because it's one or two lessons, it can be one or two lessons you use in your bigger course as you start to build it, if that's what people want to do; it's a really nice way to start. It's what they call a minimum value product.

Susan Friedmann: I really like that idea. That feels as if it's much more doable. How do you go about accommodating, let's say, the different learning styles that people have?

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Kelly Edmonds:

That's a really good question. I remember when I started on my educational path and I was in my first degree, my Bachelor of Education, I'm also a teacher, is I just felt overwhelmed when I learned that people learn differently. So I'm a visual learner. I love PowerPoints at conferences. There are people who are just so bored with them. But I cannot process complex concepts just by hearing it whereas my husband is opposite. So I realized that there's multiple intelligences and styles, but the three big ones are there are visual learners and that's how they can process information by seeing it. That could be seeing something demonstrated; that could be reading the written word or looking at a complex picture, like an infographic. Or audio. They just want to hear it.

Then there's the ones that don't want to hear or listen; they just want to apply it. They just want to try to ... So they're like what we would think a go-getter. But everyone learns differently. We process cognitively. We'll process differently. So when I first started off my own educational path, I was overwhelmed thinking, "Do you have to construct every lesson in three different modes?" No, you don't. It's just that some people have more preference to, let's say, visual learning but they can still listen and they can still start applying it right away by practicing the lesson.

So what I usually say is have a nice mix through your whole course. How I choose what mode to present something, like a lesson, so it could be a video, an audio, just a worksheet with audio instructions or maybe it's just written text or maybe it's an image and I'm describing a graph or something, it all depends on what the lesson is calling for. I just sit and I think, "How would I deliver this in the classroom? How would I want my students to experience this content?" sometimes it's just reading it and other times it's like, "I need to show it in a different way." That's how I decide what modes to create in. so all my courses that I create for myself, the ones that you've experienced as well as for my clients, there's a lot of variety in them.

So in the end, I know I can appease all the different learning styles. You can't please everybody 100% of the time, but I think a nice variety really helps as well. Sometimes if you have an audio, you can also have the transcript. That's a lot of work. If you have a lot of audio in your course ... Well, you shouldn't in the first place because you don't want to go into one mode too much. Audio and video, especially if they're past five minutes, I'm talking instructional stuff, if they're past five minutes, then they can't retain it. So I wouldn't suggest that, but you most certainly

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can have a transcript beside it to download or the key points under the audio piece on the lesson page.

Susan Friedmann: One of the questions that I was going to ask you and maybe you can expound on what you just said, is there like an optimum length for an entire program or even for the length of each lesson.

Kelly Edmonds: That's a good question. We'll start with the bigger picture, like what is it you want? What is it people want students to walk away with, their participants? What do you want them to be able to do, know, feel or perceive? Those are the four biggies. What's reasonable? If you want people to, let's say, apply your sales method and it's a complex sales method, that's going to be a longer course. You're going to have to break it down. But if it something where they can sign up first of all an app or a platform or whatever, or they can use a certain way of laying out the sales page or a pitch of some type, what that should look like or sound, like, then that can be a smaller course.

So it depends on what it is you want them to walk away with. Then for each lesson, adults can only retain ... They stop absorbing information after 20 minutes, so your lessons have to be very chunky. It's easy to read a couple of minutes and there's a five-minute video and then there's a worksheet that may be half an hour they'll work on. Now, this all sounds like the adult learner is very flippant, but what we're finding nowadays is because of the way technology is built, nobody has a really long attention span.

So between the adult learning and then just the natural retention of information, 20 minutes is probably the max. Then because everyone's busy and if they take a course that's an informal course versus a formal credit course at university where you have to read the information, you have to do the assignments, with informal learning, it's really hard to motivate the people to go through your lessons. It's a fine balance between having this significant information in there so that they're going to learn what you said they'd learn and also entertaining them. It's small, it's chunky, they can go back to it. Again, there's a multimedia in there, which is a rich way of presenting information. Yeah, so you have to keep that in mind.

Now, a longer program, if you wanted to do the five, six weeks one, ten that would be taking people through a much larger experience and they should be able to do a lot more at the end of the five, six weeks.

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- Susan Friedmann: One thing that you talked about was accountability in terms of making sure that people actually complete the course. How do you go about that? Because I know I'm guilty of it; that I start programs, but I don't necessarily finish them.
- Kelly Edmonds: One of the main reasons you stopped because that is very common.
- Susan Friedmann: I've looked at that and I wondered and I thought, "Well, maybe because I'm bored with it." I'm not really sure 100%. Maybe you can fill in the blanks.
- Kelly Edmonds: Well, there is that element that it needs to be entertaining, not too hard because some people really dump a lot of content into their course. So by Module Two, you're overwhelmed and you will find another thing to do on that Friday afternoon besides taking the course. So it needs to be highly applicable and relevant. The Adult Learning Theory states that it has to be very relevant and usable in an adult's life right now and it also has to give them some choice on things they want to do. So if you really lockdown your assignments and you go, "You must lay it out this way," or be it a sales page, or be it a script you're writing or something, you have to give people some flexibility.
- So there's that balance between not too hard, not too easy, not too long and not too short. Think about how we like to learn, and I'm talking again about informal learning. So most of the ... I would think your audience would have a program or a course idea that they're going to sell to their own marketplace, and people are going to take it out of pure interest and you just have to keep that interest up. It's a fine balance. In terms of completion, I think, I mean it'd be ideal is 70% completed your course, but there seems to be this e-courses are the latest hottest thing out there and people buy them like candy and they never finish them either.
- So it's difficult. I mean it's hard to email someone saying, "Hey, you haven't been in the course for the last two weeks," if it's a self-directed course. The self-directed course or an evergreen course is like it's always available and you can take it by yourself whereas a facilitated course means the instructor is there, so there's a time frame to it. "We're going to start on May 1 and we're going to go to the end of May and we're going to have a live webinar and I'll be in there in the discussion board," that type of facilitation.

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- Susan Friedmann: What about a drip method whereby you get Lesson One the first week and the second week, you get Lesson Two. What are your thoughts on that?
- Kelly Edmonds: I think that would help with motivation. However, because adults ... Again, back to the Adult Learning Theory ... want a lot of control in their life. You never know how people are going to go through your course. So if that is controlled about when you're going to get the next lesson, it could really irritate people, too. But they may be looking forward to it coming in their email saying, "Lesson Two is up" or "Module Two is up." I only usually recommend drip content if it is a personal development or an emotional course, a transformational course. If you're taking people through examining themselves and looking at some disorder in their life or upset in their life and then helping them at the other end, that's a little bit bitter to drip that out because you don't want them being overwhelmed with looking within and big reflection questions if they're not ready.
- But yeah, I like the idea about drop in terms of it's going to come to their email and they're going to be told the next lesson is up. I don't know, for some reason, Module Twos and Threes are just so loaded with content that people just stop. So going back to your last question, is just watch how much content you put in so that people are able to consume it within ... I'd say, max, they give an hour or two a week to a course. Probably more than an hour.
- Susan Friedmann: That's some good guidelines. Do you have a specific platform that you recommend?
- Kelly Edmonds: I have been moving towards the hosted platforms. So that means a company completely looks after everything. You log in and you can create your course in there. They look after the technology. There's a registration process all setup. It links to your PayPal account or Stripe or whatever payment gateway you're using. It has a little sales landing page so you don't even need to have a website. It takes care of all the login emails that go to the student. The one I like a lot is actually Canadian based on Vancouver called Thinkific. So Thinkific, I've really come to like. I'm designing two courses in there right now for clients and I just really like it.
- Another one I like is Ruzuku. I know they're all funny names, eh. Again, it's a hosted platform. Ruzuku has some different elements in its online hosted platform and that's a built-in discussion forum, which is pretty

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cool. So you can actually engage with your students. Thinkific has one but it's not that great. They are working on it. So when students log-in, they see the content, but they can also engage. Otherwise, I setup an online forum in a separate place called Slack, S-L-A-C-K. That's free. If you pay \$8 a month, there's also audio conferencing like this built in there. So it's an interesting way to engage. You just have to link out to it within your course to say, "We're going to be over there discussing," and then if there's a live call, you put the date down and everybody can join that live call.

Susan Friedmann: Can you spell the name of that other platform that you referred to, please?

Kelly Edmonds: Ruzuku?

Susan Friedmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kelly Edmonds: R-U-Zed-U-K-U and they're on my website. They're under my Resource page, so you can find them there as well.

Susan Friedmann: Perfect.

Kelly Edmonds: Yeah, I do. I really love creating in both of them and they both have a great community, too. If you want to know any questions, they have a Facebook group, so you're definitely not alone if you sign up for either of those platforms and all the work's done for you. I used to design using plugins with the WordPress website and I just find that most of my clients just don't have that technical background. Now, people who have a team that work for then can go do that because you can most certainly create. You control your own brand and look and feel of the course whereas the platforms are pretty basic. But I usually ... I'm starting to advise my clients more and more to go to the platform. So after I've done building the course there, they can easily go in and edit. They can change the names, the pictures, add another video and I think that's ideal.

Susan Friedmann: What do you see as some of the biggest mistakes that your clients make when it comes to creating any kind of e-learning, online learning?

Kelly Edmonds: It's how to organize all their content into this learning journey, this experience for the students, this learning experience. They think I have a book and some of my clients have a book. In fact, one of my clients right now, we're converting his book into a course. They just think,

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"Well, I know this content." Cool. So we'll just put it up in a bunch of old PDFs or just copy and paste the text right into a lesson page. Well, they might as well just sell the book, because you need to think about how people behave, how they grow, how they evolve, how they learn, how they experience this.

So we're using main key concepts in his books, but we're most certainly not putting all that content in there. There's way too much content. We have to really think about what is it we want them to walk away with from this course? Actually, you can really boil it down. Even as a teacher, in my earlier days when I was teaching adults live, face-to-face, and then eventually online, I was like, "Oh, but I got to put this in" and "Oh, but they really need to know that." You know what? They don't and they won't read it. So you can put a few things down in resources, the extra resources, but most certainly don't put links to 82 different web pages because they just won't read this. It's overwhelming. We must remember our students are coming to us because they want to learn something, so they're newbies in a way and so we have to be gentle with them.

Learning, being in a position of a student, is very vulnerable and you're trying to learn something new, you're trying to apply it to your life and you get frustrated quite easily or overwhelmed. So even my course designs are very simple, very clear labels on all the links and where to go. You can do a little screen capture video about how to move around the course. My emails to them are very clear what we're going to do, because you want to take them on this journey without overwhelming them or confusing them. So it's boiling it down and keeping it really simple and delivering and teaching them what you promised you would.

When you stay on that course, it just makes it so much easier for you the creator, and then if you facilitate the course, if you do it live, I mean like if you do it online, and also, it's for them as well.

- Susan Friedmann: I'm one of those people that love to give you information and I feel I have to give you everything, the [inaudible 00:19:16].
- Kelly Edmonds: Yeah, yeah.
- Susan Friedmann: The whole family. So it's really refreshing to hear, just as you said, they really don't need to know all these stuff and you can put some of it in resources and they can pick it up in their own time. It's getting over that

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feeling that they have to have everything. Otherwise, they won't be satisfied.

Kelly Edmonds:

That's right, and more content does not make for a better course. Then if you have like an online community, which I always encourage people to do, have a Facebook group or go into Slack and create an online forum. It's in those moments, too ... You don't have to be in there all the time. You have to watch yourself as an online teacher. You can get really consumed, but we can talk about that in a sec, but you can learn in there what people are talking about and maybe they have a question, so that in that moment, just in time learning, we call it, you go, "Oh, hey, I have a link to that." So you could also share in that way, too. Give them what they need when they request it.

Susan Friedmann:

Just in time learning, I like that. I'm going to use that one. Do you talk about consumption of the program? Talk to us more about that.

Kelly Edmonds:

When you're an online teacher, it's different than if you're in a classroom or face-to-face if you're given a face-to-face in-person workshop. You will interact with the participants in the room, but for the most part, you'll take a break and they'll come and ask you a question or you'll work on stuff. You walk around the room and you can, again, answer those personal questions. Online, everyone has access to you. Everyone. You'll get that key learner and they'll be emailing you all the time or posting 10 questions. You have to realize, "Okay, what is my boundaries here?" and you need to say, "I'll be in the online forum Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you have any problems with the course, technical problems, please email me." So you put boundaries around it and people understand that. They really do.

Also, you'll find, too that of 100% of your student population, let's just say, 30% will disappear. You have no idea where they are. They never login or whatever. They just don't participate. They're not really going through the course. That's normal. Things happen. Maybe they're not able to get to it right away. Maybe they don't have a plan to get to it right away until next month. Maybe they're having issues with time management. Of the 70 that remain, you're going to find 40 very active and they're usually social learners. They like to learn and talk to other people and share ideas, and the others are quiet. They call them lurkers, but lurkers learn. They're just doing it in their own way. They don't want to really engage, but they want to read with other people are saying. Don't panic when you don't have this huge engagement online of all

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your students, because it just doesn't work that way. Again, it's how people learn as well.

Susan Friedmann: Yeah. So I can relate to the lurkers because I don't necessarily always want to engage in conversation, but I do like to read what other people, they're saying, and then if I do want to comment, I will, but just for the sake of saying something, that's not my style.

Kelly Edmonds: Most online university courses, there's forced participation. You have to answer some questions and post two things in the discussion forum by the end of Friday and then you have to respond to three other people. It's very forced, but you are evaluated on it. I always found that a bit of a mistake. In the end, the puddings in the end, meaning, in a course, if it's a credit course, they have to produce some work. That's where everything is. Providing these outlets for people is just that. It's just a choice and that's what adults want as well. So locking down a course and pressuring them to do things in a certain way ... I mean we want them to engage, but make it engaging then as opposed to hoping that they'll engage because fewer people engage doesn't mean the course is a failure. Everyone experiences learning differently.

They can come in and go right to Module Five. They'll drive you bananas going, "No, you're supposed to go through Module One first. Don't ask questions about Module Five." You really have to be flexible if you're an online teacher. You really have to give up the ghost and just say, "Okay, I've designed it as well as I could. I'm going to let people experience it the way they want to. I'm going to be here. Here's my boundaries and I'm going to have a live webinar every now and then or a phone call or I'm going to share something new in the email each week," or something like that. Just really have to let people go through as they will.

Susan Friedmann: That takes me back to that idea of "Should I or shouldn't I do a drip?" Listening to you know now, the fact that adults want to choose, maybe I would be doing myself a disservice if I went to a drip method.

Kelly Edmonds: Well, how I try to motivate my students is there's a weekly email. So Monday morning, set them up ahead of time so they just go it on their own, I drip those. I review last week. I tell them what we're going to talk about this week. I might add something, a fun thing in there, and I might also pinpoint, "Susan, would you mind posting in the online discussion forum your ex with blah, blah." So I motivate students to pose and if everybody could also respond to her, that'd be great, too. So I always

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have those, too. Everybody gets focused what I would like them to focus on this week; if we're going to have a live call, what that's going to be about. Yeah, so that's how I really motivate students. I just keep my course completely opened. Everything is there but I help them what they may want to focus on that week. I give them just a little bit extra information around that or an example, and it just keeps them focused and moving along.

Susan Friedmann: If our listeners want to find out more about your services, how can they do that?

Kelly Edmonds: I have a website and it's DrKellyEdmonds.com, and I have lots of offers, actually. I have a lot of free stuff. There's a quiz I have. There is an e-course starter kit, so that's information how to get started on your course. That's all free. My blogs have a lot of blog posts. I also have a Shop, so that's where you'll find the different affordable tutorials on how to do different things with your courses; and then I also design courses. So my services are I can design small courses or I can design full courses right to launch ready mode, and I work one-on-one with my clients.

Susan Friedmann: I highly recommend listeners go to the site and at least look at those resources because they're invaluable. That's how I got started and I got hooked on Dr. Kelly's information and that's why-

Kelly Edmonds: Thank you.

Susan Friedmann: -she's here, because I just love her materials, so absolutely. If you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be?

Kelly Edmonds: I would contemplate if a course is right for you, not you, Susan, but your readers. Contemplate if a course is right for you. I think a course will be right for you if you want to make your book come more alive and you have this urge to teach as opposed to going, "I should do this for passive income." Let me tell you, it's not passive. It takes two, three months of your life to create this thing. It's not that passive and then you have to market it and if you facilitate, then you're working as well. If you really want to take your material, your content and your ideas, your topics, and go deeper with them and engage with people and have that whole experience, then I would say consider a course. You can start small. Again, like that mini power course concept.

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Susan Friedmann:

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