



IxDA Sydney Podcast

S02 E8 - Elise Margaritis

Audio Transcript

Elise Margaritis: [00:00:00] Sustainability for me is the ability to sustain a healthy future. And in the business sense, a sustainable organization is one that secures its own future by ensuring that our number one habitat is going to be a healthy place for us to live long term forever.

Sam Hancock: Hello, and welcome to the I X D A Sydney Podcast, a show where we can't guarantee answers. Just better questions. Anna Sam Hancock. And in this episode, Juanita is chatting with Elise Margaritis. The creative director of TE Police has built the brand and marketing function for teme, which has grown from Asia Pacific's both trusted carbon offset provider with a blue chip client base startup success story.

TE is now a team of 50 and expanding globally fast. Now, strap yourselves in as we drive [00:01:00] straight into the landscape of sustainability, what it means for creatives.

Vinita Israni: So, hi Elise. Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today. How are you going?

Elise Margaritis: I'm good, thank you. Venita, you are giving me my 15 minutes of fame. I think

Vinita Israni: we try our best. Um, question of what has brought you to this point today? Very curious to learn about your background in sustainability, how you found your way there.

Elise Margaritis: Thank you. Well, allow me to begin by saying that I'm coming to you from war country and I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging. I haven't always worked in sustainability. The first half of my career was in the hotel space, but I do believe that I was always destined for it.

I have a Greek background and I spent a lot of my childhood in my grandmother's backyard in the northern suburbs of [00:02:00] Melbourne. It was a flourishing wilderness of veggie patches and fruit trees, and we'd plant tomatoes and picked flowers soft. Having lived through the war, my grandmother was inherently frugal and inventive, and she would dry out seeds from this year's best performing fruits and veggies to season.

And this experience instilled in me a deep respect for the earth and for creativity. Um, now being able to blend those two childhood passions.

Vinita Israni: That sounds amazing. Can you tell us a little bit about Tim?

Elise Margaritis: I like to describe the philosophy of what I do as helping people to fall in love with taking out climate change.

Inspiring them to learn and engage and ultimately to behave vulnerably and make more informed, better choices. And at 10, we focus on helping [00:03:00] big companies achieve neti through carbon offsetting, and is that a company will conduct an audit of their emissions, their carbon footprint, and they will then reduce their emissions where they can, such as through switching to green power or investing in fleet.

Then they would come to a company like us at TE and offset the remaining emissions, reduce what you can and that what you can't, because the reality is that it's really difficult for an organization to go carbon neutral today without debt in time. Once technology and financing and policy captures up business as usual to operate with zero emissions, but will be left with the enormous challenge of removing the emissions and extreme levels of pollution that have already been released.

That's super

Vinita Israni: interesting. So just for some listeners that might be not as [00:04:00] aware of exactly what carbon offsetting means and maybe the different forms that it can actually take, could you expand on that a little

Elise Margaritis: bit? Offsets are generated through environmental and technology projects that either prevent emissions from being released into the atmosphere such as through.

Renewable energy. So you would replace a fossil fuel generating power station with a wind farm, for example, or other projects remove emissions from the atmosphere such as through nature-based solutions like establishing.

Vinita Israni: Got it. And so some of these solutions, it sounds like are quite long term. So for example, establishing a forest is over the course of.

20, 30, 40 years versus some of them are much more actionable short term. How do you balance those? And I think

Elise Margaritis: [00:05:00] that carbon offsetting creates a range of additional benefits for biodiversity and community. And in addition to there being extreme levels of pollution that we need to address, we also have a biodiversity crime.

So, Carbon offsetting directs climate finance into projects that otherwise wouldn't exist. So we are experiencing extreme rates of deforestation, which contributes to emissions. However, that also means that we are eliminating habitat for native wildlife and suffering from the effects of removing.

Forests from landscapes that is resulting in erosion and selin, and meaning that those areas of land are, are no longer, more. So climate finance helps to establish projects that reduce emissions and offset emissions, but they also direct really important [00:06:00] thought to other benefits. All of that is, uh, ships with indigenous groups in Northern Australia.

Fire burning in zen ancient ancestral knowledge that has been passed to generations and that reduces the fuel load on the ground, which means that it reduces the risk of extreme devastating wildfires later in the



season. So these project, these projects prevent emissions, but they also support communities in education and creating jobs and empowering.

Indigenous communities to to remain on homeland and, and leave us stay. Yeah. And the way that

Vinita Israni: you're describing it was climate finance, is that right? It sounds like it's an ecosystem in itself, like the buying and selling of Offset, how like. It's an economy. And can you talk a little bit [00:07:00] about how it may work or how funds are allocated?

Because in a very simplistic way, we're all working towards net zero, right? And so it almost sounds like, okay, how do you come up with this bundle of money to then offset your things? Or is that from a business perspective, is that something that's potentially eating your profits, but it's also a kind of ethical.

Social from E S G. Effectively, it's a expectation now of many businesses. Can you kind of talk about how those

Elise Margaritis: for an organization there is increasing from their employees, their customers, their board with stakeholders in order to plan for how they are reducing their emission. Because in time that will become business as usual and organizations who are not will be left on the periphery.

So conducting an audit of your, your emissions, understanding exactly where we're [00:08:00] at, implementing those efficiencies, reduce your right now and then planning for the future, will ultimately enable you to avoid risk and with changing the introduction. Of regulation around emissions. If organizations don't now put in place their measures around securing a future supply or saying that they are conducting activities and investing in projects that support, for example, their commitment to the United Nations sustainability goals, the SDGs.

Vinita Israni: I'm curious, stepping back a little bit, how did you find yourself in sustainability? I know you talked a little bit about how you grew up and that really influenced the. That you saw the world and like what you were interested in working in. I think maybe from a more tactical and strategic perspective, as a [00:09:00] creative in the sustainability space, how do you

Elise Margaritis: navigate that?

There's no mold for a sustainability professional. We come in all shapes and sizes, but what I found is those who have the most impact and cut through are those who genuinely do. And you don't need to have the word sustainability in your title in order to make a difference. As I was saying earlier, employee and customer demand is driving some of the most powerful changes, elevating discussions to the board level where where really happened.

E I started out in the hotel space and developed my skills in marketing, communications, promotions, fine, and then decided that because hard to ask a. A young person, what the rest of your life? Because unless you've given something a go, you don't or not. And so I enjoyed creativity of marketing, but I wasn't fulfilled in that.

So took [00:10:00] a few months off in between jobs to really think about what it is that I was gonna do next, and then had the great opportunity to work with green, not for profit. Environmental organization where I was given the chance to blend my marketing and creative skills with now doing it for a purpose that I cared about and greening Australia developing a biodiverse carbon product, which is, I found fascinating, which is how I then, okay, I'm gonna, Go more specific with how I wanna direct the time that I spend in my career and dedicating time to the climate cause was was That's so

Vinita Israni: wonderful.

Yeah. There. Pockets. I would say I've recently heard climate designers.org that have quite a plethora of resources in terms of interaction design specifically, and how designers can find different kinds of roles within the sustainability [00:11:00] space. So it's always really inspiring to hear someone's journey and how they've got so.

To that point, how do you start to find some of these opportunities? I know you went into the nonprofit space. Is there, are there other avenues to go down to try to figure out where some of these pockets are?

Elise Margaritis: Yeah, of course. I mean, there's obviously a range of environmental industries that you can focus on.

Ethical Jobs is a great website that is dedicated specifically to purpose. But you don't have to work for an organization that's specifically in that space. You could take a role within a sustainability team in a bigger organization who is looking to communicate what in that space. And through my work hands, they are very good at what their industry is specific.

Oh, for example, Qantas are wonderful at flying you from A to B and Wow, fantastic. It helps. [00:12:00] But when it comes to engaging with their customers around the issue of how do we really explain what it means to carbon offset, if net zero, that's when you can get a creative specialist and the communication help gap.

So there's, there's plenty of opportunities and that industry is really booming. Sustainability is. Growing and there is the, the diversity that you are able to transfer skills from marketing or creative design and then apply them.

Vinita Israni: And so the concept of bridging the gap for different skill sets than working on sustainability, what are you finding as the biggest gaps there?

What is the bigger gap? And then what are the smaller gaps as you work together as a designer working in aviation? As an example, domain knowledge. Skillset there, but then there's also a skillset around kind of your craft and the creative side of things as well. Not that aviation isn't creative, but a [00:13:00] more additional craft, I would say.

What are some of the gaps that come together? I

Elise Margaritis: think empathy is essential in answering that question. We need to meet people. They are, so, it's vital that we understand our audience, we understand what their base level, level of knowledge is, and. What their objective trying to achieve because what, what do they care about?

That's will help us to then craft messaging, achieving that, and we have a story. I was invited by my son's prep teacher to talk to the class about what I do, and it encouraged me to really think about how I explain the two of claimed to children and the practical actions that weak difference. And the discussion went so well that I've started using those same messages when I'm communicator.

Business world discovered is that grownups respond really well when you, and cause [00:14:00] a lot of the time we pretend to understand things and we don't ask the questions that we need to because we are worried about how others might perceive us. And I don't mean. Dumbing down the science. I mean, smartening up how we educate and how we engage, which is audience.

You might have seen that meme flax, LinkedIn, which says the school te, the school teacher says to their pupil, write me a as word essay. And then you fast forward 20 years and the boss says to the same person, give it to me unless. But what that misses is the fact that you need to do your homework in order to understand a topic well enough to be at gravity, because people who dunno what they're talking about tend to ramble.

She said,

Vinita Israni: no, I love that a lot. That Mina is definitely spot on. After writing many essays in academia, then [00:15:00] starting real world work experience and having the opposite. And so what have you learned in your time outside of empathy? What are some of the other messages that maybe aren't getting through or maybe are getting,

Elise Margaritis: well, a couple of tips from my experience with copywriting specifically that might be useful.

The first one is to make, a past teacher said to me, imagine that you get a hundred bucks for every word that you take out of your headline. What's. That you want the audience to take away in as few words or, because sometimes advertising space call you real estate kinley. Remember the people what you can do I care about, do for them.

How are you gonna solve their problem? How are you making them look better or win new business or stand out from the crowd? And this is my favorite one, embracing the of storytelling. Create an emotive. [00:16:00] Connection between your audience and the impacts of their actions. If they're gonna tick the box to fly, how does their money go?

If they're gonna purchase this more sustainable product, how is it actually having an impact environment? Most people can't list with accuracy, the 10 Commandments, but they could probably tell you what happened to Adam and Eve. So a story is memorable and full. Please don't exaggerate when it comes to communicating your sustainability credentials.

Be honest and ensure that your claims can be substantiated. We'll see is clamping down on corporate greenwashing as they should, which means that your words and your images need to be accurate representations of what you're acting. This scrutiny is transforming into a new marketing tactic, Nick Green Hushing, where organizations are deliberately choosing to under report or hide their E S G credentials [00:17:00] view in order to avoid any potential negative sentiment.

And now we're also seeing increasing examples of what's called green lighting, which is a tactic that centers on diversion. This is will heavily promote one of their sustainable products or initiatives in their portfolio, even though it makes up a minuscule of the company's overall impact. So the lesson for designers is real.

And take the initiative to interrogate the claims that your business leaders are asking you to promote. Whens to design? My mantra is where you can always use authentic imagery of your using stock shots in sustainability, I think is like covering a piece of styrofoam in icing and then calling it a cake.

[00:18:00] So if you've got budget or if you have someone's good photo, then get the real deal and caption it properly. Explain what the photo is about, where it was taken, and be mindful of cultural sensitivities and permissions around the use of photos, particularly of First Nations peoples. If your design is going to be transformed into the physical world, such as through the printing of a post.

Then you could consider the sustainability credentials of you could recycled paper, non-toxic ink and manufacturing choices around how that piece of material is produced. And you can also take a look at selection if you've got the brand flexibility to do that, because a condensed, lighter font will obviously use less ink, less space, and then will create.

Vinita Israni: I love that example. It just the typeface strength, the stroke even, [00:19:00] and what you're using and how that actually translates in a really simple way. But it's a economy of scale, right? It's the fact that all of these little steps end up being this much larger thing that we're contributing to. I was wondering if you could share another example of something like that where you've seen smaller steps and parts added up to.

Where you can start to

Elise Margaritis: see that different. One example of that is to then go though, instead of NGS creating Trinity turn, that piece of communication digital, but there was an error go that was Brooking the benefits of this particular advertising manager who was brought in to sell ad space scene. And this person was so full at building the advertisers and increasing the size of the magazine, that the additional weight of the paper contributed to an [00:20:00] increase in fuel usage and therefore an increase in overall expense running the airline.

And obviously not to mention with that. So airlines have the opportunity to reduce. The paper that they may use on board by turning to iPads or other technological devices in order to reduce the, the weight and sensation that would be producing materials hinting them. Efficiency should be had by turning that into a digital experience and can also be more engaging.

That is

Vinita Israni: definitely one of the initiatives that Qantas has looked at as well in the past and when I joined my current team, a really unique perspective. I think we've done something similar with the bar carts on board and looking at how do you reduce the weight of certain bottles while maximizing the amount of liquid to be able to then reduce carbon emission.

[00:21:00] So it's. Really cool to be able to hear a story like that. I wanted to take a, a step back and ask a question at a more macro perspective, so, In Australia. I think we're quite aware and with it, for lack of a better term, in terms of what we're trying to do in the sustainability space. I know there are more initiatives or different kinds of initiatives in different places around the world, depending on.

What their economies are like. And so curious to hear your perspective about how do you see this changing across the world? What are some of the techniques or things that we've developed that are unique to where we live and how our economies work versus, for example, I know in the states there's been a bit slower to adopt, has taken the perspective of re quite a bit of it with a quite a lot of governance.

So how do you see that playing out in the Australia or even in.

Elise Margaritis: I think there is real opportunity [00:22:00] to learn lessons from Europe in how they have applied, stricter measures and considerations, and also the ability to incentivize businesses for making those tough choices. We have an entity to leverage. The growing sentiment from consumers and people who are making this to create change Overseas, we've got developing trees who have the opportunity to develop more sustainably, but they need countries like Australia and others in order to path into.

To give them the opportunity to develop more sustainably. And so there's great efficiencies of scale that can be had by knowledge and communicating what has worked well [00:23:00] in particular countries or particular industries and how that could be transferred across the world. And I think the media has a lot of resilience in being able to create active sense of.

Understanding what the issue is and not drowning it out in, but just being real. And individuals understood exactly how the climate system works. Human impacts are having a detrimental effect, not only on pollution, but on biodiversity and the, the security of food and industry. Then we would be much further along the way in making those big choices and big decisions.

That may mean we've gotta sacrifice some things in our way of life in order to,

Vinita Israni: do you think people are willing to make the sacrifices?

Elise Margaritis: [00:24:00] I think there is definitely a growing contingent of them and educate. Future generational messaging is important too because it's not about always just about what's happening right now.

It's about future proof, our way of life, and securing biodiversity and the health of people on the planet future, and that's your message in communications. People really resonate with messaging around children and hearing the voices of children, hearing how. View the issue and there's young people have a lot about like drastic steps to move forward in order to create a better, I

Vinita Israni: think there is a balance between having societal value sustainability.

[00:25:00] With, I think we have come forward with in different ways. So for example, a friend who's a teacher described as he, the kids that were slightly overweight, were made fun of, and now that is not a thing because we've accepted that, okay, you cut, everyone comes in all shapes and sizes so that that's just doesn't occur.

We see. Kids growing up. So sustainability becomes one of those values that's like, we're not gonna, it's not a no, it's just a, it's here. Right? And it's inherently accepted. So curious there about how do you start to make that happen? Is that a lot of that might be role model, I would assume Anything else

Elise Margaritis: That childhood education is vital in that respect.

So you're so right. Children these days, lettering. If anybody, if I was to be walking through the city with my kids and somebody was to [00:26:00] drop some litter on the ground, the catastrophe that would enue this, this person should go to jail in their perspective because they have really disrespected the environment.

How dare they? And the standing that the bin is right there, it is like it is perplexing to them that this person would not just say, The values that you talk about, which start in the family home and then extend through to kinder and primary school. And our teachers have such an incredible ability to influence and persuade and educate and they play a, a role in the future generation and how future generations will value the oncology.

We could. Put a greater emphasis through kill on the environment and the respect of these peoples. Then I think we in [00:27:00] away to have a generation that once they come into power and I start making the decisions, that's when things will really,

Vinita Israni: and as adult individuals who may decide not to have kids, what would you recommend?

Elise Margaritis: I think talking about the conversation, when you go to a barbecue and you sit down at the table, clean up in every discussions, a lot of people talk about politics and the footy and the weather. What about if we started bringing conversations around and, and biodiversity and gyms management into the everyday world, and so then people would feel more empowered.

They would be, become what they would. Go home and read more about it, and then think about how they could transform that in their own environment, in their own workplaces. Start bringing it into the office discussion. And even if you're not enough influence [00:28:00] over sustainable decisions in your job. Having the conversation and creating efficiencies and telling and that, and then start people start people talking and thinking about what they had an organizer so.

For example, in a big company you'll have different departments. You'll have a, a sustainability department, perhaps finance, marketing, sales. And so that idea of doing something more sustainably within a business can come from any one of those departments might start in marketing thinking about, we understand there's great sentiment in our three around what.

Organizations are doing in this space and our comp competitors are doing X, Y, Z. So let's think about what we can do to be able to promote our sustainability credentials. And then they would speak with the sustainability team, who would then sensing team an idea. The way to develop the business case internally is to ensure that you address what's each [00:29:00] department for.

We're gonna boost. New business for sustainability, we're gonna achieve our E S G credentials for finance. We're gonna be because we're emerging into a new industry or a new section of the market. And for marketing. Sounds

Vinita Israni: like something. That we know as stakeholder in a different way. So Elise, one of the questions I had, and you touched on it a little bit before on the ethical implications and businesses.

Have to become sustainable to futureproof themselves. For those organizations that don't have the budget, that don't have potentially even the capacity to start thinking in this way, how do they get started? And do you have examples of businesses who've gone down that pathway and that, or how journey?

Now

Elise Margaritis: you start small and best thing you do is conduct a sweep of your business operations to [00:30:00] see where your canop is. It could be as simple as swapping out suppliers, so you could look at your current list of suppliers and access information to see where you could partner with an organization that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or employees, users, 100% recycled paper in their paper products, or who has a life cycle recycling, where once.

The printer cartridge is no longer full, then they'll take it back and re, so that creates efficiencies in the business operations in terms of your waste. And, and by way, you would also see efficiencies in savings. If, for example, a really basic example would be in your bathrooms, you would have electronic dispensing stations for your.

SOAP as opposed to, [00:31:00] and choosing to on an area of sustainability that resonates within your business. So we'll use what do your custom care about and how is investing in that space gonna have the biggest return on investment for you? How can you turn that into a positive store? Use that. To engage better with the communities that you are working in.

If you, for example, have operations that source product out of India, what could you do within India to create a better connection with those communities there?

Vinita Israni: Community building is part of the, your definition. So what does sustainability mean to you? I know that seems like a basic question, reading about it, but I just realized that your definition might encompass a lot

Elise Margaritis: more sustainability [00:32:00] To sustain healthy future and a sustainable organization is one that secures its own future, showing that.

Is going to be a healthy place for us to live long-term. So the connections that a business has with its local environment, with its is with stakeholders and customers is probably one of the most full ways that we can influence rapid chain necessary to that ability.

Vinita Israni: I 100% agree with that. Change is difficult, right?

A lot of individuals only change after they've experienced selves. How do you start on that journey of change? Both for individuals and for a lot of the effects have may [00:33:00] on top of their heads, they may not be experiencing it remnant, and we've seen many. Some people would like to explain away how do you promote something that people have not experienced

Elise Margaritis: to change?

It's much easier to promote something if you've experienced it for yourself. And travel is such a, you describe the positive elements and flavors like prefer dione. So if your role is to inspire people to take action on sustainability through your designs, your creativity, your messaging, then you yourself should immerse yourself in what it mean will.

Part of my role at 10 is the awareness and investment into indigents where original groups used their ancestral knowledge, blended with modern [00:34:00] science and carbon accounting. And last year I was fortunate enough to take a trip Arnum land in the Northern Territory to visit one of the, and I'd read all the materials and consumed all the content that had been written about the project.

But nothing beats experiencing it for yourself, meeting the people on the ground, seeing firsthand how. So if you've got the chance, if the people that you are designed for and you can visit, The sites and pearl conditions with the founders about the spark that built this in the first place. That's where you,

Vinita Israni: that sounds a lot like user.

Sitting down with your audience, ideally in their environment, so that they're comfortable and they can talk to you from a, a safe place and share. Ideally build some trust and share with you their insights and [00:35:00] their experiences that then ideally builds the product or solution or service that someone is working on.

That's really quite beautiful. I wanna end our time together just asking that. Are there any resources that you would recommend that you would hang on, so to speak, to expand your knowledge about sustainability in working space? Whether that's or more create, like,



Elise Margaritis: one of my favorite resources is called Famous Campaigns.

I'm sure that you've, you've heard of it and it's a profile that delivers great inspiration. Of creative brand communications and it, it helps me to think outside the box. One of my favorite quotes comes from Mark Twain who said, there is no such thing as a, as a new idea. It's impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of scope research, explore, talk to people, [00:36:00] Google search and find resources that may laugh and that make you learn.

Feel something. And then put that information to your third eye and take a look.

Vinita Israni: That is, I think we're collecting. Things for our mental kaleidoscope. But I love that you're holding it to your third eye to figure out what rings true to you and that really makes your work your own, but also will call to others in a completely different way.

So that's wonderful. So thank you so much, Elise, for your time. Really loved having you on. Learned so much about. How we frame things for sustainability and just kind of diving into the world to really appreciate your time. Thank you,

Elise Margaritis: Juanita.

Sam Hancock: And that concludes the latest episode of the Sydney I X D A podcast for the transcript and resources, along with more information on I X D A.

Sydney, please visit. Ixda [00:37:00] sydney.org. See you next time.

Elise Margaritis: Hi, I'm Elise Margaritas and you've been listening to the I X D A Sydney podcast.