Marketing Moxie Podcast

Episode 43: Creating A Design Mindset with Christie Halmick

Show notes at: http://www.maggiepatterson.com/episode43

MAGGIE: Today on Marketing Moxie we're talking about do-it-yourself design with Christie Halmick.

INTRO: Welcome to Marketing Moxie with your host, Maggie Patterson. This show is dedicated to practical and proven, online and offline, marketing ideas that you can take away and apply to build your business, all with Maggie's signature, to the point, style and sass. Let's go.

MAGGIE: Today we are joined by--I like to think of her as the queen of do-it-yourself design--Christie Halmick. She comes to us with a magazine design background, and she does an amazing job of educating and training people on how to use these tools to create a really consistent and powerful brand. I've actually been through some of Christie's materials myself. It's been very, very helpful in getting my design muscles exercised, so I feel really confident about what I'm doing. And I was just really excited to have her on today because she shared so many tips and tools, so let's dive in.

Hey, everyone. We have Christie Halmick today here from Jewels Branch. We are going to talk about do-it-yourself design. And, as a little background, I first found Christie over in the B School group on Facebook, which is a business program we're both in. She was, at the time, teaching people how to do PDFs. That was, for me, a huge block. I was like, how do I actually make my documents look pretty? Coming out of a corporate background, I was used to things looking pretty. Christie

helped me build my confidence and actually learn how to use Pages, which was super helpful. Thank you for that, Christie.

CHRISTIE: You're welcome.

MAGGIE: Welcome to the show.

CHRISTIE: Great. It's great to be here.

MAGGIE: We're going to talk about some principles of do-it-yourself design, but what's kind of your background, Christie? How did you end up as this, you know, creating Jewels Branch and getting to where you are today?

CHRISTIE: Yeah, my background is actually journalism, so I have a journalism degree, and I spent many years designing magazines. I was a magazine art director. When I left my job and came home and had my kids. I thought I wasn't going to work anymore. I thought I was going to be a stay-at-home mom. About a year into that, I said, "You know what? I've got to use my brain somehow," so I started again doing magazine design, and I did it for magazines all across the U.S. and some in other countries. Then we kind of went through this kind of magazine bust.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

CHRISTIE: So a lot of those jobs kind of dried up, and I started doing a lot more online. I am out in the middle of Missouri, out in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the U.S., and so all of my clients and stuff started coming from online and from having my portfolio up and that kind of stuff. I kind of transitioned into this working a lot with women mostly on building their brands and websites and all of that kind of stuff.

I had a client who I'd helped them build their website, and I was kind of teaching them WordPress as we went along, you know, all the stuff they would need.

MAGGIE: Yep.

CHRISTIE: She said, "You know, Christie? You're really good at breaking this stuff down and making it understandable." And so kind of a lightbulb went off for me in terms of teaching, and I hadn't really thought of myself as a teacher before. I had thought of myself purely as a designer.

And so I thought, "You know what? What is the thing I love doing? I love designing documents, so why don't I try that? I know the topic, and then I can pretty easily go through that topic. But the part I'll be learning is, do I like teaching and do I like teaching online?

That got me into that class that you took, the PDF workshop. Then, from there, I actually fell in love with teaching, so I really do love teaching design and kind of have continued to add courses and go that route with my business.

MAGGIE: I think the interesting thing about design is, if you're not design literate at all, it's super, super intimidating. I've always worked with graphic designers. I've always, you know -- I took desktop publishing on PageMaker way back in the day in college.

CHRISTIE: Yeah.

MAGGIE: I mean, I even have those basic principles, and it was so intimidating. I can't even wrap my head around, like, if you've never done anything with color, font, or anything, it must be so -- you know, they're literally starting at zero, which I think you do a really good job of kind of bridging that gap. If we're really brand new to design, but we don't have the budget and everything else, what's the number one skill we should learn?

CHRISTIE: Yeah. You asked me that question, and I thought about it. It's really not so much of a skill as more of a mindset.

MAGGIE: Ooh, I like that.

CHRISTIE: For me, it's how you approach the do-it part of the do-it-yourself. It's really coming at it from a playful place, a playful place of action. It really doesn't matter what you know or what you don't know about design or what you do or don't know about software, or where you're even starting from, because a lot of us come into it from corporate and have had some experience, but maybe have never done it. It's really more about learning design by doing.

MAGGIE: Yes.

CHRISTIE: And failing, and succeeding, and then doing it again, so it's a very repetitive thing, but it's very much the action has to happen in order for your brain to get all this stuff put in there. If you can approach design playfully and have a fun attitude about it and have fun doing your design, even if it feels overwhelming, then the results are going to be much better.

We get so wrapped up in what we create being perfect, and we get kind of like super businessy and thinking this graphic has got to be the thing that represents my brand forever and is carved in stone. That's just not the case. Design is a lot of fun, and we have a lot of tools now that I didn't have when I started learning design. And we're not doing surgery. We're not going to hurt somebody if we use the wrong font. We can make mistakes and play around.

When people come in and start taking courses and stuff at Jewels Branch, there is a lot of hesitation. They will get stuck just opening up a program.

MAGGIE: Yep.

CHRISTIE: And so what I tell them to do is set your timer for 15 minutes, open up Pages, open up Canva, open up whatever it is you're going to make your design in, and play around. You're not going to break it.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

CHRISTIE: You're not going to break your computer. You're going to make a mess. It is going to be the most ugly thing that you have ever seen, and you're going to have colors. You're going to have crazy fonts. You're going to -- you know, you may crash it. You may crash the software, quite honestly. But it breaks that tension for them, and it gets them in, and gets them in the software and started going.

Approaching whatever it is you're designing in whatever software, if you can just say, "You know what? I'm just going to have fun with this. And I can throw this away. And I can start over." There's no huge downside to just getting in the software and starting to play around.

MAGGIE: I love that because I think that so many times we're so stuck on the end result, and the reality is, whether it's writing -- you have a typo, you can fix it. You don't like the font later in a design; it all can be changed, fixed, as we evolve.

CHRISTIE: Yeah, we aren't -- we feel like, especially in terms of, like, branding that we have to get our brand right from the very beginning. And if we can see it as an evolution and say we have opportunities every single day to improve upon this, to be better, to get our message across, instead of saying we have to do it all perfectly from the very start, it just gives us some space. You can't create when you're, like, in such a tight box that you can't make a mistake. You have to be able to make some mistakes and start over, close that document and start a new one if you need to.

MAGGIE: Exactly.

CHRISTIE: Yeah.

MAGGIE: I think it's interesting too because I just had this conversation with someone who is relatively new in business. She's still trying to figure things out. I'm like, I really don't think you should be paying top dollar to have, like -- do a good enough website and let things unfold and see where your business goes because I know, even my own business, what I thought a year ago and where I am today are very different. I'd be very upset if I made the investment in a custom website back then.

CHRISTIE: Yeah.

MAGGIE: Because I would be starting over. What are some of the top pitfalls, things we need to watch out for--I don't want to say mistakes, but--things we tend to do because we think it's a good idea, and then, later, it's not such a good idea?

CHRISTIE: Yeah. One of the things that I see, and I see everybody doing this, and we're all probably guilty of it, is just quantity over quality. By that I mean trying to put too many messages in one graphic.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

CHRISTIE: Using too many fonts. If you have five or six fonts in one image, you've got too much going on.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

CHRISTIE: Using way too much color - if your brand is not a super colorful brand, you don't have to apply every color of the rainbow to your graphics. If you're a business that's targeting kids, yeah, go for it. Primary colors are awesome. But if you're not, you can scale that stuff back. Especially with Canva and with PicMonkey, we have a lot of design elements to choose from, so we can put swirls in there and rainbows and stars and arrows. What I see people doing is putting all of that in one graphic.

It's sort of like the style yourself. Look in the mirror and take one thing off before you head out. The same thing with your graphics - if you can just step back from it and say, okay, what's the message I'm trying to get across here? Am I getting that across? Is there anything I can take out? Then take something out because over-designing it takes away from the message that you're trying to get across. That's one.

MAGGIE: I love that one because, the reality is, we've all seen the graphic where it just looks like someone threw up all over.

CHRISTIE: Yeah.

MAGGIE: You're like, what just happened? I'm not sure what you're trying to tell me.

CHRISTIE: They were having fun. But then after you have your fun, step back and take a look at it. Put your business glasses back on and say, okay, yeah, I had lots of fun there, but I can pull that back just a little to make it clearer.

MAGGIE: Yeah, maybe you don't need the stars.

CHRISTIE: Yeah. But if stars are on brand for you, go for the stars. Yeah, another one I see people doing, and this is especially when you're starting out, is not staying consistent with colors and fonts and your logo. Part of how we get used to brands is by seeing them repeating themselves. Coca-Cola is red, Coca-Cola is red, Coca-Cola is red, over and over and over.

And so, if you're just starting out, and you're trying to establish yourself, if you can kind of tie yourself to colors and fonts and use those consistently, and use them consistently for six months or so.

MAGGIE: Yes.

CHRISTIE: Then say, okay, let's go back and look at this and see if we want to update the look and everything. But just so that people start to recognize you and tie that and tie your message to those colors and those fonts. It also saves you a lot of time trying to reinvent the wheel every time you're going in and designing something to know what colors and fonts that you're going to use. And be consistent with them.

MAGGIE: Yeah. For me, that's been a huge thing. I know I need to use Thirsty. Don't mess around. You're not using any other script font. That is the one you have to use.

CHRISTIE: Yeah. And, I mean, at the beginning of, like, building your brand and stuff, it is exploration. And so there's room for that too, and there's room for playing around with that. But not every day do you need to reinvent and redo your fonts, colors, and things like that. Give yourself a little bit more space to let that stuff mature and to just get recognized by being consistent with that stuff because that says something about your business too. It says, okay, they're here to stay, and they're trustworthy, and they're not fly-by-night and constantly changing up what they're about.

MAGGIE: Yeah, you're not flaky.

CHRISTIE: Yeah. One more, I think: Being lazy with the type of images that you choose. It's so easy just to pop on whatever free site and grab the first search term that comes up when you type in whatever you're searching for. Spending just a few more minutes to really look at those pictures.

If you're a health coach, and you're going to pick a picture of an apple, there are illustrated apples. There are apples in a basket that look really Martha Stewart-ish. There are apples on a scale. There are sliced up apples. There are so many different variations on that image that you're looking for that each tell a slightly different story.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

CHRISTIE: Thinking about what it is that you're trying to get across, and if you pick that first search result that comes up whenever you do your image search on your stock site or on the free site, you're using the same image that lots of other people are using. Dig just a little bit deeper. Spend a few more minutes, and find a different image, an image that really matches up a little bit better with the message that you're trying to get across, and that's going to set you apart from everybody else too.

MAGGIE: One of the things I know, I mean, just even in the last year, graphic design has really become, I don't want to say, democratized.

CHRISTIE: Mm-hmm.

MAGGIE: We no longer have to use Photoshop, so what are some of your favorite do-it-yourself friendly tools?

CHRISTIE: Yeah, it depends on what you're creating. If you're designing my favorite things to design, which are documents and magazines, ebooks, and that kind of stuff, Canva is a really good up-and-comer in terms of designing short PDF documents. You don't want to design anything over 10 or 15 pages because it just doesn't have the power to deal with that.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

CHRISTIE: It also doesn't have a lot of the structural stuff like page numbers and things like that that you want to repeat page-to-page. When you get into bigger documents, you're going to want to go on over to Word, which I know people are like, oh, no, but you can really do a lot in Word. If you're on a Mac, Pages is another really good option. Then there are quite a few people who do stuff in PowerPoint and Keynote, and that's a good option too if you're familiar with those programs and you can get in there and design your documents that way too, they can output, as PDF works too. If you want to take it up a notch, NDesign is definitely the premium and the way to go if you're going to create something more complex like a Magazine or something like that.

MAGGIE: That just got fear in my heart in design.

CHRISTIE: [Laughter] Yeah. But, you know, if you're going to do photo editing, so if you've taken your own photos, and you want to adjust the colors and that kind of stuff, PicMonkey, Pixlr are great options, Photoshop Elements. You know, Photoshop is a great option for that, too, as well. If you're looking for quick social media graphics, your quotables, your pinnable type stuff, Canva and PicMonkey are super awesome tools, very fast to get in those and make yourself a graphic that you can use in social media and on your website too. So many more options than what I had when I first started.

MAGGIE: Yeah, it's pretty mind-blowing.

CHRISTIE: It's a great time. I even say that Canva is kind of a gateway drug to design. If you get in there and you really love it, then you can move on. You can decide that, okay, well, I've learned everything there is to learn in here, so I'm ready for the next step. That's how I tell people, too, to decide. All right, is it time to move on from PicMonkey and Canva? Are you running into roadblocks and there's stuff want to do that you can't do in there? Then it's time to check out Adobe and plunk down some cash and get some functionality. Yeah.

MAGGIE: Yeah, it's funny. I notice that I use, like, I will literally use one thing like PicMonkey, and then I'll use Canva. Then I'm like, oh, I want this element this way, so I'm going to go to my digital scrap-booking program.

CHRISTIE: Mm-hmm, exactly.

MAGGIE: Sometimes I end up in Photoshop. I'm like, wow, this is really convoluted, but it's working for me.

CHRISTIE: Yeah, and that's the other thing too is that when you're using professional design, you're using this kind of suite of software.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

CHRISTIE: And so you can do that kind for yourself, so if you really like PicMonkey, and you like editing your graphics in there, if you really like Pixlr, or even if you really like some of the features in Canva, you could use part of it in one, like part of it in PicMonkey and then pull your image into Pages and do your document stuff. You can kind of make that suite of products for yourself using these free options that are out there for us. It doesn't always have the same power as NDesign, but starting out in DIY, you don't necessarily need that level of power.

MAGGIE: All right, Christie. This has been great and, I think, so, so action packed. Everyone will be able to find the links to all the tools that Christie has shared with us below. But, Christie, where can we find you?

CHRISTIE: I am at JewelsBranch.com. That's the best place to find me, and you can find me on Facebook and Twitter from there. Come over. See what I've got. Sign up for my list. You'll get a free course called Polish Your Online Brand if you sign up for my list.

MAGGIE: Honestly, guys, I know I say this about a lot of my guests, but I don't have people I don't like on the show, generally, so Christie's stuff is really good. It's really, really valuable, and it just refreshed me on so many things that I think I had forgot about design. Definitely two thumbs up. Hop on over to Jewels Branch. Thank you so much, Christie.

CHRISTIE: Thanks a lot.

MAGGIE: Let's dive into the takeaways. We've got so much to cover after today's episode. Takeaway number one, I think this is probably the most important thing if you take away nothing else from my conversation with Christie is, design is a mindset, so you need to approach it with a bit of a playful feel, and you need to understand it's not brain surgery. Just take that kind of 15-minute trick Christie talked about. Open up the document; give yourself 15 minutes, and just play. Play with the fonts. Play with the colors. Play with everything and see what could happen.

Takeaway number two, I think this is so important: quality over quantity. The upshot of do-it-yourself design is we have access to all these things that we didn't have before, so sometimes it can totally look like we just barfed a bunch of elements out. We've got six fonts in three different colors and a bunch of rainbows and stars and all these different things.

The reality is that's not necessarily serving our brand well. Really think about how you can simply it and really start to tell a story with that visual.

The rule of thumb Christie used is kind of do it the same way you do when you get dressed. Get dressed and then take one thing off - hopefully not your pants. Take off one thing, so take off an accessory. Take off something else for that little bit of simplicity. Don't over-design things.

Then takeaway number three is really about creating that visual consistency. Like I just said a minute ago, your visuals tell as much of a story as your written word does, so really start to think about: what are my brand's colors? What are my brand's fonts? Really kind of niche that down so that when people look at something, there is that harmony and that recognition where they can say, yeah, I know so-and-so designed this, and I know this is part of her brand. That's the way her podcast looks. That's the way her headers look. And it starts creating that thing.

There's a reason Coke doesn't all of a sudden be blue or green or yellow. It's because of that brand recognition, so you want to create that same kind of feeling for you. If you consistently use the Thirsty script font like I do now in my brand, consistently use that. Develop yourself a little brand cheat sheet so you have that all in one place.

It's really important, too, as part of that, part of your branding, part of that consistency, not be lazy with your images. Really look at how you can take those images and tell a bit of a different story in a consistent way. If one week you have blaring bold cold, and the next week is black and white, and the next is sepia tone, you're not creating a visually cohesive experience. Really start to think about that.

More than anything, I think what Christie said is just have a little confidence and let -- you know, be creative. Don't over-think it. You're not performing surgery.

If you want to get links to any of the tools Christie discussed--Canva, PicMonkey, everything else we talked about--it'll be in the show notes, which are over at www.MaggiePatterson.com/episode43. You can also learn more about Christie over in the show notes, and subscribe and review. And, as always, there is a link to the Marketing Moxie Facebook group. If you just want to hop on over there right now because you don't even want to go to the show notes, it's at www.MaggiePatterson.com/group. We would love to have you over there and continue the conversation after the show.

Have a great day, and thank you so much for listening.

OUTRO: Thank you so much for listening. Hop on over to our home base at www.MaggiePatterson.com for the show notes and more episodes. And you can join the Marketing Moxie Facebook group at

www.MaggiePatterson.com/group. And remember, as Yoda says, "Do or do not. There is no try." That's what having moxie is all about.

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