

S6 E28: Paying Attention To Your Brand

(AJ II & Alex Wolf)

Previously recorded on Thursday, February 20th, 2020

0:00 AJ: This week on *Max Out Time*, award-winning tech philosopher, brand consultant and author, Alex Wolf.

0:09 Intro Song: 'For The City'

0:45 AJ: Alex, how are you today?

0:47 Alex: I am well, how are you?

0:49 AJ: I'm doing fine, thank you so much for coming on the show.

0:51 Alex: Thanks for having me.

0:53 AJ: When did you realize that you had broken through, was it Boss babe and the amount of social following you got through this female millennial entrepreneurial platform, or when did you really get your start?

1:10 Alex: You know, being on social media and starting to build an audience and seeing how that developed overtime, like the Boss Babe audience was definitely a viral growth. So once I saw - you know - that if I put this energy in this direction, it will grow. Now, it's definitely an eye opening experience for me.

1:31 AJ: Why was that so important for you?

1:33 Alex: At the time, I was just a broke, um desperate person who was just trying to get famous, it's what I talk about in my book. I didn't really have a lot of people on social media with very little intention or intentions that completely requires some mental health issues, particularly Instagram. So, I was one of the people who was just lost in the sauce.

2:00 AJ: With this being the social media era; snapchat, Instagram, twitter, facebook. How did you know or how did you see a lot of the success coming for social media and the new media era?

2:15 Alex: Yeah, when I got involved with it, it was around like 2012/2013 and it wasn't really taken seriously as a marketing vehicle. People were still trying to figure out should our brand be on social media, should I as an individual be on social media. And so I would say that around 2015 and 16, is when it became more mainstream for brands to be expected to be on social, to be engaged with the audience and now, it's like we can't really envision a world without it. I saw that progression happen over time and I still think we are particularly sensitive to what effects it's had on marketing, on politics, on economy, but it's all moving so fast so I guess we're trying to keep up with it.

3:15 AJ: How do you measure success for a brand or someone like yourself on social media because I know everyone has a different definition for success, what does it look like online?

3:29 Alex: I mean, I'm a business person at the end of the day, so for me what matters most are, is the engagement on social media reflecting sales or are we just making noise on social, or are we cultivating a community where people are excited to be customers, people are excited to purchase products and services. There is a big difference between getting people excited about posting content and getting people excited to actually spend money. So I think that ways I like to measure that is just how much effort is your community putting into communicating back with you. Are they responding thoughtfully in the comments? Are they sharing the content in a way that proves that they are proud to be associated with it? These are things that prove way more than a "like" can prove or a follower count can prove.

4:28 AJ: So it's not just the likes or the selfies, but it's more so the engagement and how that translates into something tangible?

4:35 Alex: Yes.

4:36 AJ: I mean I had to ask that question. But when I watched your self produced documentary *Attention for Sale*, something really stuck out to me, you said; [audio of Alex speaking] "*We're a species of the heart living in a world built for the eyeball.*" Can you expand on that?

4:54 Alex: Yeah, so basically I believe that the hyperinflation on advertising business models which profit off of getting as much eyeballs to stare at their screen at once as possible has sort of warped the attention span. So much of living in American culture is about creating entertainment out of everything because the way that we've primarily decided to sell things in our culture is by asserting commercials in between entertainment content. So obviously this started with primarily radio, but the television sort of changed the dynamic of that in the sense that it was visual. Once it became visual, it became about how you know how sensationalised we can make things, how invested can we make people emotionally to become what they see on television. Social media has taken that business model and ran with it as well. And so before with television, when the programming was stuff that the network invested in and paid for to have that programming and to have that entertainment, so that they can sell products and services in between the entertainment. We now, the way social media works, our lives are the entertainment and we post our most intimate moments and photos and memories on social. And in between our most intimate memories, we have ads.

6:36 AJ: There's been like an evolution of entertainment mediums that you've said started with radio, then TV and now social media. Is that hurting our society at all?

6:47 Alex: Well it depends on who you ask, it depends on what side you're on. I definitely think it has trivialized a lot of the more serious aspects of the civilization as far as our politics and the economy. Just the fact that the president is a celebrity is telling to how impactful media and entertainment is in our country specifically –

7:15 AJ: And he's on social media way more than any politician or president we've ever seen. It looks like it's working so far.

7:22 Alex: It's absolutely working so far, he also understand the power of the media, he has for decades now and he's been using – you know he's a business man, but he understood that by using media, he can inflate his image as a business man even more. Again, it

depends on who you ask as far as who does this help, it does, I think that the American appetite expects everything to be wrapped and packaged in entertainment. But, that threatens things that may not be as entertaining, particularly when it comes to politics or our economics.

8:02 AJ: You stay current, and not only current, you stay futuristic when you think about new media and technology. Have you always been that way?

8:12 Alex: Yeah, so in my book I talk about, I sort of opened up about how I grew up with a dad who is into technology and was an earlier adopter. My dad was one of the first people to own a personal computer, so I had personal computers and I had the internet in my home from a young child which is obviously normal now.

8:34 AJ: So we're talking about the 90s?

8:36 Alex: Yeah, early 90s, exactly.

8:38 AJ: Wow that is very early.

8:39 Alex: So, I saw first-hand how the internet went from a niche hobby for weirdos to a way of life now for everybody. Having that head start, you get to kind of see what is on the horizon and what is coming next. That's one of the advantages I had of being in a home with new technology.

9:04 AJ: Your parents instilled that in you?

9:05 Alex: I think so.

9:06 AJ: Now is it by design that you stay so futuristic and forward thinking and forward looking?

9:13 Alex: I don't know if I would categorize it as futuristic as much as I would categorize it as observant. It's just about looking at the pieces – like I said, I think it's so easy to become distracted between the entertainment which is super distracting and then the speed in which it's being fed to us, the news cycle and through just the information glut. It's really easy to not see these pieces that don't really stand out. If you look – you can look at a time right now

and you can see pretty clearly what's happening as far as the relationships between millennials and other generations. You know things like Trump are kind of easy to predict when you're looking at pieces that are standing in front. You have to know how to look for them. If you're going to get swept up, the distraction that most people are distracted and you know everyday there's a new drama, there's a new fiasco to pay attention to, if you only pay attention to that, then yeah. It looks like I am futuristic but I'm just paying attention to different pieces.

10:27 AJ: What are you exactly observing? How do you translate that to a brand that is paying you to help them with their goal?

10:37 Alex: Every brand's goal is different. I think what I like to pay attention to is first of all, are we selling a product that people want. Unfortunately, some companies are in a position where they are in denial about that, so they're trying to figure out every strategy possible to sell a product that doesn't have product market fit and doesn't really have demand. That is not necessarily a good thing, you want to make sure that we're set for success in a sense that we're selling something that the world wants to buy. If the brand has something that the world wants to buy, then it's about how do we package this in a way that makes people feel included. The millennial consumer, especially younger consumers, they care a lot about unity when it comes to what they purchase. They have to feel that what they are buying is going to further affirm a belief they have about themselves or about the world. Definitely, most of our purchases are social based, we need to feel that we are publically associated with the brands that we choose to buy from. In order to do that you have to have a culture for your brand, you have to have a chest of symbols, you have to have you know a whole cohesive – what a call a brand universe or a brand environment – where it's easy to identify if you purchase from this brand, you are a part of this world.

12:08 AJ: I want to pick back up on that – inclusion. What should brands be including, in terms of what trends should most brands on social media be trying to include in their daily outreach to their audiences?

12:22 Alex: I think the big weak spot I see a lot of brands have is acknowledging their audience as adults. Especially when it comes to millennial branding, for some reason, there's a lot of confusion about how old millennials are and how many of us are kind on the boarder of middle age at this point, the oldest millennial will be 40 this year.

12:48 AJ: We have a millennial presidential candidate, I mean when you think about it, millennials span so many years.

12:54 Alex: Yeah, we're grown, we're grown. I think what a lot of the ecosystem is missing as far as social is acknowledging millennials as adults. I think millennials have dealt with an industrial wide confusion as to what adulthood is for ourselves, and this has been reflected through the weird misalign communication coming from brands, and just ourselves trying to develop and mature in this sort of information climate where again it's very fast, very distracting. It's troubling to figure out which life stage you're in when time seems to go very fast. The brand perceives time to go really fast the more stimuli it has. We've had more stimuli than any previous generation because of the advancement of telecommunication. A lot of us have warped conceptions of time, and it gets in the way of us being able to connect with each other and definitely connect with brands.

14:06 AJ: So you're not only a brand consultant, but an author, and some would even say a tech philosopher. How can we try and tap into the black community and get more of us to be involved in, or aware or observant in technology or technological trends?

14:27 Alex: I think that black people already contribute a lot to social media for sure, and social conversations. I think for me, I'm just personally passionate about it and I think the way I get people to spark their own personal passion is by talking about technology through the lens of it being a modification of nature. Usually the way technology is pitched to us is AI

or the newest robot or the newest tectonic. I like to go the other direction and say that technology can be as simple as a spoon or a table – any type of invention that modifies nature. Over time we've advanced our technology to be where it is today. When we redefine it like that, we get to see how vast a component of life and humanity it is, and that really I think it amps up the fascination part of it.

15:30 AJ: So technology is a little more of what you make of it, it's not this vast fast booming culture?

15:38 Alex: Yeah, the way I look at it, it's the cousin of art. In the sense that, it's an expression of a co-creation with you know the universe and its resources, or the earth and its resources. So it's how we take resources and say hey, let's make a coat out of this, or say hey, we can make a table out of this. It's that desire to want to take natural resources and create some kind of invention or tool to either serve or not serve whatever goal a human has. It's a very interesting anthropological relationship as you look at you know old civilization and the way they talk about technology is all little tools and gadgets and knives and things that were hand carved because it was those inventions that over time got us to be to where we are today.

16:32 AJ: So it's that creativity and just making it to what you want it.

16:37 Alex: Exactly.

16:38 AJ: Is there someone who we should be looking out for, should we be following someone in addition to yourself, who's kind of hit it on the nail like you in terms of black tech gurus or people that really know what they're talking about?

16:53 Alex: Um I feel like there's a lot of black tech folks in this space. I don't really know that many that are talking about it in this anthropological way, but I feel like Twitter is full of resources, of people in the black tech space.

17:13 AJ: As always my special guest tech philosopher, author, branding consultant, the whole nine, Alex Wolf, thank you so much for coming. Do you want to give yourself any shout outs or any of your upcoming appearances?

17:26 Alex: Yeah, if you're interested in following more content on tech philosophy, you can go to alexwolf.co/newsletter and sign up for my private newsletter, it's free and you'll get an immediate email that gives a list of my most popular interviews, podcasts, and videos.

17:45 AJ: Thank you Alex, have a great day!

17:47 Alex: Thank you.

17:48 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time With AJ II* on iTunes. Add @alexwolf on social media. Like me on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter, and rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

18:06 Outro Song: 'For The City'

18:33 –End–

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