

David Abrams:

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Hello. Hello and welcome to episode number eight of the SaaS Breakthrough Show brought to you by Demio. The SaaS Breakthrough show will be an inside look at what is working in marketing for SaaS companies today by the marketers who are in the trenches experimenting on a daily basis to grow their MRR and build amazing businesses.

My name is David Abrams and I'll be your host today as we bring on Alyssa Ackerman who was the former director of marketing at EverThere. Now Alyssa is a designer turned strategist with a passion for helping people better empathize and connect with other humans. Her career has often changed forms, but the core of her work is always rooted in consumer research and insights. She is happiest when executing and synthesizing consumer research in order to help clients develop creative campaigns, improve product flow, create content converts, define personas and journeys and constantly optimize every channel for maximal success. And like I said before she was the former director of marketing for EverThere, joining very early on with the team and she would say that EverThere really allows brands to get in front of more audiences and create a unique experience for audience members. It helps to create MQL or marketing qualified leads from live event audiences around the world. It also helps event organizers make more money from every single event. They do that through their digital gift bag and you can find them at EverThere.com.

Now as I mentioned Alyssa goes through a ton of stuff today as far as her designer turned strategist approach to marketing and what she brought to every their team in fact will actually dive directly into what she thinks UX user experience actually means for marketing and why it's so important and her marketing audit process, it helps you actually create a customer persona and why it was so important for her to really deep dive into understanding exactly who that person was from the social media image, to the actual competitor outline of their customer persona. Cold e-mail strategies that help them to outline the major benefits of their software that is really helpful because they were early stage and they were still figuring out some of their marketing angles and the company outline. Who were they and how they could help their customer persona better. They also worked at dialing on one single acquisition channel. This is a common thing that early stage startups deal with. We just find the right acquisition channel and she'll talk about what they did to find that their primary acquisition channel for maximum success and we also dial in on where she thinks marketing is headed in 2018, where you need to be. So we hope you enjoy today's episode. Please don't forget as always to rate

us, leave comments and questions and join us inside of the SaaS Breakthrough community on Facebook. You can join us for total free, jump right in and have questions come and we'll answer those questions with you, will try to bring Alyssa there as well and she can help answer those questions from this episode. So let's go ahead and jump right in.

Narrator:	03:14	This is the SaaS breakthrough podcast. Uncovering what's working today and SaaS marketing by the actual SaaS marketers who are building companies day in and day out. Let's get started.
David Abrams:	03:30	Hey Alyssa. Thanks so much for joining me today. How are you doing today.
Alyssa Ackerman:	03:33	Well I'm watching the snow fall outside in Portland Oregon.
David Abrams:	03:39	Yeah I'm jealous that sounds absolutely beautiful. I haven't seen snow one time this season here in sunny Florida where it's like 85 degrees outside now.
Alyssa Ackerman:	03:47	OK I'm jealous. Now yeah.
David Abrams:	03:50	It's good weather but you know obviously I don't make it out of the office too much sometimes. But we really appreciate you taking the time to be with me today and you know we have a ton to cover. You have some amazing lessons I'm sure we'll be able to go through today. We'd love to just take a step back and hear how you got started in SaaS marketing, what companies or what you were doing, what really caught your interest.
Alyssa Ackerman:	04:14	Yeah I guess it started back for me in college. I was taking a digital marketing class as an art student at university in Michigan. And I was like super interested in that. We were talking about using scent as a marketing tool which really freaked me out but I definitely got into marketing through that class and through an internship I was doing at the time in school. When I got out of school I went over to ... an International agency but I was in the Boston office. And though I was focusing on design I moved over to strategy pretty quickly and that was a very new X oriented kind of marketing strategy. But we were working with much bigger companies and it was more like it was more retail. So it wasn't I didn't really join SaaS until I moved out to San Francisco and joined a company called Livefyre. It was maybe a hundred and fifty people at the time and it's recently been acquired by Adobe. But I was again doing

strategy with them and marketing and ended up playing a big role with the product team over there.

- David Abrams: 05:30 When you joined them at 150 people what was your title over there at that time?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 05:34 I was a strategist so that was pretty vague. But I was I was like the client services teams so we had a whole internal agency basically, where we were working with some big clients to come up with really creative applications of our technology. The technology there was oriented around user generated content and helping companies get that onto their websites and use UGC to help tell their story. Yeah. So that was that was at Livefyre in San Francisco.
- David Abrams: 06:11 That's awesome. We actually just recently did an episode all about user generated content and the power for SaaS companies, is a really powerful way. And just listening to you it also sounds like you know you have this kind of design mindset designed background from the art you know kind of starts all the way into working with clients agencies going to the strategy in the UX. What do you really find that you're falling in love with on the UX side on the on the artistic side of marketing?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 06:38 I love observing people and behavior. And so I got really hooked into UX when I would be working on these huge or very like intensive projects say for Ram Trucks, working on Ram trucks and it would shift my entire life outside of work where I'm just like looking at all of the trucks I see part and then men driving those trucks and the ads and the radio for our competition. And it would be kind of two weeks intensity in that space and then it would switch and it would be like Coach bags. So now I'm now like observing women in the bags and what they're carrying in the bags. And so for me UX is a really really interesting way to keep studying humans. And the strategy piece really like rides with me because it mixes the creative side and the analytical side. So a lot I would spend a lot of time designing research around the questions that we still had. Executing that research and then creating a creative brief for our team so that they could do the best work themselves. And that in itself is the whole process. I like how you make a brief where you don't give it all away and you let them come to some conclusions on their own so that they make this project their own as the design team, so yeah it's like a huge mix of wearing many different hats that I really like.
- David Abrams: 08:10 Yeah it sounds like you have some really good kind of self-assessment you can analyze who you are, what you like, where

your strengths are and that's fantastic and I kind of want to come back to the brief section in a little bit, talk about how you've created those initiatives and did that set up some really really interesting. But I wanted to take some time to talk about your last company which was EverThere and learn more about when you joined that team, what that company was like at that time and where you're coming in for with that.

New Speaker: 08:36

I was so excited and still so excited about EverThere. In terms of just the future of marketing I think they're doing something really really unique and they really focus on turning offline event audiences into online consumers. So it's very contextual and there's a few pieces. But as an event attendee you walk into the event and you receive an email like a mobile e-mail that has a whole bunch of digital swag in there and so you are at the event, you're already committed your time like you're there and then you get this e-mail. You click through the promotions and you say yes no you know I'm interested not interested. And at the end you put in your e-mail address so that you will receive all of those discounts to your e-mail at the end of the event. So we attend like that's the attendee experience, as a marketer or a company marketing with EverThere, you're able to sponsor events worldwide without having to send representatives there, is a great tool if you have people at the event as well. But if you can't afford to get to a certain event you can still have your brand in front of an audience that you are targeting heavily and you can be connected with that event. So like that's a pretty cool application for the marketers and then they're also working with the event organizers to help them make more money from their event totally.

David Abrams: 10:07

And it makes so much sense like the problem you're solving is so apparent when you hear that but so many events are still run the same way, you go home with his bag of swag that ends up in the garbage and pieces of paper they never used, make so much more sense to digitize those events the way you guys have. So that's fantastic so when you joined what was it like? What were your initiatives, what are you coming to do?

Alyssa Ackerman: 10:29

I joined as the director of marketing. It was a pretty small team with around eight. And it was small at the time I think there were around 2 customers who were probably paying around 4000 dollars a month for our service and actually they've grown 450 percent in the last year which is really exciting. But when I joined we had a few initiatives for me. again I'm I come in and my first goal is to understand the landscape. I think that's common. So I run stakeholder interviews and customer interviews and just an audit on everything, our Web site, social

and the competition so that I make sure we're all aligned and can highlight gaps and make sure that we're just on the same page. But from there we kind of moved into setting up content to have content ongoing and then we really focused on email like that was a major major project for us just testing everything with email, testing that audience. What kind of titles are we looking for. Who. Who within the industry do we want to talk to, that subject lines the content in the emails and then the way we did sequencing. So that was kind of a major one for us.

David Abrams: 11:54 Yeah I would love to know more about that initiative. I think that I think e-mail is a place where a lot of companies still fall down even though it's very heavily utilized. I don't know if it's done always the right way. So you're coming in to a newer company a smaller company. You're learning the landscape, you're auditing the customers you're finding out who we are what's our voice. What are your first steps with e-mail or are you going to prospect and try to get new leads in. And then you're testing who did you attract, what does it actually look like from attract point?

Alyssa Ackerman: 12:26 Yeah it was a mix between departments. So we were kind of doing a lot of research on the back and figuring out the titles and how to you know capture emails that are really relevant to us. And then my role was a lot more around the content and the sequencing. As well as what are we selling and how do we speak to that because really we're selling we're selling leads like marketing ready leads, real humans who are adding clicks that they're interested. At an event that's relevant to your topic. So there is definitely a lot there was a lot of education that needed to happen. Before we even would get someone who's interested. So I worked a lot on just refining that content and the sequencing. And then I worked with my cofounders too and they kind of focused much more on that segmentation of like are we looking for event organizers or are we talking to the marketers companies who want to get to these events all around the world. And then again you know really prioritizing what the customer benefit is because that's that tends to be a challenge.

David Abrams: 13:39 Right. Totally I mean you definitely have to dig that out sometimes and find what that core thing is, what did you guys end up finding, who was your kind of perfect target?

Alyssa Ackerman: 13:54 We tested digital marketers liked the title of digital marketer and that wasn't really it because the digital marketer wasn't necessarily the event marketer so we ended up focusing more around event people. So people with events. Event Manager

marketer in their title and connecting with them around that offering. So we ended up focusing there a little bit more which was really productive.

- David Abrams: 14:23 Where you guys doing like a cold email reach out trying to get them on a call and talk to them more on a one on one basis or is it more like you're seeing them emailed to an offering to get them as a lead and putting them in email sequences.
- Alyssa Ackerman: 14:36 It was a cold email to get them to sign up for a demo. So we would include our most recent stats in there about some companies that are in their space and just chat with them on the phone or just run through demo to understand how they're currently collecting leads what's working what's not working and make sure that they also have a team ready like an email team ready so if they were to use EverThere they can then follow up on the leads they collect. That was an issue we would find with customers like if they don't and they don't have content ready to go out once they collected the leads then they would see it as a failure even if they got a bunch of great leads.
- David Abrams: 15:21 That's really interesting to hear so you guys kind of found some of the bottlenecks or the friction points and use those as kind of objection overcomes early on or just to identify if they were the right fit early on?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 15:31 We've got really we've got much more particular about our own like our own lead qualification and who who we thought was ready to be a client and not. And that really really helps when we focus that down instead of trying to work with everyone or anyone, to get really narrow, that was a huge win.
- David Abrams: 15:52 When you start looking at and I think this is such a good point, when you're looking at that where you guys like it's got to be a financial kind of filtering or it needs to be a niche specific filtering. What did you guys find was like the big filter wins that kind of took you down again everyone, a lot of people start their SaaS and their customer base is everybody and then they're like wait this doesn't work and they start reading weeding it down to find the right size. I'm interested in like what filters?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 16:16 There was financial element. The big I mean a big one for us was they had to already be investing in events, if they were not already investing in the event we weren't trying to pitch events to them and change that behavior. We're selling leads like quality leads and if they are already seeing the power of events that's who we want to talk to.

David Abrams: 16:40 Right. Did you have to deal with education as much once you made that kind of filtering or because they knew the power there was no real education needed to talk it up.

Alyssa Ackerman: 16:52 The education became much less, still around the products, which was great because then we can talk about what we do and why it's relevant. But it was so nice to then have conversations where we're starting from the same page of like events are super powerful way to connect to.

David Abrams: 17:11 Right just like talking about the benefits of events versus like the power of this one system, would you say that like just from your experience now that if you're doing deep level education like that, you may be talking to the wrong prospect market?

Alyssa Ackerman: 17:25 Yes. I I mean I think it's a balance. But yes if you can work. I mean the less education needed it is great. Now though if you are a new company and and we haven't found what you do before then that education is going to have to exist for us. We dealt with that a lot in how customers measure success because like we are selling leads but they would they might only think that that was successful if they close x number of deals and there's so many elements outside of our control that have to happen in order for them to close deals. So like refining that metric I think it's still ongoing for the EverThere team. I haven't checked in on that but that was definitely a challenge for leads like lead oriented.

David Abrams: 18:19 And as a webinar platform we've also faced something similar and for us we started to think about like how do we display metrics or learn what their goal is early on and make it something that we can actively show at there getting small. Even if it's small steps to get to are just little ways to showcase that value in other ways I think it's totally true and I mean that goes back to what you guys were talking to before which was how do we how do we figure our real benefit. What is it that we're really trying to do. So let me ask you this. Any other powerful marketing experiments that you guys ran that you found some surprising results from, maybe some that failed. Obviously it sounds like the cold email reach out and just some of the initial research was the critical pieces for that huge growth. What about other things that you were trying was or anything else that kind of caught your eye?

Alyssa Ackerman: 19:12 Yeah I mean first of all my favorite was using our own platform to market ourselves. Yeah we did that at marketing events and a number of different events and that was an awesome way for our team to be testing collecting leads. And just kind of closing

the loop there that I enjoyed. I also started testing Quora like before they were doing ads. I was just getting at Quora and connecting with the community around event marketing there. And then we did some testing with Quora ads. I would say the results were unclear. But that was the like that was an interesting new platform to kind of test out Facebook wasn't really...

- David Abrams: 20:04 We're about to get started there with Quora ads, was just because you guys couldn't see the data you're were collecting or you just you couldn't tell if you got like actually qualified leads from it?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 20:16 We were (...) getting leads and we were getting traffic to the Web site and just connecting with that community. So those things were all positive in terms of the end like closing of deals. I'm not sure where we netted out on that but, but I would definitely test Quora again.
- David Abrams: 20:36 And that's an interesting point.
- New Speaker: 20:40 I would love to hear how that goes.
- David Abrams: 20:41 Yeah and you said you were also doing Facebook ads?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 20:44 Yeah I would say Facebook ads wasn't really our... It didn't work as well as we may have hoped. I think for SaaS, it depends. But for SaaS Facebook is a little less. It can be a little less effective than other platforms maybe like meaning like LinkedIn or a business more business oriented and tech oriented platforms.
- David Abrams: 20:44 Did you guys try LinkedIn?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 21:13 We did not actually start LinkedIn when I was there. But I was, it was on the list.
- David Abrams: 21:20 Yeah I could see that being a good one for you guys because of just the fact that you can you dial in for the titles and sounds like you guys are going very specific. We haven't had great results on Facebook either, going after SaaS but no it's definitely a great platform as well to go after. But it's all experimentation. It's what works and what doesn't for each company and each niche. And that's great. Were there any major things that you guys were looking for when you were doing your marketing experiments were you looking for a specific KPIs? Only closed accounts, were looking for leads like for a company just getting started what would be some good advice as far as what to do

when you're starting those marketing experiments. You're going into Quora, what were you guys expecting or are you guys looking for.

- Alyssa Ackerman: 22:04 For Quora we were looking for traffic most. I mean most of our marketing efforts were around traffic to the website. And the Web site is oriented around booking a demo. So that was our main goal is we just want to book demos. We want to talk to people. And that way we can understand where we're missing the mark or where we're who we're really connecting with and maybe we should target those people more. So I mean for me the major KPI is generally Web site like chats to the Web site because then you have an entire website and that's a separate beast and that's a separate test to see what's converting and not converting. But it's it is very distinct from the marketing campaign.
- David Abrams: 22:46 Yeah it totally makes sense. And we did a lot of initiatives around demos as well so I know how how good those can be as far as data acquisition and stuff like that. So that's that's really cool where were you guys do you have any idea what you guys were averaging for like cost per demo.
- Alyssa Ackerman: 22:46 I do not.
- David Abrams: 23:08 No problem. I was just interested because you guys were doing so much around. It's really cool. Well let me let me ask you if you need to and I guess you kind of in a position now maybe where you're looking to join a new team or if you were to join a new team maybe at the same size, knowing what you know now after having this whole great experience in EverThere, what would you do now taking over or do first?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 23:29 Well I would do some similar similar things. I mean I love getting to an interview all the stakeholders and just because you learn really quickly where we have gaps internally and I like to do the full audits and really expand our idea of who our competition is because really really we think very narrowly about that. And so when you can broaden that up and you can find inspiration and kind of creative positioning. So that's what I mean. I also love getting customers on the phone as soon as possible and as often as possible and if that it's a somewhat bigger company maybe that means you're just sitting there sitting on the calls with your customer success people. But for smaller teams you can easily get involved with the customers pretty quickly. And I think that is a very high priority. So I would definitely start there and then I would like I would set up content like a set of ongoing content partnerships of content and email because

email did work pretty well with us there. Those would be my initial ones and then I would focus on prioritizing the channels and picking. Like really picking our best where we think we have the most potential and running tests there. And it's it's common that companies want to be on every single platform and they spread themselves thin and it can get pretty disorganized if you don't really, start with one really focus and then grow from there.

David Abrams: 25:11 Yeah exactly. And maybe you have some advice for companies who maybe aren't bringing in a director of marketing but still want to do an audit of their marketing. Where are we, what are we really doing wrong. Do you have any advice on how people could you know audit themselves or do better customer and competition analysis of themselves to give them better I guess self-awareness?

Alyssa Ackerman: 25:32 Yeah good question. I mean I just to me it's really from a UX background and anyone can do it. You just have to be curious. And like really dig into those details it's helpful for me. It has been helpful for me when I'm presenting that kind of work to do a creative or design or visual presentation of it like I will literally take images of the competition and the website and all these things and place them next to each other so we can see just how different companies are messaging and and what the fans are saying. The lovers and haters are saying on social media and all of that. So really anyone can do it. If you're hiring someone or someone with a UX background I really think it's going to come equipped with those skills. Interviewing again anyone can do it and there's some great strategies in how to be better and more neutral facilitator of those conversations and user testing. But there's so many tools out there that you like that are easy to get your hands on and easy to get that kind of feedback quickly. So that is a pretty exciting time because it's at our fingertips. Whatever role you play. You can navigate in all of these different avenues. But you have to really make sense.

David Abrams: 27:05 It totally makes sense. I have a ton of questions I could keep going into this special around like the customer interviews and stuff like that but we're kind of running out of time here and I don't want to take too much of your time today. So we'll kind of move forward but that was super helpful and I think it's something that most companies need to do more often. I think you've done a really good job of just talking about how nitty gritty you went into this. I can just imagine like your with all these different competitive analysis like your company and pictures of real quotes from social media and stuff like that so it paints a really good picture of how dialed in you can get to learn

all that data. But moving forward what do you think, what do you think is going to be changing in 2018? Where do you see marketing changing or marketing teams, where do they need to refocus?

- Alyssa Ackerman: 27:49 I think contextual marketing which is why I'm still so excited about companies like EverThere. I think that's going to become more and more important to customers. And I also think chatbots, customers are already turning to chatbots to get information. They enjoy that is much quicker and more it's much more like a text message than than an e-mail which is almost like clunky now already which is surprising and we expect a really fast turnaround from companies. So I think there's a lot of potential.
- David Abrams: 28:29 Oh yeah I totally agree. We have this. We're getting more and more impatient as a society as we go along. It's crazy. But we're digging into some lightning quick questions here basically just read off a question and you can answer as fast as you as best as possible as the first ideas that come into your mind just five questions here. You ready to go? Let's do it. Advice for early stage companies starting marketing?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 28:58 Fail fast and hire people who do many things honestly kind of like generalists more than specialists.
- David Abrams: 29:05 Super solid advice. I love that. What marketing skill do you think is vital for today's marketing teams to improve and build on?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 29:12 It's a soft skill but like Curiosity big time. And when you get the results of a test it's not over. Like what questions come up from the results and then keep at it.
- David Abrams: 29:25 That's powerful. Best resource you recommend for marketing?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 29:31 I love Mixpanel for testing everything.
- David Abrams: 29:34 That's great. And then this is kind of similar, resources, you know maybe sometimes educational but favorite marketing tool that you can't live without?
- Alyssa Ackerman: 29:46 I say the same Mixpanel. Google Analytics is also great. But I find Mixpanel more more user friendly.
- David Abrams: 29:51 That's great. It just shows the analytical side of you in kind of everything that you need for it. The data driven approaches that

you've taken. What about a branded business or a team that you admire today?

- Alyssa Ackerman: 29:51 A lot for the different reasons. But I've been a little... can I come back to this one?
- David Abrams: 29:51 That's the last one so you can take your time.
- Speaker 13: 30:23 OK I mean I steer away from SaaS when I'm looking at inspiration. So I look for these purpose driven brands like outdoors. Some of the outdoor brands. So obviously like Patagonia and they're just doing so well and they're living what they preach. Big time.
- David Abrams: 30:23 It's an amazing company I love Patagonia, that's a great one.
- Alyssa Ackerman: 30:44 And they I think they've inspired a lot of other companies to do the same. So I really. Yeah I mean that's the one I would say Patagonia for sure, I know it's a little out of our space.
- David Abrams: 30:54 It's totally outside of our space. But you know there's so much to learn from them they're amazing at marketing. I think cross-industry you still have great marketing things that you can learn. They're so good at like driving passion and like relatability in the mission that it gets people involved and kind of creates a community involvement. So lots to learn from them. They're a great great company.
- Alyssa Ackerman: 31:18 Actually I have one more BetaBrand from San Francisco. Again it's a fashion company so it's not SaaS but they are pretty awesome marketers. And if you don't know them and you check out their Web site you'll find what I mean because you'll see this, you'll see their Facebook ads and everything from that day forward.
- David Abrams: 31:37 It's amazing I just wrote them down, I will check them out after this interview. They sound like a cool company and I'm sure I will get retargeted everywhere. That's awesome. Well I want to thank you so much genuinely thank you for taking some time to speak with us and share all your knowledge. I learned a ton. And so I really appreciate you joining with me today.
- Alyssa Ackerman: 31:56 Yeah it was great to chat.
- David Abrams: 31:57 Thanks so much for taking some time to listen to that episode today with Alyssa. She was an absolute incredible guest on today's podcast. You can really feel her empathy and her

understanding for that user experience coming out in this interview and I think she's done a phenomenal job of not only improving EverThere but bringing a ton of content for us today. So if you want to check her out if you want to learn more about Alyssa you can go to her website. It's AlyssaAckerman.com that will be on our show notes on our Demio blog. Just look for Alyssa's episode. You'll find all of the differing called actions resources that we talked about today including a link to join our SaaS Breakthrough community if you haven't joined yet, you should 100 percent get in there. It's a wonderful little community that we're building. Talking about SaaS talking about marketing and also of course webinars since we are Demio. Really hope you enjoyed today's episode and we'll talk to you soon.