**Motivational Mondays interview:**

**Amy Balliett – *Airing* 01.11.2021**

**Music intro** [00:00:00-00:00:01]

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:02] Welcome to another episode of Motivational Mondays.

I’m your host Max Irzhak, and joining me today is Amy Balliett, the CEO of Killer Visual Strategies.

Amy’s agency has worked with some of the world’s biggest brands including Microsoft, Boeing, Starbucks, the Discovery Channel, and even the United Nations to visually tell stories that get people to take notice... and more importantly to take *action*!

They’ve won over 30 awards for excellence in visual communication.

And Amy herself has spoken at more than 175 conferences around the world, including Content Marketing World, Adobe Max, and SXSW.

Wow, Amy it’s so great to have you on the show!

**Amy Balliett** [00:00:39] Thank you for having me. I really appreciate being on the show.

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:43] To me, design is much more than just pretty pictures, right? It’s about truly understanding human psychology and connecting with people on a very instinctual level.

Can you share a little about what visual communication is and why you’re so passionate about it?

**Amy Balliett** [00:00:59] Yeah, definitely. The definition for visual communication says it all. It graphically represents information to efficiently and effectively create meaning; and then there’s this one final sentence in the definition that really matters: “when necessary, limited text is used to explicate the meaning.” So in other words, the concept of visual communication is that the visuals are speaking louder than the words. That somebody can look at a piece of visual content, and in under five seconds, they can form conclusions without ever reading a line of text.

Yes, you can include text, but text should not be what’s driving the final message of that content. Instead, custom visuals should really be what’s connecting with the audience and sharing the information.

**Max Irzhak** [00:01:50] One of the things I try to share on this podcast is the ups and downs of successful entrepreneurs. Now, your company has been featured on the Inc 5000 list four years in a row now. And for those of you who don’t know, Inc 5000 is a list of the fastest growing private companies in America... so it’s a really powerful testament to your brand.

But, you weren’t this huge success from day one. Can you tell us the story of how you got started, and the lessons learned along the way?

**Amy Balliett** [00:02:20] Yeah definitely. We weren’t even close to a huge success from day one. The fact of the matter is is if you want to create a successful company, you better be prepared to work 80 hours a week, and you better be prepared to get up as fast as possible every time you’re knocked down. And you better be prepared to pivot.

When we started the company, it was not Killer Infographics, it was not a design agency at all. We actually started a company that was a completely different business model. We had a bunch of different websites that we were doing affiliate marketing with. And i started creating infographics for the SEO value of those websites to really drive traffic and inbound links to those sites. And the infographics were succeeding so we saw an opportunity to create another website that was meant to be an affiliate site, that was going to be an infographic directory. And then we just kind of had people start asking us to design infographics for them. So from that, we pivoted into Killer. So that’s one big lesson right there, is you got to embrace a pivot. You’ve got to be willing to pivot. Your original dream, your original business model most of the time is not going to be your end business model because you really have to shift with the demand and go where that demand is.

**Max Irzhak** [00:03:42] What *actionable* advice do you wish to share with NSLS members?

**Amy Balliett** [00:03:49] So many things. If you’re wanting to start your own company. If you’re wanting to venture out on your own; which by the way, the opportunity is right now. We’re hitting a recession economically, and the fact is it’s actually easier to start a company in a recession. It’s easier because you have a much wider talent pool to pull from, and you can keep your costs really low and compete on cost before you have the brand that is recognized in the marketplace. So I definitely suggest that if you’re looking to start a company, first big piece of advice is do it in a downturn; it’s a great time to do it. Second big piece of advice, make sure you have a healthy savings account before you jump into starting your own company. This was a big thing for me. I saved and saved for a year before I started Killer, and that year made all of the difference in the world. Had I not had that money in my bank account to pay me for 2 years, because I basically saved enough to live on bread crumbs for 2 years, had i not had enough money to do that—i would have given up after two or three months. So save your money; that is a huge one. If you have a safety net of cash that you can pull from, you’re going to be willing to take the time it requires to start a successful, and grow a successful, company.

**Max Irzhak** [00:05:22] If someone wanted to become really great at communicating effectively through visual design, is there one book or resource that you recommend for getting started?

**Amy Balliett** [00:05:32] Not to toot my own horn but i did just release a book this year. It’s also called Killer Visual Strategies, so if you remember the name of my company, you’ll remember the name of the book. And it’s 10 years worth of lessons; every single thing that i learned from the beginning of Killer, to the end of 2019. In fact, I wrote the epilogue or the outro of the book on January 1st of this year with a very rosy outlook for 2020; not aware of what 2020 was going to become because of the pandemic. So it’s also worth buying the book just to read that and laugh.

But the book does give just a complete guide to visual communication, and visual strategy. It’s written for marketers, it’s written for business owners, it’s written for brand communicators, and designers alike. And it includes 8 rules of visual communication you should always follow, as well as exercises you can do to make sure that you’re actually understanding the concepts within the book. And then I also always recommend LinkedIn Learning. It’s just a phenomenal resource, a phenomenal hub of content to learn hands-on graphic design and visual content skills. And I have a new course on LinkedIn Learning actually coming out in the Spring that’s going to be called The 20 Rules of Visual Communication, and my book acts as a textbook that goes along with that course as well.

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:06] Amy, thank you so much for sharing your entrepreneurial story.

I’m going to provide links in the show notes and description to your book Killer Visual Strategies. I highly recommend everyone purchase it; just go to Amazon by clicking on the link. And for anyone interested in the LinkedIn Learning course, ‘Data Visualization’ will also be linked in the show notes; definitely check it out.

Congratulations on all of your accomplishments. I’m sure we’ll be hearing about the success of your company for many years to come.

**Amy Balliett** [00:07:36] Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:39] And thank you everyone for listening. We’ll see you next week on Motivational Mondays!

**Music intro** [00:07:42-00:07:48]