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**ScratchThat Podcast Episode 6: Get Real**

Tracy: Hey, I'm Emily Chenevert, CEO of the Austin Board of REALTORS®. Real estate is changing. Disruptors are flipping the script before most of us have even had our morning coffee, so we're taking it to the experts to peel back the layers on what you need to know. Scratch what you think you know about this business and listen up for a new version of an old industry. Everybody knows our attention span sucks, and while I think I can do better than a goldfish, most days, I can attest to trying to communicate important stuff about your business to 13,000 REALTORS® every day. It's hard stuff. What's the solution and how can I change the way that you communicate so that you can cut through the noise with your clients and customers? I sat down with Tracy Weir former Chief Marketing Officer for Inman News and founder of August Partners to talk about how to do that better. We started by discussing what genuine communication is and why it's pure gold in your business. Tracy, what is the value of genuine communication and how do you define that?

Tracy: Well, genuine communication is something that is a buzzword right now. Everyone wants to communicate authentically, and they want to use their influential circle and sphere to communicate authentically. But you know, honestly, I think communication is much more about listening than it is about blasting out and having someone follow you around with a video camera.

Emily: Right.

Tracy: Which is something that people are doing now. It's like some weird ego driven. I'm going to create content on the fly, taped and communicate my whole world to everybody and it's awful.

Emily: I do find it interesting that what people call genuine or authentic communication is still so structured, so strategically managed. It is the video camera following me around my life? So, if it's not that, what does it look like when it really is authentic?

Tracy: What it really means is listening to who you're trying to talk to. When we think about doing any kind of strategic positioning or branding, what we look at first is who's going to hear the message? What are their concerns? What are they thinking about? What matters to them? Because if you know that, then you can actually design your communications. You can be strategic about it, but it's also genuine because you're actually talking to them about something they want to hear about. So often in this industry we hear RDR: REALTORS® don't read. And I hate that saying, the reason that…

Emily: P.S. All of us don't read.

Tracy: I mean, but we do read, do read when it's relevant to us. And this is my point, is that when you think about communication that's has compelled you to do something, it's because it reached you at the right time with the right message about something that you were generally interested in. So, the, the myth that all content has to be 200 words or less or that people don't read, they don't consider, well, you know what, when's the last time you read a review on Amazon? You went way deep; you went end of the long tail. If it was a larger purchase, maybe you spent months considering this larger purchase. If you buy a car, you're interested to know in every single last bit of everything about that car. Cause it's a 40 -$50,000 purchase. Yeah. Well, you know, if you're purchasing a home, huh, that's the largest transaction for most people ever. And, so, consumers do read. They don't make a decision on the on, on a snap, on a snap basis, they might decide to work with the first agent they've met. But in that case, it's more about convenience that they just met you, but they already know they're going to buy a house. They probably know which neighborhood they want to live, and they know what price range they're in, and they've probably already got preapproved for a mortgage. So, they're well down the pike by the time they meet the person to facilitate the transaction. So, the question to me is how can you get farther up that chain, right where they're considering, okay, which neighborhood am I going to live in? Does this person have expertise in the neighborhood? Well, if you're considering the neighborhood and find your content, they're going to go way down deep.

Emily: Yeah, yeah.

Tracy: Right? They're not just going to glance off your website and they're not, for an agent, they're not looking at the website for search. They're going to go to Zillow or Redfin or Trulia or wherever, but you know, it goes back to I guess authenticity, right? If you're an agent and you're, you're thinking about *how am I going to connect with people?* We are going to connect over expertise. You're going to connect at the moment that somebody needs your expertise in a way that is useful to them and if you're just reprinting stuff that doesn't matter if you're just taking 400-word bites from some syndicated source, it's not you. It's not authentic. It's not genuine.

Emily: Well I find that agents who are trying to leverage like influencer marketing and leverage their own personal brand in a way that they think is meaningful tend to focus so much on themselves that they leave out what their client might want to actually hear from them. What's that tidbit? What does a consumer want to hear and how can real estate agents listen more closely to what their consumers want and need?

Tracy: The first thing is just to stop. Stop listening to influencers.

Emily: Yeah, yeah.

Tracy: I'm serious. Like Gary Vee is much as he's done outstanding things and social and built an enormous media empire with Vaynerchuk Media telling everyone to crush it and all that crap.

Emily: It's a lot of crush it in real estate.

Tracy: It doesn't help, right? I mean we have two ears and one mouth for a reason. You're supposed to listen more than you talk and when you do talk, talk about the things that are relevant to you and your career and your expertise and talk about it. Because remember it's like fly paper. You're putting it out so that you can attract people that you want to work with and if you understand the people you want to work with, if you go back five, six, 10 years in your career or however long you've been, whether it's six months or 10 years or 20 and you say, what kind of clients do I work best with? What are their common concerns? Then all of a sudden you have this giant list of content that actually springs from your heart that's a lot more authentic.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: And you know it's the same thing at any level, right? If you think about any large corporation that you respect, like Apple, everyone always talks about Apple, but the thing about Apple is they've taken technology and made it so that as opposed to being, you know, an MP3 player with, you know, 254 gigahertz of blah, blah, blah, blah. They say it's a thousand songs in your pocket. Well, that's meaningful to you. I understand that question. How am I going to carry around music? Well now I have a thousand songs in my pocket or on my iPhone and that is helpful. When they introduced the iPhone X, I guess it is the latest version, they didn't introduce it saying, we have this fancy 454 megapixel camera that can do blah, blah, blah. They said, you can take really beautiful portraits, more beautiful than you ever took before.

Emily: And moms across the world shouted, Hurrah. Pictures of my children now exists that look good.

Tracy: Right and--

Emily: They answered a question. They solved a pain point.

Tracy: Yeah, they saw something because it's meaningful for you in the moment.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: But you know, I think you have to be willing to invest in understanding.

Emily: So tell me, one thing I think about is how to leverage the social media platforms that we use to push content to also pull and to listen. There are opportunities within Instagram, within Facebook to provide content that's not just compelling in terms of what I'm giving out, but then also could be my ears on the ground with my network. So how do you recommend leveraging the platforms in that way?

Tracy: So, I'm sort of a luddite when it comes to social media. I participated in it personally, but I've never wanted to on a personal level, on a professional level to make it my megaphone. And the reason is, is that I think when people do that and they try to make Facebook or Instagram and they're trying to drive leads from it and they're an individual, it can come off as feeling really weird, weird and like off target. So, I think the people who do it best are people like Katie Lance. Her whole business is social media. And I love Katie. She and I worked together at Inman years ago. Sure. But what she does really nicely is she talks about her expertise in social media and how, why she's so excited about what she's doing, but she also inserts her personal life in there for everyone that's aligned. Right. Like she talks about her kids. Other people don't want to talk about the kids.

Emily: Yeah, that's a personal choice.

Tracy: She talks about that she lives in California and other people don't want to say that. You know, they live on Mars. I mean they didn't want to talk about where they live. Sure. But the point is, is that she does a really nice job of blending who she is with what she wants.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: And I think often when, um, some people are advised, you know, to get on social and have it be a platform, it's like, well, what they want, it's not about who they are or what they could give. It's about what they want. Years ago. I wrote this blog called Eight 11 and it was technology reviews for real estate agents and it, I did it after I left Inman from 2013 to 15 in some total this blog had maybe 60 articles on it, but they were really deep. They were 2000 words, 2,500 words, technology reviews. And the surprising thing was is that I would put out, and I got so many comments on it on Facebook, people saying that was really useful. Thank you very much. I want more, you know, how do I get it? Well, it's because they made an investment that was useful to people and I wanted technology companies at the time, his clients. And, so, who do you think came to me to talk about real estate technology? But you'll say technology companies because they just thought, well…

Emily: You're fly paper. You caught what you were looking at more because your content was built for that audience.

Tracy: Right. And, so, if you have an expertise, let's say you're an agent, you love mid-century houses.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: I mean this is like personally what you're passionate about. Then why would you not have content about mid-century houses? Why would you not put on Instagram every beautiful mid-century house, whether it's yours or not? Why would you--

Emily: Fly your flag, right?

Tracy: Yeah, why would you not talk about mid-century architects and design and furniture and all about it and you know people don't do that because they're thinking, well, it's maybe not interesting or it's not professional or it's not. But when you compromise your passion for something, it's just compromise, right? You just put out stuff that you're not interested in. Yeah. If you do listen to influencers like Gary V, the thing that he talks about most--

Emily: If you, you are crushing it.

Tracy: If you are crushing it, right? If you do listen to him, he says, talk about your passion, be passionate. He also says a bunch of other stuff in his top of his lungs, which I don't necessarily agree with, but it's about your passion professionally and if you're contemplative about what your passion is and offering value within it. That's to me how you leverage social media. I mean in terms of like if you wanted to advertise your site and put out, I'm not the person to talk to about that because so few agents are in that position. When you think about how much people actually sell as real estate agents. Most people don't do 50 or a hundred transactions a year where they're trying to employ a 60-person team. Most are single agents who want to do six to 12 transactions a year. Well, in that case, it probably doesn't make sense to invest thousands of dollars advertising on Facebook because you'll get so much waste in your media spend that it just doesn't make sense. But attracting people based on who you are and what you're passionate about, that to me makes tons of sense.

Emily: I appreciate what you say about blending personal and professional. I think that that's a definitely a line that everybody has to walk in their own way and in a way that feels right to them. I know personally, my younger son had a kidney transplant, who was born in kidney failure, and then later had a kidney transplant just before he was two. And I shared every bit of that story on Facebook because it was easier for me to talk about it there than to have day to day interactions with people who wanted to ask me the questions and wanted to know the answers.

Tracy: And over and over and over.

Emily: Yeah and what was interesting is how that personal story wove its way into my professional life and really became a part of who I was in both worlds. I find power in the people who are willing to share more of themselves personally because I think it comes back to them tenfold professionally. But it's something that you have to be sure that the whole family feels good about and that you're really committed to. Once you start, people want to know more.

Tracy: I mean, you shared a lot, but there was a line wasn't there where you were like, I'm not going to, I'm going to stop here.

Emily: Yes, sure.

Tracy: You know, and, and I think that's the thing of it is there's a line for everybody. You just have to find it. Yeah. And everyone hates it when there's too much personal.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah. I think it's about, for me, I have made my bed professionally on connecting with people and building relationships and so that if I was not sharing some part of this major seismic crack in my world personally, then I wasn't connecting with people in a real way. I just encourage the REALTOR® community to not just try to market and sell and do and push, but also to pull, you know, when you have some kind of seismic shift in your world, personally, you should talk about it because people are interested. It makes you human and real and probably makes you a better REALTOR® because you're a relatable person at that point, not just a marketing machine.

Tracy: Yeah. Oh, I agree. But I mean it also works. You're the new CEO of Austin. And--

Emily: So I've heard,

Tracy: And, so, I think you've done a remarkable job pretty quickly making the Association, your, your own, right? You have a long history of other CEOs and other things that have gone on, but you've done a remarkable job of making the Association your own without it being like Emily's personal platform.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: You have to do that, right? If you're a professional and you're in charge of a team, you have to make it so that it is your own. So, it has its own unique purpose and its own unique message that's authentic to you and you can't just pair at the company line.

Emily: And more so, I think we're trying to make Associations, human institutions have no love in today's culture, and so if I don't personalize it to some extent, if we don't talk to our 13,000 members in a way that's real and human and maybe somewhat reflective of who I am as a person, then I'm missing the opportunity to connect with them in a meaningful way.

Tracy: Well, it's refreshing. Yeah. Honestly, you know, I deal with Associations all over the country and often there's such fear about saying anything positive or negative. We can't say that.

Emily: How can we say lots of things without saying anything at all.

Tracy: And, so, then you know, they're like, well no one is reading our stuff and no one's paying attention. Well, it's because you're not actually saying anything that is useful to anybody.

Emily: Yeah, that's on you, you chose not to say anything. Right?

Tracy: So, if you're not seeing anything that's useful, then don't expect people to read it. Right. Don't expect people to interact with it. But if you're saying something that is useful and using channels to get it out to people, like email is still the most effective form of marketing ever.

Emily: Yeah. You believe that email is the most effective?

Tracy: 100%

Emily: It's unbelievable.

Tracy: Much more so than even social. Because when somebody signs up for your list, they're asking to receive your stuff. They're asking for you to put something in their email box and they will read it if they are interested. I think that's one of the things that's happened with the campaign that we've been working on together is I think people are interested in it because it's different.

Emily: So, email's powerful in the sense that it's not just passively consumed like my newsfeed on Facebook, but I asked for it and then if you gave me what I really asked for.

Tracy: I will read it.

Emily: Then it's incredibly compelling and is more meaningful than, than social media. I could understand that. I can see that. Yeah.

Tracy: So, when I was doing my Eight 11 blog, I would send out a newsletter on Saturdays. I would put in the synopsis of the Tech Article of the week, but at the end I'm really personally into wine. I love wine and I used to manage a wine store, so I actually know quite a lot about it, and I would always put in at the end wine tip of the week. And that email, I'm actually sorry, I kind of gave it up. Maybe I should get back to it. It had like a 60% open rate because it was, people would ask for it. They wanted the tech thing and they wanted the wine tip.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: And there wasn't anything else in it, but the tech thing and the wine tip. And so that was sort of my thing. It was all about what I loved, but it was also useful to people and because people would ask for it. It was a great channel. What you're trying to do when you have a content strategy or when you have anything that you're communicating is trying to get people to ask you to give more.

Emily: Regardless of the platform you use. There's all kinds of strategy behind Instagram versus Facebook versus email versus my website and the content matters no matter where it lives, but what matters most is what you put in it and if you met somebody's need and doing so, and if that somebody was your client, then you're really doing well. Yeah.

Tracy: The other thing that I would say is that you don't have to be everywhere at once.

Emily: Yeah. It seems like there's a lot of pressure to perform across every content. Package that up and spit it out.

Tracy: I find that impossible. Personally, I find that impossible and I can't imagine that I'm any different than like your average REALTOR®. Right? I mean to think about, okay, I not only have I got to write this thing, now I have to socialize it and on five different platforms. So, we've got to measure response and I've got to advertise, boost the post. Like what? When are you supposed to sell real estate?

Emily: It's chase two rabbits get none. You cannot divide your attention that many ways and be really successful and have high quality content in all the places all the time.

Tracy: You can't and I don't think you should. Yeah. And you know some of the most successful people, like there's this guy named Chris Brogan who I followed for a long time. He's sort of an entrepreneurial guru, not like Seth Godin, but he's like really about small businesses and he's not on Facebook at all.

Emily: That's cr…. Isn't that nuts in this world?

Tracy: Yeah. Cause he's like I don't like Facebook and I've never been on it. I don't want to be on it, I don't want to waste my time on it. Right, right. You might find me on Twitter once in a while, but I don't really like that either. So, he's built his entire empire, and it is quite a little empire now, on his very useful website and his email list.

Emily: And true to self. Right. If he doesn't like and value those platforms if that's not a place where he feels like he can connect to genuinely, it's not worth time spent on it.

Tracy: The thing is, is that when he is sending out his email, it's actually genuinely valuable content. He's thought about it. He doesn't send five things a week.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: He sends one thing a week and when you get that one thing, he always opens it up and he says, you know, I'm sitting here with a green tea. What are you drinking this morning? And then he goes into his thing about whatever the subject is of the week. But so many people who are really great in sort of the social space, you don't see them everywhere. You see them someplace.

Emily: Yes, pick a place.

Tracy: Pick a place, make it your own, have fun with it. But there's only so much of anyone to go around. And that's true for companies too. If you're not good at it, you don't like it, you hate it, why would you do it?

Emily: Let's move on. Let's go to the next chapter.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah.

Emily: Well, Tracy, you're one of the most genuine people I know in this industry and I-I value any opportunity to speak with you, but especially for you to help tell REALTORS® that they don't have to do it all and they don't have to do it on every platform. And if they'll just stick to who they are and do that really well, that that can be meaningful for them.

Tracy: Totally.

Emily: But now that you've given this up, before we wrap, you need to give a wine tip to all the listeners.

Tracy: Oh, well let's see. Shop the import section.

Emily: You have a favorite locale?

Tracy: Well, I love Cotes du Rhone so typically that's Syrah and Cinsaut and Mourvedre you know, often some of the best buys are in the import section and if you go to any major supermarket, is wine sold in a supermarket in Texas?

Emily: Yes.

Tracy: If you walk down the aisle there, what you'll see is, is that pretty much there's somebody who's tasted that bottle of wine and it is unlikely that you will ever buy a really bad bottle of wine at a supermarket because every bottle and there's been tasted because they don't want you to return it.

Emily: Yeah.

Tracy: So, explore, spend 10-$15 a bottle and you have something really tasty.

Emily: I like it. Maybe we'll put your top three in the show notes.

Tracy: Ooh, I like it.

Emily: Okay. All right. Thanks so much.

Tracy: Thank you.

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