

[00:00:04.410] - Kriste

Hey, welcome to How It's done. A podcast for Curious Marketers. I'm kristy Goad. I'll be your host, and I'm really glad you're here. Okay, you ready?

[00:00:17.190] - Amanda

I am.

[00:00:18.610] - Kriste

Today we're talking to Amanda Donnelly. Amanda is a revenue growth partner and fractional chief marketing officer with Tech CXO. Tech CXO was founded on the premise that high potential companies can benefit from proven interim executives who they otherwise might not be able to access due to cost availability or because they don't necessarily need them full time. Tech CXO has been a pioneer in the space since 2003. I'm going to ask Amanda to tell us more about her career path in her own words here in a few minutes. But before joining Tech CXO earlier this year, Amanda started out in the ad agency space before switching to the corporate side of the house. She's worked with all kinds of big name brands through the years, including Sony PlayStation, Volkswagen, Huffington Post, IGN, Nissan North America and Eventbrite. Most recently, she served as CMO for a fast growing humanitarian aid organization before leaving in 2021 to start her own consulting firm focused on fractional CMO leadership. Today, we're going to talk about it all... paid media performance, marketing, SEO, when and how to hire an agency, when to hire, full time in house marketing, all the things.

[00:01:35.780] - Kriste

Amanda, welcome to the show.

[00:01:37.740] - Amanda

Thank you. I'm so happy to be here.

[00:01:39.620] - Kriste

I am so happy to have you here. I really want to dive deeper into your career path here in a minute. But first, I think most people don't know about this whole notion of fractional leadership. So can you tell us more about the concept and about Tech CXO?

[00:01:55.810] - Amanda

Yeah, absolutely. Well, I'll start with Tech CXO because it's a really interesting organization. So they started as tech CFO in Atlanta in 2003. So that was the first practice area that really dived into fractional sea level leadership. And there's a lot of reasons for that. Big one is that CFOs are very expensive and for smaller organizations, startups that can't afford a full time experience, CFO but really need one, it was a great way for them to bring that experience into the team without having to hire full time, have overhead, et cetera. So they focused on CFOs for quite some time. And about 1213 years ago, they expanded significantly since they started adding practice areas like the revenue growth group, which I'm a part of,

technology, product HR. And now we have a really holistic practice of about 100 partners that focus on different areas of the business. My partner team, there's about 15 of us and growing, and we focus on different areas of revenue growth. For me, I focus on marketing and CMO leadership, but I'm not super precious about titles. My clients call me a lot of different things, mostly good. So, you know, the idea of fractional marketing leadership I really feel like came to the forefront around the time of the pandemic because there were so many shifts in how business needed to be done and how to market to people, and businesses were figuring out where to make their investment.

[00:03:32.920] - Amanda

And there were so many layoffs, but once the dust settled, essentially they realized that they had laid off people that they really needed and lost some of that strategic leadership. So building marketing strategy and knowledge within organizations kind of took on a new look. So that was when I started hearing about fractional and interim in regards to marketing. And the concept for all fractional leadership in various stages of the business is to bring in that talent and bring in that experience that your organization either doesn't really need full time, so maybe you have like a sprint that you're trying to work towards or you're trying to solve a very specific problem. You might bring in fractional leadership to help assist with that for a short term. If you've lost a C-level leader, then it's a great opportunity while you're re evaluating and going through that recruitment search. Because C-level recruitment searches can take a really long time. It's a great way to bring in someone in on an interim basis that can help shepherd the team, ensure that growth is sustained, and hopefully continues in that exponential way until a new full time leader can get in place.

[00:04:52.750] - Amanda

And then the nice thing is that there's a knowledge transfer opportunity because you're setting up this relationship with the understanding that this isn't a forever thing. None of us at Tech CXO are in this to become full time employees at an organization. We do this because we want to work with great people, help great companies get to where they need to go, and then we move on to the next thing.

[00:05:14.620] - Kriste

I love the way you described that here at fuoco, we recently hired a fractional COO with Tech CXO, which is how I realized you were there even though our path had crossed so many years ago. But that's exactly how we approached it with Peter Clifton, and he was great just hopping in and really helping us move some things forward. It was kind of a sprint situation, really intense for a couple of months and then sort of tapering off as all the things we needed him to jump in and help us do got done. And now just knowing that he's there when we need him is amazing. So I'm very curious to understand from a marketing perspective how that works and why would a small, high growth organization choose a fractional option for a CMO? What's been your experience there and what advice can you share with listeners?

[00:06:13.310] - Amanda

Yeah, I think that anyone who has been in marketing for even as few as five years realizes that marketers have a big challenge at any organization. This specific challenge kind of gets more prickly the higher up you go in that tenure for marketing leaders is very short we're looking at 18 to 24 months for most CMOS.

[00:06:42.770] - Kriste

And that's crazy.

[00:06:44.340] - Amanda

It's really crazy. But it makes a lot of sense because unfortunately there are studies that show this and I know this narratively just from almost every organization I've worked with and been with. It's no slight to them, but marketing is the last practice area to be celebrated around successes and it's the first practice area to be vilified around failure.

[00:07:07.300] - Kriste

That is so true.

[00:07:09.290] - Amanda

It is. That sounds very dramatic, but it's just the truth of the matter that has a real burnout issue when it comes to full time CMOS, they get burnt out really easily because that's a roller coaster ride constantly. They either leave due to burnout on their own or they're asked to leave because they are being held responsible for failures that they contributed to. Probably, but maybe aren't solely responsible for. That's one reason why I think fractional leadership can help balance the scales with that specific problem. Because you aren't committing to a person, a leader, someone that's going to come in and be looked up to in a permanent way, seen as a permanent fixture, and then jerking the team around and the marketing strategy around because things aren't working. I think for organizations that maybe are on the smaller side and have never had a CMO before, starting with fractional is actually a great place to start because, particularly in the first three to ten years of owning an organization, depending on your growth pattern, you're changing your product strategy, you are changing your value proposition, you are changing your key messaging. So if you bring in a full time marketing leader to solve a specific problem at a specific moment in time and then your product changes, they may not have the experience or the drive to support the product as it evolves.

[00:08:57.450] - Amanda

So by bringing in fractional leadership, you have this great opportunity to say, okay, we've got this moment in time here that we need leadership on, we need strategy. But we understand this moment in time may shift and that shifts could happen six months from those shifts could happen 18 months from now. But we're not beholden to this person in a really deep emotional way. Let's be honest, the smaller the organization, the more emotions play into things because you really live and breed that company. And I think that that's also where you get conflict, right? And so having fractional leadership, particularly within marketing, because I work with a lot of founders and one of the biggest challenges they have is losing the voice that they've owned in the first early stages. It's huge and it is a true grieving process. They go through all the steps and denial is typically the step that I'm brought into. Where they're going, nothing's working, no one's listening to me. I know the voice, I know what we should be writing. I can't get my marketing team to do this. And so I kind of consider myself a mini executive therapist at that point to help

them through stages and learn how to let go of the voice that is so tied to them as an individual when they're a founder.

[00:10:28.810] - Kriste

Okay, I need you to talk about that more because not only do I experience that with clients, especially earlier stages, and they're growing and things are changing and as they're coming on and even as their strategic marketing partner, we may try to go in certain directions and there's like a visceral reaction a lot of times. And I understand it 100% because I too am an entrepreneur. I started my own agency and built it from scratch and the voice. And so it is very tied to me and I feel very strongly about it. So I understand it from both angles. And I'm just curious, how do you work through that and how do you help founders and CEOs in that instance let go and move on?

[00:11:20.250] - Amanda

It's not easy and not possible in some instances, but I would say that there's probably three examples of the stage of the organization and the type of founder where they need that level of guidance, right? So the first one is you have a very charismatic founder where the company has been built on their charisma and on their connections and on their ability to hustle and network. And when you have that founder company relationship, it's very hard to delineate the company from the person and that can work to an organization's benefit for quite some time. But truthfully, as a long term marketing strategy, at some point, the individual and the organization typically need to have differentiating voices. And when I'm brought in at that stage, my goal is to get the founder to help craft that voice for the company and get their buy in. So that as they start to let go and I like to say as they start to work on the business rather than in the business, they feel confident that their team is going to shepherd the voice of the company in a way that they've already bought into. Now that won't stop founders from seeing something on Twitter that they would have never said or wanting to rewrite an occasional email or CTA, but we want to see that habit go down over time.

[00:13:10.340] - Amanda

So that's kind of your founder company scenario one. The next one is the founder company scenario where the founder is maybe more of a product person and really wants nothing to do with marketing. And I love this type of founder because they're so easy to work with. They are typically like, please take this, take this away from me, I don't know what I'm doing, I need help. And still, though I think it's very important to get buy in, they might think that they are willing to let go and willing to give that voice away because marketing isn't their area of expertise. But in reality, it's still their baby. They still want a say in it. So buying along the way and understanding the emotional tie that founders have to the voice of their companies, regardless of what type of founder they are, I think is really critical to that process. And then you do occasionally have these organizations where the founder has so much charisma and so huge of a network that they will always be tied. They are the company, the company is them. And when that happens, and I've seen this happen at very small companies that just happen to be very well networked.

[00:14:30.240] - Amanda

And we all know the apples of the world, the Amazons of the world, the Huffington Post, these are all very tied to the founders and CEOs. I think that you have to lean in heavily to what the founders vision is and be super respectful of the fact that they are going to want to see every single thing that comes out. And if your personality is such that that doesn't work well for you, then that is truly a great opportunity to bring in fractional leadership because they can hold the space for those more visceral feelings without engaging at emotional level.

[00:15:11.280] - Kriste

That is brilliant. Okay, well, so clearly I think this is a great segue. You've just described several, three different scenarios and that those are based on a lot of experience that you have through the years. So let's rewind a minute and I'd love for you to talk about how you got here in your career. Tell us a little bit more about you and your journey.

[00:15:34.670] - Amanda

Yeah, what a journey it's been. I think that if you look at my career on paper, it's very confusing because I've kind of dabbled in every industry. B To C, b To B To C. Very Traditional old Organizations Like Nissan, where The Company Has Been Around For Over 100 Years, very Fast Growth Ahead Of The Time. Organizations Like Eventbrite That Are Always Trying The Next New Thing and Kind Of Everything In Between. So the through the line there is what's the problem to solve and do I feel like I can help to solve it. And that's really been my deciding factor for every move I've made. So when you look at the first kind of ten years of my career, I worked in the agency space. The agency space is so interesting and as you know very well because I think it keeps people meaning, the talent and staff engaged. Because there's so many opportunities to try something new, to go to a new client, to work on new business that you can keep staff and talent engaged in different ways than an organization marketing team. Like so an internal marketing team can stay engaged.

[00:16:55.630] - Amanda

So that's really what kept me in the agency space for ten years is that I was constantly able to evolve with the evolution of media. So I was fortunate. I say this a little tongue in cheek. But what really was fortunate, I started in the digital space immediately after the.com bust. It was a terrible time to go into digital, but it also was a wonderful time from a career standpoint, because everything I learned, I learned grassroots. There were no classes to teach me how to buy media in college. I learn it by doing, and that is still my approach to this day.

[00:17:32.500] - Kriste

It's not the best way to learn, too.

[00:17:34.580] - Amanda

I think it really is. And I think that when you look at digital media and digital marketing and the evolution of large level agency media buy to self-service platforms, and now that we're moving into this era of less tracking, more privacy, less dependent on cookies, it's funny. I see the media buying trends kind of

shifting back to where it was over 20 years ago when I first started, where you're buying more interest and behavioral. So I'm really interested to see kind of how that continues to evolve and everything comes back in style. Right?

[00:18:17.310] - Kriste

Apparently acid wash jeans are coming back.

[00:18:20.510] - Amanda

I know. And flares. And I'm very committed to the skinny Jean, and I know that makes me super unhappy, but I think mullets are.

[00:18:27.430] - Kriste

Maybe even coming back. I don't know.

[00:18:29.650] - Amanda

I don't approve of this.

[00:18:32.130] - Kriste

Somebody else the other day said, you know those really low rise jeans where they had to come up with new t shirts just to COVID your muffin top and stuff? Apparently someone said that that's coming back. I'm like, no, I'm not doing it. It's not happening.

[00:18:46.300] - Amanda

No, I will leave that for the teens and tweens to have fun with. I went through that phase, not going back, adding into the space, lost opportunity there. I was able to really focus on clients that were in the consumer electronic spaces. That was a really interesting space to be in. So Verizon Wireless is my major client. When I lived in Atlanta, when I moved to Los Angeles, I worked on the PlayStation account for the majority of the time I lived out there. And because I had such a significant background in client side mobile, that is the reason why I was able to easily pivot to publisher side, because this was 2011, so smartphones and apps were so hot then. All the publishers were rushing to figure out how to build apps for Android and iPhone, how to then monetize them. So that's what I think the post brought me on to do, is to launch their first mobile apps and then determine the monetization strategy, go out to market with their sales team and sell through their mobile products. I then moved on to IGN, which is a gaming publisher, and did the exact same thing for them, expanded that role to actually be over sales development.

[00:20:01.300] - Amanda

So partnering with the sales team to create products and offerings that they could go to market with, that was a great space for me To Be In. I was in that space a little less than two years. But that was a great bridge from agency to client side, because I truly came to the client side and to Nissan with a full scope

understanding of how the interactions of agencies and publishers work from both sides of that business. And that level of education is really hard to find in the brand space, regardless of where you live and regardless of what industry you're in.

[00:20:38.040] - Kriste

And why is that? Just because most people tend to stick more with one particular area.

[00:20:44.510] - Amanda

I think that life hires, like So when it comes to brand side, there is a little hesitancy about hiring people that have exclusively agency backgrounds or sales backgrounds on the publisher side. And that's a really hard mold to break. I mean that's kind of not for all agency people, but I think for a lot of agency folks they are interested in moving to brand side because they work so closely with the brand and it's kind of an appealing thing to work on the other side of the coin. The brands often don't want to work with agency folks because they want brand people. They want folks that understand corporate organizations and whatnot. So honestly, with Nissan, it was a really interesting path into it. I live in Franklin, which is where their headquarters from North America are. And on a whim, I saw a job on LinkedIn for their vehicle connected services team to be the product marketing manager over that product. So that's in vehicle safety and security as well as entertainment and this was pre CarPlay and pre android. So all the OEMs have their kind of unique systems. On a whim. I was like, okay, this is essentially mobile, but in vehicles.

[00:22:04.300] - Amanda

All of a sudden my resume and I got a call back 2 hours later, which does not happen.

[00:22:08.560] - Kriste

It never happens.

[00:22:09.740] - Amanda

Ever. Especially because it was going into the void.

[00:22:12.730] - Kriste

Right? You applied online? Like on their HR portal or something?

[00:22:16.940] - Amanda

Yes.

[00:22:19.930] - Kriste

It's what it was meant to be. It was meant to be.

[00:22:23.140] - Amanda

When they called me. I even said it was like I just submitted my resume 2 hours ago. Why are you calling me back? This past was so unexpected. And then I was hired at Nissan within about three weeks. It was a really fast turnaround for that brand interview process, which usually is a lot longer. And I stuck with Nissan for six years. It was a great organization. They gave me so many amazing opportunities. I worked within vehicle connected services. I then went on to the Mark Home department, which focuses on all major vehicle launches. So I stayed within digital. There first in digital marketing for Tier One and Tier Two. And then I went into CRM. So that's where I really learned everything about email marketing. Strategy segmentation, how to write great copy and subject lines, and Pts to make things click with your customers, right? Really learn about customer loyalty and retention there as well. So that was a great period of time for me. I also got my first toe in the water with B to B at Nissan because I worked for the Dealer Network development team on a consumer facing app.

[00:23:35.700] - Amanda

But it was an app that we needed to sell through the dealers. So, yeah, it was really interesting from that standpoint too. So that kind of set me up for success in landing my next role, which was head of Marketing for Eventbrite. Eventbrite. SAS b to b. They were really trying to grow their team here in Nashville. So I was hired on to not only lead the North American marketing team, but also to build it out from scratch here.

[00:24:03.870] - Kriste

Wow.

[00:24:04.640] - Amanda

Yeah. And it was a great time, to be honest. I had seller team, seller people, and then this whole global pandemic thing happened and it was really hard to do live events. And they laid off 50% of their global workforce in April of 2020. Yeah, it was a total heartbreaker.

[00:24:23.650] - Kriste

You had just built your team, right. And then you had to go the opposite direction. That it is heartbreaking.

[00:24:29.050] - Amanda

It was actually the second time in my career that I've had to do that. I did that at IGN as well, and they were purchased by Ziff Davis, but that was an acquisition. This was obviously far more dramatic in nature. But when I look at the team of people I hired for that project, that team of Inverse and where they are now, that moment in time was short for all of us, but it really did set us all up on these very interesting, very successful career paths.

[00:25:01.870] - Kriste

That's amazing.

[00:25:03.550] - Amanda

It is amazing to see. One of my dear friends who I worked with and hired there, she's now VP of Marketing at the Science Center. A few of my team members went on to Amazon. One of them is working at the New York Times.

[00:25:19.670] - Kriste

Amazing.

[00:25:20.790] - Amanda

Yeah, absolutely. So I feel like A, it was an incredibly strong team based on what they've done since then. And while it was a sad moment in time, we all really supported each other to ensure no one was without a job eight weeks after layoffs. And that is to me, a huge that's amazing. Yeah.

[00:25:40.900] - Kriste

Did you have a lot of HR support from corporate on that? Or were you kind of out on your own or how that works? Because I've always wondered, hiring is a laborious process. Getting the right people, you want to get it right. And then when you have to hire so quickly, like I imagine you were having to do, how did you do that?

[00:26:05.600] - Amanda

Yeah, that's interesting. I had great HR business partners at Eventbrite, so they definitely helped with the recruiting process significantly. But I think that as a leader, you also have to put yourself out there and you have to find either people with interesting LinkedIn profiles where you're like, if I could have this person, this is who I would have. But their experience and background is what I'm really looking for. Working your own networks, I mean, especially and that was the Hustle in 2019, 2020. The Hustle is so much harder for talent now because no one's geographically beholden in our field anymore. So you're looking at people living all across the United States at all sorts of different pay requirements, time zone, highly competitive business side marketplace. People are jumping from job to job and getting these huge bumps in pay and responsibility. My fear is that the kind of class of college grads that graduated in the last three years and in the next two years, because we're still figuring this thing out and evolving, I worry that some of them are. Moving too fast because they're able to bounce from job to job, and they're going to, in five to ten years, look back and go, oh, God, I don't know what I'm doing. And we all had a place.

[00:27:36.180] - Kriste

Sometimes.

[00:27:39.970] - Amanda

I say that to myself at least a few times a week. But I do know what I'm doing because I have 20 years of experience.

[00:27:47.990] - Kriste

Right. You put in the time and yeah, there's no replacement for that. You can't learn all that you need to know in that short amount of time. Is that kind of what you're maybe let me ask you to unpack that a little bit more because I'm very curious about what you mean when you say that, because I agree, especially as someone who's hiring and employing people, and I see people moving around very quickly and I agree with everything you're saying. I just would like to hear a little bit more about what you mean and what you're thinking.

[00:28:22.340] - Amanda

So I think there's like theory and practice, right? And the best talent understands the theory as well has been in the practice of it. Right. So talking to leaders just in the greater Nashville area, one of the things that is a pretty consistent complaint that I hear is we got this person to the last stage of the interview process and they all of a sudden realized they would have to be implementing and they had never implemented before. And we're talking about people who are not late stage in their career at all because I understand you a certain effect. They're definitively senior leaders who have never built out a Google Ads campaign and that's totally fine because they had the practice in other areas, so they don't need to know that area. But if you're interviewing for a job that is specific to search engine marketing and you understand the theory of search and marketing, but you've never been in the back end in the weeds, you have set a limiting factor for yourself. And some of that is the marketplace as it stands right now is not limiting people in the way that they have before.

[00:29:41.640] - Amanda

They're not saying, well, have you ever built a Google search campaign? They're saying, oh my gosh, this person has Google search on their resume. They have credentials from other companies. Let's hire them. And then they get to the end stage and it's like, oh no, we had coordinators to do that. Or we outsource contractors or upwork or whatever have you. And it's like, oh no, I need you to be doing this day to day process over again. So I think it's a problem on the business side where we're not necessarily rewarding or encouraging folks to do the work because there's such a desperate need for talent. And then on the talent side, don't be moral. They're incredibly talented, hardworking, very knowledgeable people in both theory and practice out there. And they are not folks that have decades of tenure. These are people that have just really worked hard to be great at what they do right out of college. They are out there. But for every one of them, I feel like there's three folks who have an infinite level of confidence that only comes with youth and they've been rewarded for it over and over again. And until they start getting rewarded for it, they're not going to pause and go, oh my gosh, do I know what I'm doing?

[00:31:03.110] - Kriste

That is so well said.

[00:31:15.910] - Kriste

You learned by doing. I've learned by doing. Most people learn by doing. You can read all the books and study all you want and then your career evolves over time, and it evolves by you taking on things that

you've never done before and figuring out how to do them. I think those are different things than what we're talking about altogether. And I think that is what can be a big challenge for companies when they are looking to hire talent. And the talent here's one that gets me, someone's coming right out of college, or maybe they have one or two years experience and they say, I want to do strategy. They say they're strategic and maybe they're strategic at that level, at that time and place in their career in that regard. But doing strategy and being a strategic marketer come with time. So I think a lot of it is, it's about self awareness and it's about being willing to admit what you don't know and learn from people who have something to teach you and realize that there is a process. So I think one thing we're trying to implement is not only in our interview questions and styles when we're hiring, but also implementing. One thing we're using now, starting to use now, is something called a Culture Index.

[00:32:56.810] - Amanda

It's such a good idea.

[00:32:58.810] - Kriste

It's new to me, and I'm blown away by it. I've been telling everybody about it. I should have them on my podcast next. But that really allows you to see people's kind of how they're wired and then know how to build teams, build the teams around them. And I know that's not a new topic of conversation, but I think that particular tool is going to help us a lot in that regard. So in terms of hiring, when you're working with companies, obviously, how do, especially younger or earlier stage companies, how do they know when to hire someone in house this time versus an agency versus a fractional? CMO I think the answer is somewhere sort of like in between, because no one of those people can really be successful on their own. And there is a relationship among all of them. So I'm curious what you've seen out there and how you advise clients on that.

[00:34:06.030] - Amanda

I feel like my introductory conversations with people who are like fractional curious, I've met through various conferences or referrals or whatnot. The first thing that they say to me at Essence is, we tried something, it didn't work. We need help. And typically the thing they tried is they hired someone too senior and didn't have anybody to implement. They hired someone too junior and they didn't have anybody to help them strategize or they said, we're not going to hire internally, we're going to bring on an agency, but they didn't have anybody to lead the agency. So you can't operate in silos. And each one of that though, is a very siloed approach to marketing. And truthfully, like, the best reason to bring in fractional leadership, even at an advisory level. At an advisory level so that's maybe a few hours a week, for just a little bit of time, I can help an organization figure out how to navigate the in-house waters, how to navigate the agency waters and determine what they're ready for. And most organizations, they need someone, they need someone on staff. And ideally that someone that marketing. Someone is very naturally curious, open to learning.

[00:35:40.280] - Amanda

And I don't care if they've been in the industry for 20 years or two years like that. Natural curiosity, willingness to learn, and willingness to humbly say, I don't know the answer to that. Those are three

behavioral aspects. I would hire that person before the person that has this incredible pedigree on paper, but comes in with a swagger that is either unearned or unnecessary. Because the natural curiosity and the admittance of I don't know what I don't know, but I'm willing to learn, is going to generate success, particularly at a smaller organization where they might be employee number five, number ten. The impact they can have on that organization with those two behavioral factors is really incredible. And so even me as a fractional CMO, I walk into every project being willing to roll up my sleeves, get in the weeds, of their Google Analytics, of their Meta Ads campaigns, of their connected TV campaigns, what's going on through their website, and really dive in. And I have that expectation of any talent that they have on staff already and any talent that I help them recruit for. That's kind of the first stage is assessing who's internally going to be responsible for marketing. Because you need a person.

[00:37:09.850] - Kriste

You do. For an agency to be successful, you've got to have someone on the inside shepherding, herding hats, all the things, and.

[00:37:19.310] - Amanda

That person might wear a lot of different hats, but you have to identify who that person is.

[00:37:24.290] - Kriste

Right.

[00:37:25.630] - Amanda

I think that oftentimes founders of small orgs see Paid as a quick fix for all their problems, and that is what drives them to hire agencies too early. They will go the Paid route without getting their foundational marketing in order. And you know this to be true. I mean, you can throw as much money as you want at Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, whatever. They'll take your money.

[00:38:00.010] - Kriste

And the agencies that specialize in that will take your money too, 100%. And they don't care if there's not a strategy.

[00:38:08.410] - Amanda

What I've noticed, I work with a lot of different agencies, and what I do, some of them are agencies that companies brought on before I start working with them, some companies, and I feel like I'm especially able, because of my background, to help them with this. A lot of companies will bring me on to help them manage their agency search, help them go through the RFP, and help them through the onboarding process because they don't have a dedicated person to do that. So I become that person for them. And what I've noticed with particularly these more performance, marketing driven agencies, is that they tend to take what the client tells them and execute on it and not push back.

[00:38:53.600] - Kriste

Right.

[00:38:54.250] - Amanda

And not question. But if a client comes to me and says, I have \$5,000 to spend on Google, go make Google Ads for me, I'd ask them why. That's my first question.

[00:39:05.200] - Kriste

Now, why do you want to do that? Where are you driving them?

[00:39:11.310] - Amanda

Exactly? My advice, particularly to younger organizations, is always invest in your own channels first, and that includes invest in your product. Your product has to be able to go to market and sell, or else no amount of marketing is going to generate revenue for you.

[00:39:33.590] - Kriste

That's a great point, because that happens all the time. Your marketing might be awesome, and then you have all these leads, and then all of a sudden there's no product or it doesn't work or there's no sales team.

[00:39:45.820] - Amanda

So I think that the foundational elements of sales marketing, customer success, product technology, those need to be in place. Now, they might not be perfected, you might not be 100% there, and that's okay. You're building the airplane while it's in the air. When you're in startup mode and everybody understands that. But at minimum you need some foundational elements of each in place to really start investing in performance, marketing and paid. And if you don't have the elements of each of those in place, then I'm going to tell you to save your money and spend it elsewhere.

[00:40:24.060] - Kriste

I love that. And so just to be certain that everyone listening understands what you mean when you tell clients, invest in your own channels. What are you talking about?

[00:40:33.210] - Amanda

Their website is the biggest thing. So your website is still the face of your product. It is your storefront digitally. It is where people will go to find information out of you. And that is true for every generation. I mean, I know that there's all these things the younger target audiences don't go on websites, they don't read emails, but they do. And you still have to ensure that you have these basic things in place. That's step one. Do you have an email system? Set up an email marketing tool. There are so many good free ones that you can start with while you're building your list. But you have to give hand, raises a space to say, I want to keep track of your organization, I want to learn more. And then you have to be able to

communicate even at the simplest of ways with those folks on a regular basis. Social media your own channels. This is another pitfall that I commonly see. If you are a B to B startup, you do not have to activate Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, those are nice channels to have. But if you are a true B to B, if you're in the SAS space, you are going to have very little impact there because those are B to C channels. So let's focus on B to B channels, which is predominantly LinkedIn. So I will often look at organizations' social media channels and they've got a huge Instagram following and three followers on LinkedIn, but they're B-to-B and I'm like there is a mismatch happening here. Yes, content is also huge, so content is hard. And I think this is a space where there is a real opportunity to hire folks early on and they can be freelancers, but there are great content marketers out there and a lot of them are freelance. So if you are a competent writer, that is absolutely something that you can easily and inexpensively invest in. And there's a very all or nothing mentality like, oh gosh, I got to put out new content every single day and you don't, especially when you're small and growing. Put out a couple of quality pieces every few weeks and you're good. And you can grow and leverage that content into emails, into social media, into website content expansion. So that is an area that actually could use expertise and investment at an earlier stage. And once you have a website that people are coming to, a product that people want to buy and all your foundational channels in place. Great. Let's test Google first and see where we go from there.

[00:43:30.610] - Kriste

I love that. I love that so much. So, quick question. How do you assess the right fit of an agency when you're working with companies? Like, what are the kinds of things that you look for or that you advise your clients to look for?

[00:43:48.310] - Amanda

Yeah, that is a great question. I mean, definitely looking at their current client list I think is really important because hopefully they've got a good mix of clients that are ideally in a similar space to where your company is. So if you're an e-commerce company, you want to look for an agency that does ecommerce. If you're a B to B company, you want to look for an agency that understands B to B. I think that in certain industries, like healthcare, it can be incredibly important to have an agency partner that really understands that industry, but that's not always a necessity. But I do think it's true in certain cases. And then a lot of what I do, honestly, is I go with my gut, and it's really never led me astray. So meeting and talking with the agency leadership, but also meeting your day to day team prior to signing the scope with them I think is so important because I have seen Bait and Switch happen where you have this. Amazing bizdev team that you're working with during the print process. And then it's like, okay, let me introduce you to Jim and Jane over here. They're going to be your day to day and you've never talked to them and they don't know your business. And look, I work on the agency side, so I get it. I understand why that happens. But I also know that it's entirely possible to bring in the day to day team at a very high level in those earlier conversations to ensure that the client is comfortable with who they're going to work with. So that's a lot of the questions I ask. Will you be on our account after this moment in time? And if not, who will be and can we talk with them?

[00:45:36.220] - Kriste

Right. That's great advice. So I'm also curious, surely you don't work 24/7 Amanda, but when you're not working, what are you doing? Where do you get your inspiration? How do you stay energized? And I don't know if you're like me, I have things I do that aren't work. But a lot of times what I even do in my spare time, I'm so curious about always learning things. I'm listening to podcasts or reading books or talking to people, just learning new things all the time that are related to work. But to me, that's also some of my downtime. So I'm just kind of curious, what do you do when you're not working? Where do you get your inspiration?

[00:46:19.370] - Amanda

Yeah, well, when it's not gross and raining outside like it is, right now. I walk a lot. So walking is something I started doing at the height of the pandemic when everything shut down. Couldn't go to the gym, you couldn't really do anything. You could only walk isolated, right? And it also became kind of an escape for me because we were all locked in together. So at the time, my children were four and seven. They were really little, 24/7, working, parenting, teaching, it was a lot. So when I could break away for an hour and do a several mile walk, I would listen to podcasts. And that's just a habit I formed a few years ago. And it's one that I still would say if I'm in the car, if I'm walking, if I'm cooking dinner, I am always listening to something. I'm a huge fan of audiobooks, a huge fan of podcasts. And I listen because I don't have time to read. And I'm such a voracious reader. My first job ever was at an independent bookstore. I am a book nerd through and through, but I don't have time to actually pick up a book and read it.

[00:47:28.530] - Amanda

Me, I'm the problem. I can't sit down and focus because my brain is always in 18 different places. But for whatever reason, when I am moving and listening, I can focus and I can really hear. And that's actually interesting. Those are some of the best conversations I have, too. Like, I love taking walking calls with clients, or walk calls with partners, colleagues, personal friends, because I have zero distractions when I'm outside walking with my earbuds in. And I can just walk and listen and really actively listen and respond in ways that are impossible to do when you're sitting at your desk and you have four different strings looking at you going, we need something from you right now. It's so hard to maintain focus these days.

[00:48:22.290] - Kriste

It's so true. I love that. Do you have a favorite podcast? Anything like that? Kind of a go to?

[00:48:31.810] - Amanda

So I love Jesse Hempel's LinkedIn podcast. I think it's called Hello Monday. That's a great business podcast. She interviews interesting people and talks about fantastic topics. LinkedIn actually has several good podcasts that I'm interested in. I'm a politics junkie.

[00:48:49.120] - Kriste

How are you?

[00:48:51.370] - Amanda

I love to hate politics, but I am a total politics junkie. So I listen to a lot of the Crooked Media podcasts. Yes, they're a lot of fun for me.

[00:49:02.990] - Kriste

Well, you've been having a lot of fun lately. Last couple of years, yeah, there's been.

[00:49:09.790] - Amanda

Some hold my breath for a little too long moments, but yes, I think that like, everything going on and 2020 was just a weird year and it was very easy to get obsessive about certain things in healthy and unhealthy ways. And politics is something that I really started to engage with in 2020. And I feel like I am a more active participant in local politics now. I pay attention, I get out there, I talk to people, I talk to my mom friends because women in particular, we don't get out and vote in the numbers that we should. And I always say, I live in Williamson County, which is a very affluent area of Tennessee, and there's a lot of diversity of politics and stances and whatnot. And I try to approach everything with I don't care where you're leaning, just please go to the polls because our voices need to be heard. And then if someone asks me for my resources, I just claim, hey, this is where I learn and this is who I go to. Take it or leave it. But yeah, that's a huge source of energy for me. And I think that truthfully. That influences who I choose to work with because companies that have a social responsibility focus and want to put good out in the world, I mean, I'm sign me up. What do you mean? How can I, right? And that is every client that I'm working with now really has such an amazing backstory and their goal is so heavily rooted in improving the lives and situations of others. So important.

[00:51:08.230] - Kriste

That is so important. And it sort of ties back to what you were saying earlier, like going with your gut. I think for me on the agency side, it's as important for me and for us as an agency to choose partners that we feel good about, that we have a connection with, because our whole thing is doing good work that's meaningful. And it's hard to do that if you don't believe in the people in the company you're working for, whether it's the company that's paying your paycheck or the client, the customer. Right? So I think that is so important. And you also said earlier, like attracts like or like hires like. We need diversity, for sure, but just having a connection and really believing in the people you're working with and for, I think is maybe even more important now. Post pandemic and post apocalypse and existential crisis and everything else that we've been going through, more and more people that I talk to, I hear the same thing. So I don't know if it's more important now or it's just more talked about. I don't know.

[00:52:17.000] - Amanda

I think that value sets are really important. So as a marketer, I see problems that I want to solve and help companies solve them through marketing. That doesn't always mean that their product is solving these big social issues and that's okay. But is the value set squarely sitting in? Do no harm to others, do good.

[00:52:46.390] - Kriste

When you can, right? Yes.

[00:52:50.870] - Amanda

At the end of the day, we're marketing sales. I don't want to make us sound like these marketers business, right. We're in the business to sell things, so let's sell things. But do the people that you work with on a day to day share a similar value set? Not the same value set, because I think diversity in voices is really important and I think that's where that like hires like can really be a trip up for companies and agencies because if you look at a homogeneous team and your marketing and media always skew very female. Very female.

[00:53:31.210] - Kriste

So female. I'll take it to the next step. White female.

[00:53:37.190] - Amanda

Yes, absolutely. And some of it is area of the world. Some of it is like hires like but being really intentional about hiring people that have differing voices and differing perspectives and backgrounds. Truthfully, a long time ago, this would have been more than five years ago, I stopped caring about what someone's college degree was. I stopped caring about if they graduated from college because if their resume has made it to my desk, they've done something in their career that gives them credentials and gives them credibility. And so if they did two years at an associate college, if they graduated from high school and hustled and got coordinator positions and did upwork and freelance and they built up this incredible wealth of knowledge through natural curiosity, a willingness to learn and a willingness to say, I don't know what I don't know. It does not matter to me what college they went to. So I just don't bother looking. It isn't an aspect of what is important to me anymore. It helps with the diversity aspect of things, you know?

[00:54:53.970] - Kriste

Yeah, yeah.

[00:54:54.960] - Amanda

Particularly in the space where it is so challenging for kids graduating from high school to afford to go to college. I mean, we have to be open to other ways of gaining knowledge and education.

[00:55:07.250] - Kriste

Yeah, that's a great point. I love this. This has been so much fun. I really appreciate you coming on and sharing all your knowledge. It's really great. How long have you been at TechCXO? So you're pretty new there. You probably already have a bunch of clients and I wish you well on that. But how long have you been I.

[00:55:29.920] - Amanda

Joined in July, so it is pretty recent. And then a year prior to that I was on my own.

[00:55:35.450] - Kriste

Right?

[00:55:37.390] - Amanda

Yeah. It's a great organization. It's so nice as a single shingle, which is what they call kind of sole proprietor consultants. It was very lonely. I'm an extroverted talker and I don't do well. I'm more creative when I have smart people and ideally people who are way smarter than me that I can bounce ideas off of which creativity is so important to marketers at every stage. So I feel like in the last six months since joining Techie though, I've been able to be more creative, offer a fuller scope and vision to clients and just meet and talk to new people that I wouldn't have been able to meet and talk to on my own. So it's been a good move. Right?

[00:56:24.330] - Kriste

Well, I think it's such a great concept and I'm so glad to see that the fractional concept has grown into marketing because I do think there's so much room for it and for someone like you with such knowledge, it's so true. A lot of companies, certain sizes, wouldn't be able to afford you to come in even. They can't even afford a VP level, much less like a CMO with your level of expertise. So I think it's just awesome. So with that said, I don't want to sign off before giving you an opportunity to tell people how can they get in touch with you? Tell us all your best ways.

[00:57:08.020] - Amanda

All the channels.

[00:57:09.090] - Kriste

Yeah, we'll include everything in the show notes to make it easy for people, but yeah, tell us how the best way to get in touch with you.

[00:57:16.590] - Amanda

Best way to get in touch with me is probably email. Amanda.Donnelly@techcxo.com. I'm hyper responsive almost every day of the year, which is something I'm trying to work on. I will be responding on Christmas, but outside of that, I'm probably going to respond. So email is always the best way. If you're curious, maybe people don't need a CMO, but they're really interested in a CTO. They can go to the TechCXO.com website, see our vast network of partners, or reach out to me directly. We do that a lot. So people reach out to me not needing a CMO, but they need another sea level talent. And then I work with the managing partners that are over those practice areas to say, hey, this is the company, this is the need. And then they will kind of put up the folks that have the needed experience to support that team. So there's a lot of different ways to get in with us. That email is probably the first and foremost way to communicate with me.

[00:58:06.830] - Kriste

That's awesome. That wraps up this episode of How It's Done. My guest today has been Amanda Donnelly. She's a revenue growth partner and fractional CMO with TechCXO. Thank you so much, Amanda.

[00:58:19.890] - Amanda

Thanks so much. Kriste, it was great talking to you. I really appreciate you having me on.

[00:58:23.670] - Kriste

That's it for now. Thanks so much for listening. We're looking forward to keeping great conversations coming your way as we grow this podcast. There's even more great content from our conversations on our blog. Be sure to check it out at growwithfooco.com that's growwithfuoco.com. Stay tuned until next time, and no matter what, stay curious.