

Season 2 | Episode 44

How Social Media and Networking Helped the Box of Oddities Podcast Reach 10 Million Downloads

PAYCHEX
Business
Series

Coronavirus



Gene Marks

CPA, Columnist, and Host



**Kat and Jethro
Gilligan Toth**

Hosts, The Box of Oddities podcast

Full transcript

Gene Marks:

Hey everybody. My name is Gene Marks. And thanks for joining me here on the Paychex Business Series podcast. Today I had a great conversation with Kat and Jethro Gilligan Toth. They are the hosts of The Box of Oddities podcast. It's a really hilarious podcast that I subscribe to, with all sorts of fun and interesting stories that's presented by two fun and very interesting people as well. The real interesting thing about The Box of Oddities Podcast is that they have more than nine million downloads in just the two years that they have been in existence. How did they get nine million downloads? If you're thinking of doing a podcast for your business, or you're thinking of doing it just for yourself, and you'd like nine million downloads, well, I think you might want to listen to some of the advice that Kat and Jethro has for us.

Gene Marks:

All right, Kat and Jethro, thank you so much for joining me. I've been actually really looking forward to this conversation for a while since we booked you and I am a fan of the podcast. I listen to a lot of different podcasts, and I'm always looking for good ones. I bumped into your podcast really in a list that I read somewhere of great podcasts to listen to. But before we get into marketing, let's first of all just give our audience a little bit of background of yourselves and your podcast. So I don't know which one of you guys want to take this question, but tell us a little bit about The Box of Oddities podcast.

Kat:

Oh, sure. Well, first of all, thank you so much for subscribing, please tell your friends.

Gene Marks:

I do.

Kat:

We've both got a bit of a radio background, and we decided that we wanted to do something that was a little more us. And so we had, I guess, a meeting of the minds in our backyard pool which is inflatable, and came up with this idea that a podcast would be a way that we could reach out and really share ourselves and share our lives and share the things that we're interested in, and there wouldn't be so many parameters on it.

Jethro:

We spent a lot of time trying to determine what the content would be, and we kept coming back to oddities, strange stories. These are the things that we talk about in our personal life, so it just seems like a natural fit.

Kat:

Yeah.

Gene Marks:

Yeah. It's funny you say that, because I do a lot of writing. I'm always looking for offbeat stories as well, and your podcast has a ton of them. I remember that there was one with Harold Ramis was one that was really funny to listen to. I don't know if you guys remember that one. But you've had a couple of good ones. Can you recall whether it's that episode or not, any specific examples of a funny offbeat story that you guys have told, a good episode that you can entice your audience with?

Kat:

I think my favorite that I always come back to is one that you told, Jethro, was the story of Barbara and her magical trunk of goodies.

Jethro:

Oh yeah. This was... I'm trying to remember, just pull this out of thin air. Maybe 100, 150 years ago this woman, she would come into town and present herself as nobility and she had a giant chest full of jewels. And she would go to the innkeeper, and she would ask the innkeeper to, "Please lock my valuables up in your safe." And they would do that, and she would go and spend the night and the next morning-

Kat:

Inevitably.

Jethro:

... inevitably, the room had been burglarized. Everything was gone including her trunk, and they felt really bad about that, and so they would try to compensate her for her losses. But this went on for a long time, over and over and over again. And ultimately, what was determined was that she had a little person in the trunk. And when they would lock the door, he would pop out, fill the trunk with all of the riches and goods that other people had been storing there for safety, and make off into the night with it.

Gene Marks:

That is awesome. How did you find a story like that?

Jethro:

Let me see. I think that one, boy, I'm not really sure. I don't remember where that one in particular came from.

Kat:

They come from all over. We get inspiration from so many places, whether it be an episode of CSI or a museum that we went to. And of course the internet is amazing.

Jethro:

Yeah.

Gene Marks:

Of course. So okay, you guys have been doing this for a couple of years now, I guess, right? You started it 2018, is that-

Kat:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Gene Marks:

Yap. That's right. So we're all business owners here. Are you making money yet?

Kat:

We are. Yes.

Jethro:

Yes. We are.

Gene Marks:

Do you have day jobs?

Kat:

I do not.

Jethro:

Kat stopped a year ago. I still have a day job, but I'm looking at probably doing this full-time sometime in the next year or so. I guess technically I could right now, but we're just trying to put all the pieces in place and build a strong foundation to do that.

Gene Marks:

Fair enough. I have so many questions about the ins and outs of your podcast, but we have on this episode of this podcast, we try to limit the time. And the thing that really caught my eye about you guys is you've been doing this now for a couple of years. I mean, I guess you're in your third year now, nine million downloads of your podcast. Now, as my own, as myself podcast presenter, with the way we have to scrape, and claw, and beg, and steal to get downloads of our podcasts, you don't even want to know. So there's a lot of business owners that are out there that are starting their own podcasts, or they're participating in podcasts, they're wondering if it's a good opportunity. They want to do it if it's going to be a waste of your time. So I'm going to ask the Holy Grail question, and maybe we can break it down a bit, but how do you get nine million downloads of your podcast? What did you do to get nine million downloads?

Kat:

Well, we scraped, and we crawled, and we begged, and we stole.

Gene Marks:

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Jethro:

Yeah. That's true. Actually the timing of this interview is really good Gene, because we are projecting to hit our 10 millionth download sometime in the next two weeks.

Gene Marks:

Geez.

Jethro:

We're pretty close. Yeah. Well, what we did going into it, we knew that because anybody can do a podcast, the barrier to entry really isn't that challenging that we would just focus on the things that we could control. And that started out with our prelaunch strategy. And then as we developed a further approach to it, we started focusing on the technical aspect of it to make sure that the quality, the technical quality was good. And then of course the content, we spent a great deal of time deciding how the show would flow? What made the most sense? And how to do it in a specific order? And then we executed that plan. Part of our launch strategy was to launch with five episodes. And I think that that gave people the impression that we were in it to win it, we were in it to be consistent with our approach to it. In other words, they weren't going to listen to an episode and never hear from us again.

Gene Marks:

Right. So certainly, so you're saying obviously the technical stuff had to be right? And it had to be regular and consistent, so you can build an audience that way? So it's not like you just do a one-off and just expect it to just blow up? And then of course, it's the content is very important. But I still say even though you build it, how do you get them to come? I mean, I've heard like a bunch of great podcasts from people that I know, people that I don't know, that don't have anywhere near the kind of numbers that you do. And yet they're very well-produced and the content is really good. So did you do any other marketing? Did you have any other financial backers? Did you create relationships with podcast providers that helped you out? How'd you get the word out there?

Kat:

Yeah. Well, we were really fortunate that very early on, we were marked as one of iTunes New and Noteworthy shows, and that came by way of reaching out to them and being like, "Hey, could you put us on the New and Noteworthy list?"

Jethro:

Yeah. I think a lot of people-

Kat:

They don't realize that you can do that.

Jethro:

You can do that. You have to dig around for the email address a little bit-

Kat:

But you can petition them to put you on their rotation and try to get that exposure that you might not get otherwise.

Jethro:

And that really was the beginning for us once we got marked in the New and Noteworthy carousel on iTunes, our downloads started increasing pretty rapidly. And then we were able to network with other shows of similar size. We got to some people through networking and marketing and swapped out promotional announcements, and that started building on itself. And then it was a gradual process from that point forward.

Kat:

Yeah. We were really lucky to get a couple of shout outs from bigger names. Jimmy Kimmel had shouted out our podcast name at one point, and that kind of blew our minds. And Sluggo from SiriusXM had mentioned us at one point and so we were lucky to get in front of some people by way of the iTunes thing and by way of the other podcasts that we reached out to, and as well as being very fortunate to be asked on a couple of panels for podcasts conventions. And doing that was scary, but we knew we had to do it.

Gene Marks:

It's fascinating what you've done. First of all, everything that you've just talked about, doesn't sound that you've spent a lot of money doing this. I mean, different people have marketing budgets to try to promote their thing. So you talked about iTunes and I'll start with that. So you reached out directly to iTunes and say, "Hey, we are on New and Noteworthy, can you please mention us," and you went through the process and begged a little bit, and they took notice, and they did that. Did you do that with any other platforms other than iTunes?

Jethro:

No, we didn't reach out to any other platforms at that time. But when we were featured on New and Noteworthy, other platforms saw it, and we were contacted pretty early on by Castbox and they asked us to partner with them and to become what they called at the time a Castbox Original. And so we signed a deal with them and they kind of helped push us from the level we were at to the next level. As we speak right now, we're not affiliated with any network. We're just doing it all on our own at this point.

Gene Marks:

Got it. And if it's just for your information, that's how I found you was on Castbox. I mean, Castbox is my Podcast App. And I looked for recommended shows. If you like this, then you'll like that-

Jethro:

Right.

Gene Marks:

You know, and I've always wondered how podcasts get listed there, and I think it's a matter of reaching out to those providers, right?

Kat:

It is.

Jethro:

Just ask, don't be afraid.

Kat:

I think it's also a result of having a podcast that does touch upon so many topics. If you like true crime, you might like Box of Oddities. If you like comedy, you might like Box of Oddities. If you like stories about grilled cheese sandwiches, you might like Box of Oddities.

Jethro:

[inaudible 00:11:44]

Gene Marks:

How did you know that? I love stories about grilled cheese sandwiches -] how such a coincidence. It is really true and it's funny because the people that are listening to this, if they're going to do a podcast for their business, I mean, some of them are pretty niche like, "Well, if you like stories about manufacturing coated paper and film products, then you're going to love this podcast." I think you have to have certain expectations as to the size of your audience, right?

Kat:

Well, yeah. But also, consider that we have had episodes where we talked about this one house that might have been haunted in 1974, and some will reach out to us and say, "I loved this episode. I lived next door to that house."

Jethro:

Yeah. It happens a lot.

Kat:

So there are people who want to hear about your coated paper. There are people who that is exactly the thing that they need to hear.

Jethro:

Yeah. You hear that a lot in podcasting. Now, if you're thinking of starting a podcast at this stage of the game, it's actually a pretty good strategy to niche down. To become incredibly specialized and scoop up all of the smaller amount of people that like that particular topic -- specialize in something.

Gene Marks:

Right. Fair enough. Now you mentioned of your swapping promotional as well. So you made a list of I'm assuming related podcasts, somebody that's similar and you reached out to them and say, "Hey, don't we, we can pitch your podcast, promote yours, if you do the same for us." Did you appear on other people's podcasts?

Jethro:

Yes. We have. That came a little bit later. And again, it was part of the whole, of just networking with people. When we were asked to speak on a panel at Podcast Movement a couple of years ago, Gosh, seems like so long ago now with this.

Gene Marks:

I know, like another lifetime.

Kat:

Remember outside

Jethro:

Yes, remember outside, that was nice. Those were good. We were landing in Orlando, which is where the convention was. And I turned my phone on and I had a message from Jim Harold, who does a series of wildly successful podcasts. And a couple of them are right in our genre. And he said that he liked what we did, and do we want to meet him in the bar for a drink? And we were like, "Yeah, sure. That'd be great." We didn't want to bother the guy. So we thought we'd just skip in and have a quick drink with him and leave. We were there eight hours and he paid for the bar tab-

Gene Marks:

I was about to say, do you remember this conversation?

Jethro:

I remember most of it. We became very good friends and he asked us on his show shortly after that. And we've been on his show a couple of times now, he's been on ours, and we exchange Christmas cards now. So it's just a matter of getting out there and meeting people who have similar interests and in networking. And you mentioned budget, as far as that goes, when we first started we did buy some Facebook ads, but I'm not exaggerating when I say that we probably spent maybe \$150.

Gene Marks:

Right.

Kat:

Yeah. I think as we met other podcasters and as we started exchanging spots and phone numbers if you will, I think the most money that we've spent is on dog treats. I will send their dogs things as a thank you, because that's the only way I know how to love.

Jethro:

Yeah.

Gene Marks:

Actually, a great idea. I love that idea. And I'm going to remember that myself. It was funny when I do some speaking as well, and I'm thinking to myself like why do I send the meeting planners? Thank you. So let's just find the names of their dogs and send them dog treats. That's a very cute idea. How about your community guys? Did you build a community for your podcast and what investments do you make in that?

Jethro:

I'm glad you brought that up because I meant to mention that earlier. That really has been a big part of the success of the show as seen, to get to a point where we've had several million downloads. It's because we focused on building a community around the show. And we recognized fairly early on that because of the subject, the nature of the subjects that we talk about, it tends to attract people who maybe self-identify as outside societal norms. Maybe they don't quite fit in because they like stories about abandoned funeral homes or whatever.

Gene Marks:

Who doesn't?

Jethro:

So it was really easy to say, "Hey, we're on social media, come hang out with us." And the community has just sprung up around it. We have a philosophy, as long as you're kind, you're welcome here. We don't care what your political points of view are, we don't care about anything as long as you're kind to one another you're welcome here and we have just seen an amazing organic growth of our community.

Gene Marks:

Yeah. It's important to make that investment. And I'm assuming that you not only do this on social, but you've got your own Facebook page. So you're staying in touch. What kind of a commitment does this require of you guys? I mean, this goes well beyond just a 45 minute show that you guys do, right?

Kat:

Oh yeah. That was one of the things that when I was still working as I call it my side job, the podcast became my job very quickly. And the thing that I was doing to make money became my side job pretty quickly. During that time, it was so stressful because I handle the social media for the most part. And that was something that during the early stages, I really wanted to focus on. I really wanted the community to feel like they were a part of things. I wanted to be able to say like, "Hey, you remember that guy's head that we were talking about? Here it is." And so it was a lot. It's become a little more, it's not automated but simple. I've simplified the process over the years, I figured out how to do it without so much hours going into it. But it was. It was a big investment in time and it's still especially doing two episodes a week.

Jethro:

Yeah. That was another part of our strategy too early on was to show that we were committed besides releasing five episodes on our launch. I think it was maybe three, four weeks in to the process that we made the decision to do two episodes a week, and that we have not missed a drop date in 305 episodes or whatever the catalog is. And I think that, again that just really underscores the importance-

Kat:

Consistency.

Jethro:

... of consistency and your approach to it. People know we're going to be there every Monday and Thursday morning.

Kat:

Yeah.

Gene Marks:

So which kind of leads me to my last and very final question as well, before I let you guys go. Do you think you'll still be there five years from now? What is the long-term plan for this thing?

Kat:

Oh, sure. I know we've had a lot of discussions about exactly that, like how long can we sustain? Here's this weird thing. And we have-

Gene Marks:

Yeah. People are fickle, you know what I mean? So-

Kat:

For sure. I think that we've talked about secondary podcast, a third podcast, and we want it to grow as we do, and as the community does. So I think that our plan is to take cues from what the people are responding to and what they are saying they want more of. And so if that ends up being a travel podcast, where we just talk about the weird festivals that we talk about, or the haunted hotels or whatever, then that's what that becomes. But I think that a lot of it is just listening.

Jethro:

Yup. In addition to that, we are looking very much forward to getting back out on the road. We were just really getting a good sense of momentum going we-

Kat:

Over the live shows.

Jethro:

... with our live shows. Yeah. We had played the Zanies in Nashville, and Cobb's in San Francisco, some legendary comedy clubs. And in fact when we were at Cobb's in San Francisco, we were in the green room and I'm looking around and Kat and I are looking at the posters of people that had performed there. And there was George Carlin, and-

Kat:

Robin Williams.

Jethro:

... Robin Williams, and Richard Pryor.

Kat:

Like, "Oh, no."

Jethro:

Oh, they're going to be horribly disappointed in what's about to happen.

Gene Marks:

Well, they're all dead. So you do have that advantage.

Kat:

Thank you. That is a real glass half full kind of attitude. And I like it.

Gene Marks:

Got to keep the spirits up.

Jethro:

So that's a big part of our future as well too. We hope. And once things get back to normal, we're actually tentatively right now in the early stages of planning an October tour to get back out on the road again, that's assuming that it's safe to do so.

Kat:

Fingers crossed.

Gene Marks:

That's incredible. It's got to be a little surreal for both of you guys. I mean, 10 million downloads is just a huge amount and you have to look at each other and be like, "I can't believe, it was 10 million people that have listened to us." And then you go on the road, I'm sure you meet lots of fans that it just got to be a surreal experience.

Kat:

Absolutely yes.

Jethro:

We've played Zanies in Nashville a couple of times. And the last time we were at Zanies, there was a woman that had flown in to see the show from Costa Rica. And so there were moments like that Gene when we go, "How did we get here?" It's just, it is very surreal.

Gene Marks:

That is amazing. Well, Kat and Jethro Gilligan Toth, are the hosts of The Box of Oddities podcast. Guys, thank you so much for joining me. You can listen to this great and hilarious podcast on iTunes, Castbox, Spotify I'm assuming, and all the other places that you can go to listen to your podcasts. Kat and Jethro, thank you so much for joining me.

Kat:

Hey, thank you.

Gene Marks:

I want to wish you best of luck. And again, I think the advice that you've shared will help a lot of members of our audience with their own podcast plans. So again thanks. My name is Gene Marks. This is the Paychex Business Series podcast. If you need help running your business and advice and tips for running your business even better, you can join us on not only in the Paychex Podcast, but on paychex.com forward slash WORX. That's W-O-R-X. Thanks for joining me today. Look forward to seeing you again soon. Take care.

Speaker 4:

This podcast is property of Paychex Inc. 2021. All Rights Reserved.