

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 153

Justin Eklund

Don: [00:00:00] Welcome to another exciting edition of the WCBA Powered, of course, by Evergy. First, thank you for listening. Don't forget to like us. Love us. Share us. Follow us. We truly appreciate you checking us out in today, Grove nine E.

Ebony: That's what's up. We have Justin here. How you doing?

Justin Eklund: I'm doing well. Thank you guys for having me. It's an honor to be here.

Ebony: Of course. We're excited to have you here and you tell us a little bit about your story. So I'm curious, like are you from Wichita?

Justin Eklund: I am. I was born in Colorado, but I've lived in Wichita almost all my life.

Don: Wonderful. What high school?

Justin Eklund: Northwest High.

Ebony: Oh no. Yeah. We started off on such a good note.

Justin Eklund: Grizzlies. Let's go.

Ebony: And now we're here.

Don: I'm scared to ask what, what year did you graduate?

Justin Eklund: Well, we, we don't talk about it.

Don: Yeah, that's good.

90.

Justin Eklund: 92.



Don: Oh, you're a young Thundercat. I graduated in 81. I have no problem saying it. So yeah.

Ebony: Wow. Excellent. All right. We finally have one for him. . Finally have another person who went to Northwest.

Don: And I got a quality education on and on and on.

Ebony: Somebody is really questionable. Let's get back to Justin.

Justin's.

Justin Eklund: We're off to a good start.

Don: Yeah, she went to Southeast. They do that.

Ebony: So, so they def. Okay, so how did you get into, well, well, first tell us who you are and what you

Justin Eklund: My name My name is Justin Eklund and I'm the founder of Grove Nine Marketing here in Wichita. And we are a full service marketing agency. We're dedicated to helping on mission organizations, clarify their brand, grow their revenue, and increase their impact.

So that's what we do.

Ebony: But you know, you started off with on mission. So what if the organization is not on?

Justin Eklund: If they're off mission, we help 'em get on mission.

Ebony: So you do assist with

Justin Eklund: We do. Okay. You know, we really talk about, we thrive in working with organizations who have a purpose higher than just profit. You know, profits got to be in the mix, but we really help them identify their purpose and, and that's kind of our sweet spot.

Don: That is. Okay. Can it be in the high mix?

Profit. Profit. Can it be in the high

Justin Eklund: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, without profit you don't have a business.

Don: Yeah, exactly. That's where I, that's exactly where I was going. But you sell it, you said it much better.

Justin Eklund: There you go.

Ebony: So what year did you begin the business.

Justin Eklund: So we're celebrating eight years in January.

Ebony: Wow. Yeah. Congratulations.

Justin Eklund: Thank you. It's weird to say that. It's, it's really gone fast.

Ebony: So what made you decide that, hey, I'm gonna start this small business.

Justin Eklund: That's a great question. So I'll give you my, my story if you Yeah, please. That's what we want.

All right. So it started back, it's kind of an interesting story. I think it's interesting. I don't, you can let me know when I'm done if it was or not, but back in high school, I was at a, at a youth conference and I really felt this, this pull, this calling toward toward ministry.

And I thought, I wasn't sure what that was gonna look like on my life, but I knew vocationally somehow I was supposed to be involved in that. So when I got to college, I tried a semester of Bible college and that wasn't really the right fit for me. I knew I wasn't supposed to be a preacher or a youth pastor or anything like that.

I had, I had this business sense and this creativity inside of me and I wasn't sure what to do with that and how to, how to kind of connect that to.

This opportunity to serve in this calling. So went back to Wichita State and got a degree in marketing and advertising and I started working for Associated Advertising

Don: Oh, wow.

Justin Eklund: in Wichita.

Mm-hmm. . So two of my mentors were Press Houston and Carrie Gray. And associated was the second largest agency at the time. And just an incredible opportunity to come up under those guys and learn marketing. [00:05:00] The importance of planning and branding and design and all the things. So that was an incredible opportunity to get kind of, that's where I got my start in advertising.

And then I went and did some missions work through some kind of interesting turn of events and did that for a while. Then came back to Wichita and got married and my wife was working. So I was able to serve a nonprofit here in Wichita That was Basically accepting used medical equipment that still had life and then repurposing it out into third world countries who needed this medical equipment.

So I was able to help them with marketing and development. And so that was a, that was a really cool opportunity to use those skills, you know, but also work for a and a mission based organization. I ended up being asked to come on staff at Westlink Christian Church on the west side of Wichita. And there you go.

West side, they had, it was a small church. They didn't really have a role for a communications or marketing person, but we were trusting that someday maybe they would.

So once again, just, just really following where I was, was being led and trusting God with the future. And so that's, that was what I did.

And for 14 years I was able to serve the church as a communications director. And grew an incredible volunteer team and staff. And it was the church grew and had several campuses, and then after 14 years, we felt called back into the marketplace to serve on mission organizations and really help grow the good, in the city.

So that's the long way around, but that's how we got here.

Ebony: Okay. Wow. And that's, that's very you know, You've always, since you've been in this, have you felt that marketing is your passion?

This is what wakes you up in the morning and say, how can I help my, this person or this business reach their goals?

Justin Eklund: Yeah, absolutely. I think helping organizations tell their story. We really feel like this stuff matters. We talk about it in terms. I've heard it talked about in terms of medicine versus vitamins. You know, we all take our vitamins sometimes, you know, they're preventative, but they're not critical necessarily.

But medicine is critical and I really feel, we really feel like marketing is medicine and for organizations to make the impact that they can and should make, they need to be serious about their marketing.

Ebony: That is, you know, that I, I love that. That's the first time I've heard that because you know, you still run into those people who know marketing They know that they identify what their but they still do not take the steps that are to tell that create that value.

How do you get that across to people?

Justin Eklund: You know, we receive, the average person gets up to 10,000 ads served to them every. Can you imagine we have that many messages coming into our brains.

For an organization to have any hope of standing out and breaking through the clutter, they have to be very clear on their brand and they have to take marketing seriously and be

intentional about their marketing. So it matters.

Ebony: So with what you do, do you help people identify what their true brand is? Because you know, sometimes organizations think that this is what they are and then they go through a strategic, you know, planning session, then realize, well, that's what we say we are, but that's not actually what we're doing.

Justin Eklund: Right?

Yeah. So when we talk about a brand at Grove Nine, we talk about that one thing that consumers think of when they think of you or your company.

We really boil it down to just one idea because we are flooded with so many ideas. People can't hang on to more than one. So let's figure out what you're really good at, what value you bring to the world, and then really help organizations be known for that one thing. So when they think of you, they think of,

Ebony: that one thing.

That's, that's really hard. That's difficult when you try to say only one thing because when you're business, you're like, well, I'm providing all of this value. I can't boil it down to one thing that's like, I can't even think I mean, that's, almost impossible, but you're saying it's possible.

Justin Eklund: It's very possible, and you may do many things, but there's one thing that you do better than anyone else and you can be known for.

You know, and you may be in a marketplace, you may be your competitors may all be sitting on one brand or a couple of brands. They all may be seeing [00:10:00] price or quality. But if you can come out with a unique brand that can be known you can really break through the clutter . It's more effective and less expensive than fighting for a brand that a whole bunch of other people are trying to be on as well.

Ebony: So what is your brand?

Justin Eklund: That's a really great question. Our brand is growing the good we are here for on mission organizations and helping them through marketing strategy really get clear on their brand and tell their story. So our name Grove Nine comes from the Nine Fruits of the Spirit in the book of Galatians in the Bible.

So if organizations look like we're here to help them look like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. So that's, that's what we're all about and we feel like that really is our brand.

Don: Very cool.

Ebony: I, I was wondering when you, and I know it's your question, but I wondered if you were gonna go ahead and tell us the nine fruits of the spirit.

Don: Yeah. Yeah.

That was my question. That's why I gotta regroup, but that's okay. I would really love your take on the church of 2022 post pandemic. I mean, where do you see, as a marketer, how can churches get back to pre.

Folks coming into the and I know church is wherever you have it, I get that, but how do you, how do you get folks back into the church?

Justin Eklund: Yeah.

Ebony: Or is, is that gonna happen?

Justin Eklund: Yeah.

Yeah. I think it's happening slowly. I think there, you know, some, in some places it's happening more than others for sure.

But I think people crave that community. We were, we were made for it. We were made to be together and, and give hugs and, and high fives, you know? And, and so I think people want that. And I think as, as we move out of this, I think people are gonna get back there.

Okay.

Don: With your background in the ministry and stuff, I just wondered how that's going to happen. It seemed like it's a slow grind right now, but.

Justin Eklund: I would agree. But you know, organizations, churches, and organizations have an opportunity now to start bringing people together and these events, you know, especially nonprofits have really been hurting the last few years with not being able to have their banquets and their fundraisers and those types of things, the virtual.

Sometimes we're effective, sometimes not. So there's an opportunity, I think now to not only move your mission forward, but also help people have an opportunity to, to gather and to to do something, together.

Don: Do you think for that to happen? There has to be They have to coexist. Social media and coming back in person has to coexist. I mean, well, it seemed like that's gonna be hard when people say, oh, I've done this for two years and I've, I've gotten, I've, I've gotten fed , you know? Based on a palm of my hand looking at my phone.

How do you market against that.

Justin Eklund: Mm-hmm. . Absolutely. And I think that's a generational question. Also, I think the younger generation, they, they don't you know, for example, They don't leave voicemails. They're not big on phone calls, you know, it's much easier to send a text. Mm-hmm. or you know, snap somebody or send them an Instagram message or whatever.

But I think it's both. And I think organizations have an opportunity to utilize social media. To help bring people together to help move their mission forward. And it has to be part of the mix today,

Don: And you can help them with that. Absolutely. Excellent. That's what I was trying to get to, but also selfish. I was just trying to figure out how we gonna get people back at the church. I mean, it seems tough. You're an entrepreneur now. Are you successful?

Justin Eklund: You know, I feel like we are, our definition of success would be helping organizations make a greater.

That's what gets us outta bed every morning. It's, you know, we get to work with some incredible organizations who are tackling poverty and mental illness and foster care and sex trafficking and healthcare and, you know, just incredible organizations doing incredible work.

And from the bottom of my heart, I. If we help you clarify your brand and you put together an integrated marketing strategy, you will touch more lives, you will show more love, you will have a greater impact.

Don: As the kid's say, is that your jam far as dealing with non-profit organizations and churches is that your sweet spot there where you can do the most good?

Justin Eklund: it's part of it.

Non-profits for for sure, but [00:15:00] also mission driven or purpose driven for profit organizations. Okay. You know, driven by a missional leader who's, who's all about generosity, who's all about really, that, the whole kind of sacred and secular. I don't believe in that anymore. I think that that all work has purpose and all work is meaningful.

And so we really wanna help organizations move their mission forward. And hopefully that's, you know, we find a way to make love, joy, peace, goodness, all these things. Really part of what they're doing. and so.

Don: Excellent. E?

Ebony: Yeah, no, this is, this is good. But it's time to hear a word from our sponsors, so we'll hear a word from them and then we'll be back to hear more from Justin and Grove nine.

Welcome back friends. We're here with Grove Nine and we're just hearing a little bit about their story and the impact that they are making on the Greater Wichita region. So Justin. Why Wichita? I mean like, you know, you weren't born here, but you were raised here and you went to that one high school.

Don: You went to, you went to a great high school, but continue

Ebony: went there and then, you know, you got into you went to Wichita State and got into business and decided, Hey, I'm gonna start my own Why Wichita?

Justin Eklund: Wichita's always been home and our, our family is here, our friends are here, and there's so much good happening in Wichita, Kansas. And I think that's what better place to, to be involved with this mission that we've been called to. So there's all these incredible people and organizations doing amazing things and and it's, it's exciting.

It's growing and the people here are creative and generous and, yeah, it's just a wonderful place to do business.

Ebony: Creative and generous. So have you had any issues with pipeline or talent for your industry.

Justin Eklund: We've been very fortunate. We're a small team. We're five in-house people, and then we work with a, a team of freelance people as well.

You know, maybe one benefit of this kind of virtual climate that we've all been in is the ability to work remote. And so we have a lot of remote freelance team members that work for us, and that's been, helpful in finding people.

But Wichita is full of talent and it's been it's been really wonderful to see how, the right people have shown up at the right.

Our team. One really cool thing about everyone on the team, everyone shares the mission. Everyone has a heart for helping organizations make a greater impact. And so we have a culture that's, that's fun and exciting and we celebrate impact all the time.

Ebony: Yeah. No, that's, that's awesome to hear. You know, when you think of and not just now, even since the pandemic, but you know, creatives, you love the flexibility as right.

And just what does that lens look like in the work, in the workplace, especially you as an owner? What does it look like? Because a lot of times you see, you'll get young talent and they wanna do one specific thing, whereas before with some creatives, Willing to explore and do multiple hats. Whereas now they're like, well, that's not kind of what I do.

I only do this. So can you maybe talk about that and how you work through those challenges?

Justin Eklund: Yeah, I believe everyone's an artist. I believe everyone has different degrees of creativity, but we've all got it inside there and I don't think there's always one right way to do something.

So how do you inspire and equip team members to, to do their thing and to bring new perspectives? and I think that's, that's really exciting to watch something go from strategy. To development and then to fruition. And it may look totally different than I thought it was going to look in the beginning, but it's wonderful and it's effective and it's on brand.

And I think giving people the freedom to be creative within strategic boundaries is really exciting. So I enjoy that part of it.

Ebony: That's good. I mean, cuz that is the key there, you know, because there's so many people who wanna keep you in this box or say This is the only way that we can achieve when [00:20:00] there's other ways. But you have to be willing, right, to let that creativity flourish and bloom, even though it doesn't fit in how, whatever box you've

Justin Eklund: created on your own.

Absolutely. One of the ways that we talk about it, because we start with a, it's called a lean marketing plan. It's a playbook or a strategic document that we develop for our clients, and it really lays out some objective data and guidelines for, for creative and for brand. So when, say we're gonna do a logo design, we've got some objective data that this logo is supposed to achieve. So creativity then is unleashed as long as it meets these criteria. It can be anything rather than it being subjective and, well, I like, I like green, or I think it should have a horse. Or, you know, let's, let's look at what is this supposed to accomplish and then let's let creativity kind of support that.

Ebony: With that, you know, you talked about having workers who are remote.

Is there anything in the Wichita ecosystem that we are missing or that we may need to help support your business or your industry?

Justin Eklund: Wichita is growing. We've got great talent here. I think the when we look at strategy and artists and people coming out of college with marketing degrees and graphic design degrees, it's really, it's really important to get them on the job.

And if they can do an internship or something during their education, that's gonna help them tremendously.

Mm-hmm.

Justin Eklund: You know, sometimes just coming out of school, they're not quite ready to jump in and, and tackle big projects. But with that, with some experience, I think Wichita is developing

really good talent.

I love to see those departments in our schools continue to grow. And yeah, it's it's exciting to be here. We're big enough to have a good pool of talent and I think we draw from some other areas as well. And then remotely you can certainly people wanna have that freedom and that flexibility to work, you know, from home or, or even from another city.

Ebony: So do you guys offer internship opportunities?

We do.

Okay. So how do they, how does one reach you for either an internship or if I'm a company, or a small business or a non-profit, or just me needing assistance to trying to be on mission and find my brand? How do I locate you?

Justin Eklund: Absolutely. Grove9.com our website, G R O V e, number nine dot com.

We're also doing a free marketing review right now.

Ooh.

It's a free marketing audit. If you go to free marketing review dot. We'll do one of those for your organization as well and help you. We'll do a free one and help you identify some stumbling blocks that you may, you may not see right now.

Ebony: That's huge. That is a huge benefit.

Don: You mentioned about, what was that called? Lean what?

Justin Eklund: Lean marketing Plan.

Don: Okay. The, is that tied to like Lean Six Sigma?

Justin Eklund: Similar to that. It's really, when we talk about lean, we talk about the ability for it to pivot. And to adjust. We try to create strategy that's flexible, that can be spoken into as, as the organization grows and changes.

Don: Excellent. Excellent. What's next since you're this successful entrepreneur? What's on the horizon for Grove nine?

Justin Eklund: we are still, we're still just growing and achieving the mission. We get up every day and do the work that's put before us and celebrate the wins with our. And talk to new clients. And really, we have a heart for, for helping, you know, as many non-profits and, and purpose driven organizations as we can.

Ebony: Well, you said celebrate, right? Right. So what are you, it looks like here in a couple weeks you're gonna be celebrating something big.

What is that?

Justin Eklund: So we're gonna you celebrating our eight year anniversary. Yeah. Which is awesome.

Congrats. Thank you. Excellent.

Thank you. It's, it's one day at a time, one year at a time, and it's hard to believe that eight years has gone by since we took the leap.

Ebony: Yeah. And you know, you've made it through a, you know, a, a pandemic, right?

And you're still thriving.

Justin Eklund: Right. And that's just thanks to some amazing clients, who have, who have just really been we feel like we add value to them and we think they add a lot of value to us as well.

Don: Excellent. Well, thank you for going to the best high school on planet . Truly appreciate that. And now's time to have some fun.

You've dealt with Ebony longer than you should have, but we're going to do word association. I give you one word, you gimme one word back. It's not wrong cuz it's your word. Are you ready?

Justin Eklund: I am ready.

Don: Leader,

Justin Eklund: integrity.

Don: [00:25:00] Success.

Impact.

College

Justin Eklund: Wichita State

Don: Failure.

Justin Eklund: Learning.

Don: Oh, he's good. Entrepreneur.

Justin Eklund: Exciting.

Don: Agree. Wichita.

Justin Eklund: Awesome.

Ebony: Wichitawesome.

Don: I knew you was going there. Vacation.

Justin Eklund: The beach

Don: Okay. Hero,

Justin Eklund: My grandfather

Don: Wichita Chamber

Justin Eklund: Champion.

Don: Family.

Justin Eklund: Incredible.

Don: Well, I was hoping you was gonna come through on that one. Fun.

Justin Eklund: Oh, family.

Don: Okay, last but not least, . You gotta tell the truth on this one. Beverage.

Justin Eklund: Coffee. That's easy.

Don: Excellent.

Truly appreciate you being on the show. Thank you for spending time with us.

Justin Eklund: Don Ebony, thank you for having me. It's been a privilege.

Ebony: Of course. This was wonderful. Thank you for sharing your story and, and having the conversation with us.

Justin Eklund: Absolutely. Thanks for doing what you do.

Ebony: Yeah. Thank you. Friends, we've come to the end of today's segment. If you would please like it, make certain you leave a comment. Let us know who you wanna hear from next, and share this with someone who might find value in this.

Till next time, peace.