

James Robert Lay:

Greetings and hello. I am James Robert Lay, and welcome to the 54th episode of the Banking on Digital Growth Podcast. Today's episode is part of the Digital Growth Journey series, and I'm excited to welcome Kara Yaquinta to the show. Kara is the content strategists at Tropical Financial, and she really has such a great story to tell. One that I know will inspire you just as it has inspired me, because I personally have watched Kara grow quarter after quarter, year after year, as she has been a member in the Digital Growth program for the past, was it three years now, Is that right, Kara?

Kara Yaquinta:

Yes. A little over three years.

James Robert Lay:

Time has flown. So thank you so much for joining me today.

Kara Yaquinta:

No, no, no, no. Thank you for having me. It feels so good to be a guest on someone's podcast.

James Robert Lay:

Absolutely. When you reflect back on this great century of 2020, and you look ahead into 2021, what are you most excited about and energized when you think about just the progress that you've made along your own journey over the last three years?

Kara Yaquinta:

I think what I'm most excited about is that I feel like, okay, so we're have all been at home for, I mean, at this point it's December. So what, about nine, eight, 10 months, somewhere in there. So we've all had to really rely now on digital communication, more than we have in the past. And to be honest, I feel like that's here to stay. So the excited part of that is I'm excited to bring new tactics and I'm excited to keep seeing where it can go, because of course everything grows, everything continues, nothing just stops. So I am really, I'm intrigued to see how this digital first play kind of keeps evolving.

James Robert Lay:

Exactly. And it's one that, we've seen five years of progress in about eight months, nine, 10 months of time. And when we look back it is, it really is to see how fast this has evolved. And when you look back on your own journey, what have been some of the biggest roadblocks, the challenges that you've had to be aware of, you've had to overcome to move forward and make progress along just your own digital growth journey, specifically when it comes to say content and content marketing?

Kara Yaquinta:

Oh, that's kind of a loaded question, but I would say a couple of the biggest challenges. Of course, there's always going to be buy-in. I feel like that's always going to be a challenge if you're not in something that is solely based on technology of course. I think another challenge is, there's always something new. And what I mean by something new is there's always a new rule. There's always a new thing to go by. So you really have to do your best on keeping a steady mind and keeping up with the industry, because if you're not, one day you could be doing something and then to the next it's totally, it's irrelevant.

Kara Yaquinta:

So I think that has been a challenge, especially when you get wrapped up in everything on your day-to-day basis. So you kind of have to be smart about how you spend your time and how you learn things and where you get your information from. And then sometimes I think another, I guess challenge is sometimes yourself. Because you get stuck in doing things your way. And I think the roadblock there is getting out of your comfort zone. I think that's a roadblock for a lot of people. And the one thing last year, it was a turning point as I read that book of Who Moved My Cheese?

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Kara Yaquinta:

And now every time I notice myself reverting back to old ways, I always sit there and I think about that book and which mouse I want to be.

James Robert Lay:

It's a great book. It's a great analogy. Great story, great narrative. And I want to talk about that, because I think you're hitting on something that's very key right now. When we look at this idea and the journey of digital growth, and some of the changes that must happen as an individual, and it's not just the individual, then it's the team and teams make up the organization, which are made up of teams, which are made up of individuals. So it's transformation happening at all different scales. And we're taking this journey at all different speeds. For you personally, when you look at your own personal growth and your own personal transformations, you've had to maximize digital growth. How have you continued to move forward so that you don't get stuck in what I call the cave of complacency?

Kara Yaquinta:

Oh, firsthand, you've experienced this with me. I have really just had to take a look at myself and my working style. I think the most I learned, where am I most effective, and where am I not, so that I know at the times that I'm not most effective, what can I do to fix those, alleviate those issues? Because it all does come down to the wire of like, for example, your day. I do content. I do social media. I do SEO. And all of those things do interlock with each other, but sometimes there's technical portions, sometimes there's creative portions. So it's where can you maximize your time so that it's best spent in creating something special for the consumer.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. You know, there's really three ways to look at your days, four if you add the bonus. You've got your, what I call your growth days. And those are the days where you dive deep, you get deep work done, great book, by the way that I highly recommend. Then leading up to that you have what are called your bumper days, meaning that's where you should be taking your meetings and your calls and answering emails. Because I think so much of time gets garbled in the middle. And these are some lessons that I learned from Dan Sullivan when he was talking about the Entrepreneurial Time System. And I'm looking at this from more of a digital growth time system. And then we look at, we have our me days. And these are the days that they should just be for us. Because I think in this digital world it's so easy to be on 24/7. And we're going to come back to that point here in a moment. But me days, bumper days, growth days, it all comes down to intentionality, right?

Kara Yaquinta:

Yes.

James Robert Lay:

And when you think about this idea of growth, on the flip side of the spectrum, and in addition to the roadblocks that you've had to be aware of and overcome what have been some of the opportunities, the wins that you've experienced along the way?

Kara Yaquinta:

There have been a lot of opportunities that have come into play with just reorganizing the way that I do things. One of the biggest ways that we've grown digitally is we really capitalized and maximized on personalization in our audiences and getting the right information to the right people. So a lot of that has come through the form of retargeting. It's come through the form of using audiences to the best of their capabilities. So like we use AI of course, and that has really helped us be able to create content that is more purposeful. And that means more to people, because before you would just put out a piece of content, but now we're able to put out a piece of content that is curated to a certain person.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. And I want to talk about that idea. On two sides, one, you talked about getting the right message to the right people at the right time. And then you also talked about this idea of being more purposeful with your content. So first, let's talk about right message, right time, because I know that that has been a really big recent win for you, because it's all about what value are we creating through our content? Can we prove that value? Can we show that value? Can we quantify that value? And one of the very simple wins that you were able to deploy was to your point, retargeting people who have started an application or who have taken some type of behavior. And it wasn't massive change, it wasn't massive transformation. It was a little win that led to massive results, right?

Kara Yaquinta:

Honestly, yes. So back to kind of the roadblocks, I was hesitant for whatever reason to do that for a long time. But when I took myself out of the box and I took myself out of the comfort zone and I figured, this is another way to capitalize on opportunities. We did it and it worked and it worked so well, but now we're moving on and we're doing it in other areas. And we're now doing it for more than just one thing though. It's not just, okay, we see people who've interacted and let's just do this. We see people have interacted, so let's do this. Oh, but we've also seen they've interacted and they don't have this, so let's go here. So it kind of takes a puzzle and it's putting the pieces together to really form something that is a whole.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah, and this is really where the idea of digital consumer journey mapping comes into play. And one of the key elements to make digital consumer journey mapping successful requires content. But also the context of that content in the different stages of their buying journey, which you said AI and AI informing personas and personas are allowing you to be more purposeful with your content. I want to come back to this idea of purpose because I believe that purpose is really the foundation for any financial brands future digital growth to maximize their digital growth potential. Purpose provides. Guidance it provides, direction it provides, inspiration, both for internal and external stakeholders. And when we think about

this idea of purpose, what's your bigger purpose? And what's the bigger purpose that you're working towards as an organization?

Kara Yaquinta:

The bigger purpose being a financial institution and that we cater to everybody is honestly just creating a peaceful and successful financial future for people. Too many people get caught up in the stigma of it's not okay to talk about finances. And for the better part of three years, I have spent talking about finances. And to be honest, talking about them has made them so much better than they were for myself personally. So it's kind of like when you go to a therapist and you're like, I don't want to speak to a therapist, who are they to tell me what to do with my life? Well, when they've been through it, and they've also gone through that and they've had certain trainings. Yes, it does make a difference in being able to rely on that person for advice, for tips, for tricks. So I will say that, that in a nutshell has honestly really helped. And it's made so much of a difference seeing that bigger purpose come through all areas within our financial institution.

James Robert Lay:

I think as an industry we've gone from putting the need and to highlight financial education or financial literacy, which I just, I abhor that word financial literacy, because you're basically saying that, "Well, you're illiterate in this particular area." So, my next big thing that I'm seeing is, it's not financial education, it's not even advocacy, it's financial empowerment, it's financial coaching, it's financial wellbeing, which I know you guys are really committed to with the Get Beyond Money program. And that's something that you piloted, but it's becoming a much larger part of the organization, it's becoming a much larger part of the brand for that matter. Can you speak to that for a moment?

Kara Yaquinta:

Yes. The first thing that I want to say about it is it's who we are. It's so much more though than who we are, it's our community. We're based in South Florida. And South Florida, they are not a "financial literate" type of people. They don't want to sit down, they don't want to talk, like they don't want to talk about it. They want to do what they want to do, and they want to know quick wins, which is totally fine, because the whole purpose is we are not going to judge you to be where you want to be. It's about financial empowerment. So whatever it is that you want to do, we want to help you get there. And we want to help you get beyond stress, we want to help you get beyond whatever it is that's keeping you from getting there and help you achieve your goals. Everyone's goals are different. What everyone does with their money is different. But at the end of the day, it's we want to be able to give you confidence and security in what you want to do.

James Robert Lay:

I want to dive into this perspective, because it's one that I think we need to be having a lot more conversations around, as organizations, really as a culture too, it was something that Ben Soppitt and I were talking about. Ben is the founder and CEO at a startup called Unifimoney. And we're talking very similar things. He was in episode number 52. And when we look at this idea of people want instant wins, they want instant gratification. That's why, for example, there's a lot of dopamine hits that we get when we buy something and big tech knows this, like it's, the cards are stacked against us.

Kara Yaquinta:

Yes.

James Robert Lay:

What are the opportunities though to help someone see beyond the here and now where they're wanting that dopamine hit we've all become addicted to. To help them look to 10 years down the road, 20 years down the road, 30 years down the road, and maybe make simple behavior changes that you guide them down that journey. Because it's very hard to do this as an individual.

Kara Yaquinta:

It is. So I guess I want to share something personal.

James Robert Lay:

Sure.

Kara Yaquinta:

My biggest personal thing that I can kind of give people is my experience. So, working in a financial institution was my first serious job out of college. I'm giving away my age here, but I got my first big job. And I was Oh yeah, I'm making so much money. I was living at my mom's house. So, I didn't really have rent to pay. I was like, "I'm going to spend my money because that's what I want to do." I thought, "Let me buy work outfits. Let me buy the most random things too." Sometimes I would buy trinkets for my bedroom. Just dumb things that I didn't need, but because I could buy them, I did.

Kara Yaquinta:

And it got me into a little bit of a sticky situation, not a bad one, but it got to a point where I identified there was a clear problem, how am I going to fix it? And I myself went through our Get Beyond Money program. And my behavioral changes came in the form of reorganization. It was looking at things differently and seeing where I could shift, not even my spending, but what I'm doing with my money.

Kara Yaquinta:

So for example, with an auto loan. If you know that you're already paying a lot with your auto loan, the simple fact of why don't you see if you can do a refinance? That extra money, with that extra money, take it to something like if you have debt, put that towards a credit card payment. It's an extra, it could be up to an extra \$150 a month. It really could. Or if you have a lease or if you were buying a car, checking your auto agreements, sometimes gap coverage, you don't even know but you purchased it through a dealership and then you also have it on your insurance. So it's looking at little things like that. That could save you 200, \$300 a month, \$600. If you buy it in bulk, like it's just things like that where no, we're not taught about those things, but we want to make it. We want to make the community aware that there are things that you can do that could probably save you upwards to, I don't know, a few hundred dollars, almost a thousand, maybe a month.

James Robert Lay:

And I think what you're talking to, it's helping first and foremost, help the unaware become aware of what the opportunities are to stop losing money. And the reason I use that stop losing money is because people are more likely to make some of these modifications in their behavior and their thinking because

their behaviors are informed by their thoughts, which are informed by their beliefs. And we can go down a whole rabbit hole with that, but we're not right now. But it all starts with awareness and then acceptance. And then third action. And then fourth is accountability. And what you're speaking to, to me, it's very special, because one, it's your own story, and it's your own experience with this. Two, you work at a financial brand. And I think there's a misconception is that just because you work at a financial brand, you don't struggle with this.

James Robert Lay:

No, we all strain. And I wonder how many others listening right now either feel that same struggle and that same personal conflict themselves? And if that's you it's okay, right? Like we're all working through this together. And there are ways to your Get Beyond Money program. You're bringing that internally to your team members. And then really the third one too, is I think there's a major misconception. This is what Ben and I were talking about when he's over at Unifimoney is, is for professionals. Many people think professionals, they make a lot of money. They don't have money problems. And that's absolutely incorrect, right?

Kara Yaquinta:

I agree with you. I always wonder, even celebrities, you hear celebrities go bankrupt sometimes. I, myself, I think you're always going to have financial, not struggles, but you're always going to run into some obstacle financially, no matter what, I guess criteria you're at. Whether you are making a minimal amount of money or whether you're a millionaire, they all come with their set of problems. We all do, that's life.

James Robert Lay:

Well, I mean, Biggie Smalls, Notorious B.I.G. He hit the nail on the head years and years ago when he said "More money, more problems," right?

Kara Yaquinta:

Yeah. I mean, yeah. I mean, sometimes you might have the financial problem of people trying to take your money, or you might have the financial problem of not being able to afford rent. But wherever you're at, it doesn't matter. Our goal is to just make you feel more comfortable.

James Robert Lay:

And take away the stigma.

Kara Yaquinta:

Yes. And I think it's finding, what system works for you. I said, I reorganized my finances and that doesn't mean that they all went away overnight. It took a lot of work, but it's finding a system that works, because people also forget you live a day-to-day life. You know what I mean? And I think it is unfair a lot of times when people expect you to stop doing everything you're doing. I don't think you should stop living just to pay bills. But of course it's becoming a little bit more responsible and that way you can have a healthy balance.

James Robert Lay:

You talked about, you want to make people feel more comfortable. You mentioned the words judgment free before. And I think that's what a lot of particularly community financial institutions they strive and

they may have an inward perceptual, "Well, that's what we do." The challenge is there's an external gap, an external perception or an external positioning gap. Like if we don't actually are intentional with the words that we communicate, people are going to think, "Well, money's already stressful because there's a natural cognitive load tied to it. And so are we either A, helping to reduce that cognitive load, reduce that mental stress, or B, are we inadvertently adding to it on a variety of factors, particularly digitally.

James Robert Lay:

So when you look at making people feel more comfortable, reduce the stigma, reduce the judgment. Judgment free. What are you doing on the content front? Because I know for example, you are in the community as well, because that's really what this is all about. It's about bringing people together to have a conversation. What are you doing? Because you mentioned podcasts. I know you have a podcast. You've also did something recently as well that I thought was pretty neat. It was more of just an open forum round table discussion.

Kara Yaquinta:

Yes. We have a round table and we invited the community to come together to honestly just talk with like-minded people about their situations. Because you never know where an idea is going to spark or where a piece of useful information is going to come from. Some people find it from a fortune cookie. Some people find it from a round table. You just, you never know. But we started with the webinar format too, we also have those going so that people can watch, because some people are afraid to still talk to others, which is okay. If you want to watch, we have videos to watch. We have the webinars to watch. We also have quizzes for people. So, if you're someone who likes to swipe on your phone while you're watching Netflix, that one's a really good one, too.

Kara Yaquinta:

We try to have that in mind, you know? A lot of people in today's day and age multitask, I know I'm one of those, I'm a swiper while I watch Netflix. So I don't want to have to sit there and read in bulk unless I'm sitting in bed. And I just want something, like we said, "We like quick wins." That's just how people are nowadays. We want everything like this. That's why Amazon Prime has two-day shipping. You know what I mean?

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Kara Yaquinta:

So, we do try to think of just people's times and just their lifestyles when we're creating content. So nothing too long, we like to keep it to what are people going through? What can relate to you, and what are you just going to find easy?

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. One of the things that I know of is this has taken some time. This is not something that happens, like a traditional marketing campaign you do X, we get Y, instant, once again, instant gratification. It's a commitment, and it's something that has required not just you, but a lot of others. Can you speak to the role that culture has played on the progress of your digital growth journey?

Kara Yaquinta:

Yes. So Get Beyond Money has been a culture integration. Like we said, it is who we are. It's finding buy-in from other people to also believe it's who we are. I think sometimes on a day-to-day when things are thrown at you and I know everybody in every organization gets that, you're like, "Why am I doing what I'm doing?" We really like to challenge our employees and show them, this is why you're doing what you're doing. So we've even gone to the extent of having our employees go through the program as well. It's just educating them and telling them as well like, "We don't judge you, if you want to be part of this, you're more than able to be part of it." It's creating them into ambassadors for Get Beyond Money. And it's simple things too, like changing the way you answer the phone.

Kara Yaquinta:

A lot of our employees, what they've picked up on, on social media, which is really special is, we have a hashtag, it's hashtag Get Beyond Money. And every time they share a post, we now see the pickup on that and we're able to track it because you can click it. You can track, see who's using the hashtag. And a lot of when they're sharing a tropical and Get Beyond Money content, they go in and they've learned, that's a system because that's who we are.

James Robert Lay:

I had a really good conversation with Kerry Ann on her podcast about employee marketing and internal marketing. She's the chief marketing officer over at JMMB Group down in the Caribbean. And yeah, I think that is one of the most greatest untapped opportunities for digital growth is to look inwardly at our internal employees, because they really should be our biggest brand ambassadors, not only in the real world, but also in the digital world, because they have their own personal social networks. And if we, as marketing teams and content teams can produce the content, we can use them to become the promoters of that content to get more eyeballs and not just for getting more eyeballs, but to really, truly help more people. When it comes to working in this digital world, it can be 24/7. How important is it to take time to just stop, to pause, to disconnect, because I've seen a lot of damage being done post COVID of everyone really being on 24/7. We're not robots yet, but what does it take for that whenever you're looking at this idea of like digital leadership?

Kara Yaquinta:

It's so funny. I was talking actually with my boss about this today. I think it's very important. So I think a lot of people are still stuck in the notion of, "If I'm not getting FaceTime, they're not seeing me and seeing the importance of my work." And-

James Robert Lay:

It's a big one.

Kara Yaquinta:

Yeah. So if you want me to be absolutely candid, if you work for somebody like that, I don't think that's the place for you. If you're, honestly, if you're a boss in 2020, and you still expect somebody to be on 24/7 and not expect them to be working from home and have a baby crying in the back, or have to take two minutes off because their family's talking to them. You are crazy, and you are expecting way too much of people and you yourself then don't understand humans. And how can you be a leader of a digital, especially a digital first community when you don't understand the first thing about humans?

James Robert Lay:

And I think that's the big thing that I'm finding is the old world mentality. The legacy mentality of, "I need to see you nine to five in a chair," is vastly different, and COVID has forced a lot of this uncomfortable conversation to have to happen. Because there was some healthy tension if you will. But if we look at what's happened, post COVID work from home is real.

Kara Yaquinta:

It is.

James Robert Lay:

Work from home is never going away. I think the next big thing once things start to open up again, it's not going to be work from home. Because I don't really think home is necessarily conducive on a long-term scale. I think what it's going to be, it's going to be work from anywhere.

Kara Yaquinta:

I agree. And to be honest, as a young person, and I don't know how generations before me feel about that, I love it. I love the opportunity of feeling like I can do my work wherever I need to do it. Because it comes back to that work-life balance. If I can do my job and do a few hours here, a few hours there at a coffee shop in another state. My dad's in the military, if I can do it overseas and still have internet access and still be. Doing impactful work, we have ways to measure it. I just don't understand the problem with that. Now I do understand, FaceTime, yes, it is to an extent important, because how are we ever going to expect to become leaders, keep growing, get raises. Those are real things.

Kara Yaquinta:

They are real things that come part of a job. And I hate to say this, but unfortunately, we don't work for free. So I do think it's a balance, but I do think the pressure of people working 24 seven, that notion needs to go away. That's just, you didn't expect it before. And why do you expect it now? Just because someone's at home. I mean, people still like to log off and they like to be with their families. They like to unwind. They like to have a mental break. So that way they can come back, refresh, reset, recharge.

James Robert Lay:

Well, I think too, it's also indicative and predictive of, and I've said this many times before on this podcast, but we have moved beyond the commoditized product economy. Digital really sped that up.

Kara Yaquinta:

Yeah.

James Robert Lay:

We're moving through the experience economy right now. But I'm predicting the next major economy we will have is what I'm calling the expertise or the knowledge economy. Where what you know is far more valuable than say even what you do. Because the doing for many will be commoditized thanks to AI and machine learning. And I'm not painting the picture of a dystopian future. I look at that, if we can have a robot or an AI pick up the repeated repetitive task and automate them, that gives us more time to

really reflect on what's being done, to learn new things, to think about that learning and how it applies to a unique situation.

James Robert Lay:

So therefore, and this is personal experience. The more I step away intentionally, and I've taken email off my phone. I've taken social media off my phone. I've taken my internet browser off my phone. I have a smart, dumb phone, because it is about creating that space in time. Because whenever I come back, it's like something happens in the subconscious mind, like new connections are being made and I'm not even thinking about it. And I come back and I'm like, wow, it's a whole, literally it's a whole new world.

Kara Yaquinta:

You know what? Hearing you say that it's what you're not taking away is the want to do what you're doing. I think when you do something too much, you take the want out of wanting to be there. You know what I mean?

James Robert Lay:

Yes, absolutely.

Kara Yaquinta:

You consume yourself too much into it. And that's, to me, I don't think that's okay. Because there comes a point where people break. It's just we're humans. We feed off of emotions. One thing that robots lack is emotion. They're still working on them. They're still not capitalizing on them, but humans, we are emotional things. We're emotional beings.

James Robert Lay:

We're emotional, but we're also communal meaning. We need the connection with other people, whether that be obviously in a digital community like we've been talking about, but also the community in the real world. Because it's through that community. That's where we find collaborative opportunities to elevate each other. And we continue to reach our full potential. You know, this has been such a fantastic conversation and I'm grateful for the time. I'm grateful for the insights and the inspiration you've shared today. But I want to look ahead into 2021 together with you and hear from like, what is one very practical action or recommendation that you can make to another financial brand marketing sales or leadership team member that wants to continue to move forward and make progress along their own digital growth journey? What would you recommend to them?

Kara Yaquinta:

Oh, wow. That's a really hard thing to answer on. What's a practical thing. To be honest, I think the one practical thing that has helped me is writing things down. Whether that's organizing a task list or writing an idea down. I feel once I write it down, I'm married to it a little bit and it helps me push a lot of things through. And I do think that's a very practical and easy thing. Get yourself a notebook, get yourself a whiteboard and just have that time because you can take it with yourself. You can refer back to it in team meetings. It's just going to help you, especially being from home or working anywhere. It's just to stay on top of things and stay organized.

James Robert Lay:



So analog tools help people to take action and commit to take that action in a digital world. I believe it 100%.

Kara Yaquinta:

And even in a digital world, there's nothing wrong with a little bit of pen and paper.

James Robert Lay:

Absolutely not, because something magical happens. When you take an idea from your head, it goes down your arm, through the pen and you put it on paper, something happens. And I've seen it time and time again for myself. And for those that I've been coaching. So Kara, hey, thank you so much for such a great conversation. If anyone is listening and they have questions, they want to continue this conversation with you. They want to connect with you. What's the best way for them to do that?

Kara Yaquinta:

You can find me on LinkedIn and on Instagram at Kara Yaquinta, I'm always available to chat, to collaborate, to bounce ideas off each other. I love connecting. So please feel free to reach out to me.

James Robert Lay:

All right. Well, you heard it from Kara herself. Connect and collaborate with her, and as always, until next time, be well, do good, and wash your hands.

Kara Yaquinta:

Thank you.