

The Overlooked Key to a Successful Course Launch

Katie: Welcome back to the For Your Success Podcast I'm Katie Horner and I'm so excited about the guests we have with us today she is the CEO of something called Bridging The Gap over at bridgingthegap.com and she's helping business analysts gain confidence in their careers. And I have watched her grow over the last 2 years we've been in some of the same groups and the same networks. And I'm so excited to be able to talk today with Laura Brandenburg about launches welcome to the show, Laura.

Laura: Thank you so much for having me Katie it's an honor to be here yeah I was just going to say, I'm also really excited to speak with you and get to share and kind of yeah get to be a part of your community. So thank you for that.

Katie: Well, one of the things that made me excited when you reached out and said, I'd love to be on the show is that conversation that we had a couple of years ago, where I was getting ready to go for something bigger than I'd ever reached for before. And, I shared that with you and you're like well, why don't you go bigger and I just love that you're all about stretching people bigger than they can see themselves stretching. And that's something that I try to do for the people that I lead.

And I'm so excited to have you here because I know that you're also one of those kindred spirits who is always seeing the bigger thing for the other people. And so talk to us about your business analysts our entrepreneur audience may not be as familiar with that career. And so maybe explain a little bit about that and your program.

Laura: Yeah, for sure so a business analyst is it's a career it's a profession often within a somewhat larger corporate environment not like not a small entrepreneur group like we have, but you know, at least a hundred people often in the company. But often, you know, Fortune 500 and Fortune 50 companies also have huge teams of business analysts, but that profession and what we teach about is how to define when a business stakeholder like wants to solve a problem using technology often software like what's the problem they want to be solved what is the process that's going to help solve that problem? And what does the solution look like? So before you start getting a developer involved or figuring out the system architecture. What tools are you going to use? What does it need to do? So that as a business user you get what you want at the end.

And what we teach our program has it's called the Business Analyst Blueprint it has four modules that teach how to analyze the business process, how to document software requirements, how to analyze data, and then also just the end to end process that a business analyst goes through. And it is both a training and a certification program and what differentiates it from a lot of other certification programs out there is that to earn that certification, a participant needs to go and apply what they have learned in a real-world setting. And they submit that, and we have an instructor team

that reviews it and assesses it, and makes sure it meets the program requirements. And so they're leaving with work samples as well as really validated work experience that they can take and use to move their career forward.

Katie: Awesome, awesome. The teacher in me loves the benchmarks so this certification is like ooh fun you know that's awesome because even with our kids being homeschooled. Our Spanish business is a homeschool curriculum business, and that's one of the foundational pieces. Is that the way you know somebody that's learned it is if they could go and teach it to somebody else or go and do it, do the thing, right? I love that. So....

Laura: That's where we see people like even before we...we really just merged it to a certification program this year but even before we had that requirement or that supported and they would achieve way more recognition in their jobs. Way more like just confidence that they could do this versus like going to a course and learning the material and like not having that real-world application experience. It's always been a huge part of our model.

Katie: Yeah, and I think that's so important, no matter what kind, of course, your teaching is to have that real-world application like it's not just the knowledge, but how do we put it into practice for me or in my job or my career? And you know, whether you're teaching cooking or data processing or the analyst. Whatever it is like you need that real-world application to truly have the learning sufficiently ingrained in the student and get them through to success. And so for those of you listening and watching, that's a key to write down is how do I get my people to apply this in the real world while they're still going through that course process?

Laura: Yeah, 100%.

Katie: In terms of launching though, let's kind of swing back around to that a lot of us entrepreneurs we're launching to people who don't necessarily have the skills we're teaching. But in your case, you're trying to reach people who already have those skills to some degree to help take them up a level. What are some of the strategies that you guys use to find your people when you're trying to launch these programs?

Laura: Yeah so our main lead generation strategy is through organic search so we've been in business for 13 years I've had a blog for 13 years at one point I was publishing a couple of times a week. I no longer do that, but we have a huge archive of content that receives regular search traffic. And so a lot of that content now has been repurposed to lead into either a free workshop that we offer or we're we're in the process of shifting our website so that getting on the waitlist for the Business Analyst Blueprint Certification Program is like the main call to action when you come to our website.

So we're really like always list-building and always talking about when is the next session going to start? Because this program it's quite an intensive program where we run it just twice a year.

Katie: Okay, okay. So you're, you're planning these several months if it's twice a year like you already know what your next two or three dates are.

Laura: We actually already have the full 2022 schedule in place yeah.

Katie: Okay. Yeah so that's, that's a good year and a half in advance and, always list-building. I love SEO, search engine optimization for organic growth, and list building. I think that's key and I think as our technology continues to change guys, for those of you listening and watching. There's a lot if you look at how the world has changed in the last three years technology-wise a lot is happening a lot faster in the next 12 to 18 months and search engine optimization is one of the ways that you're going to survive these changes. And so if you don't know about SEO and you don't have things optimized on your site that something I'm not saying it needs to be your number one priority. Like I'm all about the fastest path to cash and impact, but if you're playing the long game, SEO is something that you want to be sure that you brush up on and figure out how can we repurpose our content? Like Laura was saying.

You know, are those calls to action that were on my blog when I first started seven years ago still the calls to action, that I had 7 years ago still the call to action that I still want them to have you know and, how to funnel that into the things that you're doing.

Laura: Yeah. There has been a lot of like editing content, pruning content, tweaking content, like what is somebody going to search for to like land on this page? And like, if that's their intent, what can we give them? And what would be like the relevant next step or opt-in for them to help convert people who land on our website to opt-in. So yeah, just thinking about that, like how you can leverage that part of the ecosystem I think is there's a lot of strategy around it for sure. Yeah.

Katie: Yeah even the languaging has changed, like thinking about, you mentioned, how are people searching for this topic? Right. Even the language that we use is changed so much in the last couple of years because when I started back in 2011, we were talking about online programs or online courses. And now the term that most people are searching for is digital courses, right? And so just knowing that and being enabled to make even those small tweaks in the way that you're running your SEO or in the way that you're titling new content that you're putting out can be huge in helping people find you. Just to be sure that you're up to date, even with the common terms people are using for the things that you offer.

Yeah. Cool so you talked about list-building and I want to dive into that with the few minutes that we have left because I think that's an overlooked, but super important strategy to launching. And it's, it's overlooked often because we don't think about it as

part of the launch necessarily. And yet it's so key because you need to continually be bringing people in to get to know you to have new people to launch to when it's time to launch. You launched twice a year, and you said you're repurposing things and your calls to action to bring people into your waitlist. Tell us more about what that looks like and what kind of activities go into that list building in- between launches?

Laura: So most of our energy now is based outside of SEO is based on leveraging our current list and building interest in the next session. So like for the 3 or 4 months leading up to a launch we're sharing content that's relevant to the certification program, we open up the waitlist. We announced the waitlist early registration is open we offer some bonuses for joining early. We're experimenting with our spring launch right now for an extra early registration bonus for joining in October we have a pretty well-established December set of bonuses. So we're like communicating that to our bigger list and, then we're launching to the waitlist really specifically around that.

So we're continually trying to pull people from our main list into the waitlist by sharing content like case studies and just relevant content that links to why they would want to be part of the program.

Katie: What are some of the channels that you use for that kind of sharing? Is it just the blog posts and the email list, or are you actively using it is social media?

Laura: It is our most active platform is LinkedIn and, I'll share it a few times on LinkedIn, but our main channel is our existing email lists. That's growing every day through organic search, but, watched people go through sometimes 2 to 3 to 4 launches, before they buy our program, is a \$5,000 program. So, sometimes people like to get on the list, but it's not the right time. So you know a lot of our buyers often come from people who've joined the list over a year ago. So we always want to be building like the people who joined today, but the likelihood of them joining in spring is slightly smaller. As the likelihood of them joining next fall is probably greater.

So it really is a long-term game for us. I think in a lot of both the search strategy and in kind of not hitting, but connecting with people at the right time and kind of consistently being top of mind so that when it's the right time for them, Yeah.

Katie: I love that, you know that data. We talked in our episode with Blue Melnick, a few weeks back about data and tracking it and knowing, you know what your numbers are, and using that to inform your decisions about your next launches and things. And to know what the norm is and what to expect and, the fact that you know, that somebody can be on your list they're more likely to buy a year and a half in than they are the first two weeks. Like that's just cool to me.

Laura: Yeah It's, it's, it's cool it's also like, oh gosh, like what do I do in two weeks? Like, there's not a lot to do in two weeks before a launch right. Right like to move a needle. So it is constantly thinking you know, months, if not a year ahead.

Katie: How do we nurture them? How do we prepare them to say yes when the time is right? Yeah, I love that. I love that. And LinkedIn, we mentioned this in another episode we talked with Nancy Hand about relationships in business and building friendships even in your career. Right and she was talking about how LinkedIn is one of the platforms and we discuss it there again. So if you guys miss that go back and listen to that episode. We discussed how it's important to know where your people are and to be on that platform. Like Laura is not out there on, you know trying to be on Pinterest and Tick Tok she's on LinkedIn because that's where her people are.

And it's important for you to know where your people are and to be okay with this is my platform this is where my people are. I don't have to be everywhere I need to be where they are. And that's cool to know too.

Laura: Yeah. So talking about LinkedIn reminds me of another thing we do, or we have our customers do that helps with the lead-up process as well. One thing that will encourage people to do on LinkedIn is share their certification like update their LinkedIn profile when they get their ACBA, which is the name of our certification, share their badge, share their certificate. And like those posts get shared widely and I think, and sort of, the timing is good in the sense that we're usually like people are celebrating their results from the previous session kind of as we're getting ready for the next session. And we do see a lot of interest and people asking like where can I learn more about this program? So it's a way to leverage LinkedIn without me emailing individual people, right.

And like actually leveraging the success of the people and having them share like what their takeaways were and how they help their organization using these skills and, and what the difference that they've made is. And so there's a lot of momentum that comes from that as well.

Katie: I love that and it's, it's a gamification thing sort of without even without them knowing that you've gamified it you've just gamified right. You just made it....

Laura: Yeah. It's a win for them.

Katie: I mean you just made it fun yeah.

Laura: Those posts often we will hear people say. Oh, my CIO didn't know about this certification until they saw it on LinkedIn and then they reached out to me or I got contacted by a recruiter because I shared it. So we have to push people to share it because our community is pretty introverted and wants to not share things, but the wins for them are huge too. And we consistently see that.

Katie: Yeah. That's awesome, that's awesome well Laura if you could go back and talk to Laura 5 years ago what's your best piece of advice around launching your program from what you've learned?

Laura: You know, I have learned a lot about marketing, and I think in many ways learning about it has often taken me off-center. So I think my advice to Laura 5 years ago would have been like listening to your heart, listening to what feels right in your body. Listen to just what feels good to you and how you really want to market and grow and expand this program and reach more people.

Katie: Awesome, awesome. Amazing thank you so much for being here and sharing those insights with us guys. Awesome things to take away today I hope that you'll tune in again next week if you want to check in with Laura, get on the waitlist for her next launch head on over to [bridging the gap.com](http://bridging-the-gap.com). You'll have to put a hyphen in between those words bridging-the-gap.com we'll also have a link in the show notes, so you can connect with her get on the list even if it's just a watch and see how she runs her launches and the things she does in-between time, that sometimes can be the best lesson of all.

So, Laura again, it was a pleasure thank you so much.

Laura: Thank you for having me, Katie.

Katie: Alright, guys we'll see you next week wherever you are, please scroll down and leave us a comment. We'd love to know what you thought of today's interview what you took away and we'll see you next week.