

Business Reimagined #63

Making Rockstar Events with Louie La Vella



Working within the 'shark infested waters' of the nightlife and music industry as a marketing and branding consultant, Louie La Vella has been delivering high profit solutions to both live entertainment events, musicians and venues for years. He's an author, speaker, event producer and coach. He's also been called a Media-preneur: Combining a successful TV executive producer and host role with being a sought after marketing/branding consultant in the nightlife and music industry.



Voiceover: This is Business Reimagined. Every week, we talk with thought leaders and revolutions who are re-imagining the way business is done in their industries, like today's guest, Louie La Vella.

Louie: When you want to get something done, you can research and go after it and try to break open the doors like any entrepreneur would. The entrepreneur spirit are the guys that make things out of thin air. I feel like, even for myself, I was able to, if I couldn't break through the door itself, I would find a way to build my own door and break through that.

Voiceover: This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny.

Danny: When you've got your heart set on something, what do you do when the world tells you you just can't do it? Do you back down? Or do you double down and do it anyway? Today's guest, Louie La Vella, is a man who has constantly doubled down, driven by a true entrepreneurial spirit. He's always loved music and entertainment, and his first job at the tender age of seventeen [00:01:00] saw him not just bar tending or bouncing at a nightclub, he was running the show, literally.

Louie: Up in Canada, nineteen is the drinking age. Twenty-one obviously in the United States. Being 17, 18, the joke around ... With the owners was, "You're not even legal to come in and party here, and yet you are going to run events."

Danny: Louie proved that when it comes to being smart and ambitious, age doesn't matter as much as you think. This was the first of three major curve balls that not only Louie hit, but knocked out of the park. The next challenge Louie faced was trying to break into radio. Broadcast isn't an easy business to get into, and Louie spent a lot of time and effort reaching out to radio stations. Then, he waited, but not for long.

Louie: As I was waiting to get phone calls back from radio stations, I thought, I'm just going to make my own radio show. Online radio was just starting to get out there. I produced my own countdown shows and started emailing and banging down doors to actually syndicate my show. Don't worry, you don't need to hire me. The show is produced, put it on air.

Danny: Against all odds, Louie ended up with 300 [00:02:00] radio stations syndicating his show worldwide. Even though when he was starting out, nobody in the industry would give him the

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time of day, but he still had another mountain to climb, television. While his approach was similar to what he did to get into radio, the result he was after was something totally different.

Louie: I hired a production company, and we produced a pilot, a show I wanted to make on my own, submitted it. A national network caught wind of it and said, "You know, we like this show. We don't have room on our schedule, but you're a good host. Why don't you host for now?" Perfect, that was the goal to begin with.

Danny: Event manager, radio DJ, and television host. Louie has held all of these titles and each in spite of major obstacles like his age and lack of experience. In every case, Louie found a clever way around these obstacles, and that's exactly what he does today as a festival promoter and event consultant.

Louie: There's always been there's road blocks or stumbles, or things that block you from moving forward and getting to the next plateau. It happens continually. Even [00:03:00] just last year, when I'm getting new clients for festivals in night clubs, I was so frustrated that I couldn't get new ones for a few months. Thinking, these guys all need help. They all need marketing and strategy on rebuilding their concerts or their venues, yet they refuse to take action. What is going on? Then you start blaming them. These guys are all idiots, you know what I mean? What is happening here? I'm still producing my stuff, and all my clients are very successful. What are they not seeing? I don't get it.

I just had to make those tweaks and get them to see the light, to make action, or in a side note, change my actual targets. Okay, well, I'm not working with nightclubs anymore. It seems like they feel they can do it on their own. Maybe they're at a point where they want to try doing it on their own. I just keep offering my expert services to them, and they feel like their ego and their knowledge has now hit a point where they don't need me. The clients I have on and the new ones that come on that really want to spend money and do it well, hire me. The ones that I'm banging doors on think [00:04:00] they can do it, yet they are still either slow or closing, but that's not up to me to try to twist their arm so much. I'll just let the market eat them up so to speak and just tweak my targets.

I had to figure that out, because I just kept blaming them on not wanting to take the help that they obviously needed. I just had to tweak my end, because I couldn't change their mind. I built more authority, I started a podcast, doing more blogs, started my own blog, doing a lot more social media on [00:04:30] strategies, do it yourself. Funny thing happened, I started getting

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more clients without even advertising because I tweaked how I did it. That was a pretty big road block and stumble on my gross from last year, which is kind of fun.

Danny:

What I'm hearing a lot of is a bias towards action. I've seen a lot of successful entrepreneurs, it's always like they can't sit still. Even if stuff's isn't working, or they are feeling stuck, it's like I've got to do something. I've got to do something. I'm going to do something. Constant action, constant movement leads places. [00:05:00] Let's shift gears to talk about the present. Right now, you're in the business essentially of taking events that are floundering and making them amazing, taking experiences that are floundering and making them amazing. Is that an accurate summary of what you do?

Louie:

Yeah, absolutely. Experience is a key to the success as well, like you mentioned. Some of the festivals that you work with, there's heavy competition within a half-hour or forty minute drive around us. We want to give them an experience, and that's going to trump everything. When we have camping, when we have water parks, when we have rides, things like that, we have to market that properly and really give them the feeling of what they're going to feel when they get there. Yes, the music's fantastic. We know that we have big acts. That experience, you're going to meet your true love possibly, we'll have that as an ad. You're going to find friends you've never met before or make lifelong friends. There's a lot of experience marketing that goes into that, and that's what takes either an event that's foundering or something new ...

I've even worked with brand [00:06:00] new festivals that have no background whatsoever, nothing for a customer to gauge, and a reason for them to spend a few hundred dollars on a ticket to come try it out. In year two and year three, it starts to get easier as long as the product is right, but it all comes down to pushing experience.

Danny:

How much of that is about the marketing, like describing the experience? How much of that is in the actual product, in crafting the experience? Because great marketing that the experience doesn't then deliver on is the worst thing.

Louie:

It is.

Danny:

That's how you set yourself up for a giant failure.



Louie:

Absolutely. You're right. The experience and the product has to follow through with what we've said we were going to do in the marketing portion. Obviously the marketing is a hundred percent important before the event, because you're trying to get them to see and feel what they're going to get. That's got to convert them. It's got to convince them it's worth \$200, \$300 tickets, \$50 tickets, whatever it is. It's worth not going [00:07:00] to the other festival that I used to go to, let's say, and come to yours now. That marketing is just massive. It has to be right on the money, the strategy has to be there, the creative has to be there and on point so that they get that feeling. They get attached to it, they start loving the brand and the brand voice and they want to purchase a ticket.

As soon as event time comes, it now switches to delivery. Delivering on that product, because you're right. Once we've told them it's going to be great, we actually have to deliver.

This is one of the reasons why I wanted to get out of being a promoter at such a young age and pretty much right away. Promoters, and not to give them a bad name, I never consider myself a promoter. A lot of people, "Oh you're a concert promoter. That's awesome." I'm like, "Please don't use the word promoter." It seems like those are the guys that sell ... Not the snake coil or the bill of goods, but it's going to be packed this Saturday! Oh, it's packed right now! Even on the radio, we have radio broadcasts and the announcers are saying, "Oh, you got to get here early. It's so packed right now." It's ten o'clock at night and there's nobody there. I'm thinking, [00:08:00] why are you saying this? People who walk in here obviously know it's not packed. You can't trick people. Do you know what I mean?

As social media started to catch fire, people are now able to tell everybody how not packed it was, or how crappy the event was. That kind of idea. I'm like, your marketing is lying. Now it's becoming harder and harder for good marketers and good events to say, "Guys, it's going to be fantastic, we have this, this, this, and this." Now, the people are getting used to not believing that, which really sucks.

You absolutely have to deliver on the product, and even if it's not super packed, the event, and something bad happens, you take ownership of it, you talk about it, you fix it, and it's okay. There's always hiccups that happen in festivals and concerts all the time. It's okay. Even when people catch wind of it and they call you out on something because it effects them, you take ownership. You say, "Oh, yes. You know, that happened, and we feel just as bad as you. This is how we fix it, and how we can fix it personally for you." You can't brush it away or pretend it doesn't happen, because that wrecks the [00:09:00] actual product. It just gets really hard to fix an event.

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That's why when clubs used to call me saying, "Well, we've done this and that to ourselves." Well, it's hard, because now you have a brand problem. We can market as much as we want, but if people don't trust you, or don't like you and your staff, they are not coming, no matter how much money I put into marketing. We've got to change the product and the brand first, right?

Danny: How do you go about doing that?

Louie: It could be a rename and a whole renovation. That's kind of the last resort, but the biggest change you need to make. There's nothing we can fix product wise, you've done so much damage to the brand, we need to refresh everything. Sometimes that doesn't work because it's same owners, same staff, and all that kind of things. Then like, you just put lipstick on a pig so to speak, and I'm still not coming. Right? That might not even fix it. When you get to the core of it ... I like to go into ...

Let's say if it's a venue that has nobody coming anymore, and talk to the staff and see how the staff's reacting. Sometimes they are typically on their phones and ignoring the customer, or too slow, or not engaging well with the customer, or the [00:10:00] doormen are really bad at the front and all they want to do is push people around, and if there's a fight about to happen, they love jumping in, and technically starting the fight. You know, that happens a lot. All of that ruins the experience for everybody.

When we rebuild from there, the core of it, the staff, that really helps. You might even replace everybody, unfortunately, but that just is the case, right? You can't just renovate and put a new name on it and say it's done. Sometimes the core of the problem is the staffing, right? How people are being treated.

I always tell the doormen, "Guys, you're doormen, and supposed to stop and do the security, but you're the first host that everybody sees. You are the first piece of the product. So when you are a dick at the door, that's the first feeling they get before they walk in." You know what I mean? This is ridiculous. Be nice, be hosts, joke around, do your job. There's no reason to be this want to be police officer idea. Some of them are like that, and I tell them straight up, "You need to be fired then if you can't handle the way the job has to be done. This is a product from top to bottom."

Then it starts to fill up, right? You have to make sure people feel [00:11:00] good. Like we've mentioned before, the keyword is experience. That's from the beginning right to the end.

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Danny:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Absolutely. I want to pivot this a little bit. You're embarking on a new part of your career. You're doing more podcasts, you're doing especially more speaking is something that you want to be getting into. How ... When you're speaking, it's a really interesting challenge because you are getting on a stage that is not yours in front of an audience that is not yours and doesn't know you, other than what you are going to say and what you are going to do when you're out there, you have very little control over what's going on around you. How do you create a great experience in that context?

This is especially relevant, because I think a lot of the people listening to this, they are business owners, they are growing their business at different stages of development, and at some point many business owners are going to have an opportunity to address a crowd, to get on a stage, to deliver a presentation. It's kind ... I want to say hostile, but it's a challenging environment [00:12:00] in which to deliver a message, because it's, again, it's not your audience, it's not your stage. How do you make that, not just a great presentation, but a great experience?

Louie:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You know, practice is obviously going to come into play here as you get better and better at it. I'm still ... There are speakers that speak once or twice a week constantly. They are much more professional than I am, obviously, but aside from that and the obvious ... In my opinion, if you kind of know what your brand voice is, and this goes hand in hand with social media as well ... Almost the same question like what do you say on social media, how do you engage with them?

I know my brand voice in how I speak, in how I act, same thing like we're doing this podcast here. I'm not coming up with a different way to talk, or a different sound of my voice, or having all these notes or things like that, myself. There's going to be stories that come out of my head and they are just going to flow nicely. Similar on speaking, you're right, it's a different stage. It's a different group of people maybe every time, and they have different wants and needs.

A) I think the pre-research [00:13:00] is going to help. Thinking about who is your audience, so how do I need to tweak my stories to resonate with them? If they are musicians, my stories can go directly to musicians because it fits. If they are internet marketers, similar to your audience, or they're real estate agents ... You know, I've done podcasts that are real estate agents, that are publishers, that are authors, and my same stories just need to be tweaked a little bit, and I just need to bridge them. A little bit of research beforehand helps a lot, and then ... Like I mentioned, if you know your brand voice and you are acting yourself, when you are on stage or you are doing podcasts, I think a lot of stories helps. I think a lot of people don't just want the



slideshow with tactics. Like I mentioned before, we're at an age where people can Google the tactics and really just learn. They can watch fantastic screen shared videos or webinars on how do stuff.

To me, I believe the stories are going to resonate better. It's going to connect them with an example. Since they are stories, and for me personally being in the entertainment [00:14:00] industry, it's got a cool angle. As a marketing and branding guy, the next marketing and branding guy will have his set of stories. Mine will be in the entertainment industry. That may or may not give me a nice advantage. I think it's different. Right now, it sounds like it's giving me a little bit of an advantage or at least some eyeballs and some ears for people booking speaking engagements and podcasts as well. It's got a cool angle, something that most other marketers and branding, guys doing the circuit, may not have.

When you are on stage and you have that pre-research and you kind of know the flow of how you want your speaking to be, I think a lot of stories, past experiences and stories is what's going to resonates. It could be funny, they resonate well. Do you know what I mean? People like to hear stories. When you are talking with buddies, they just want to hear stories. They want to hear what you did. Then they can kind of create their own bridge as well in their own mind. I get it. I know how I'm going to do it for myself. Everybody's different. Even if it's just a room full of real estate agents, each one of those might have a different idea of what they want or how they would do it. It's hard to talk to one person individually, so when you are [00:15:00] in a group, I think when you can create a story though, they can kind of resonate with it and come up with their own answers at the same time. I believe that's going to work well, so I'm going to test that as much as possible.

Danny:

Awesome. Louie, we've covered a lot of ground, and I want to kind of bring this full circle. The theme of the show is Business Reimagined. People I'm excited to talk to are people who are looking at business, seeing business in a way that's different from what most of the people around them in their industry and the world are doing. We've talked about a bunch of different things, we've talked about brand, we've talked about experience, but if you had to encapsulate this, as if to fit on a fortune cookie or something. How would you articulate the way you see business differently from most of the people around you?

Louie:

I feel like my fortune cookie phrase really seems to be, "If the doors aren't there, build your own door and open it." It just sounds like ... Even the stories we've talked about today, when you want to get something done, you can research, and go after it, and [00:16:00] try to break open

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those doors like an entrepreneur would, but the entrepreneur spirit are the guys that make things out of thin air. I feel like even for myself, and we can make notes of even the stories we've talked about today, I was able to ... If I couldn't break through the door itself, I would find a way to build my own door and break through that. I think that's kind of where you can reimagine, using that word set, your entrepreneurship or your business.

There's always going to be a way, and an entrepreneur will figure that out. Much like entrepreneurs traditionally will find a problem and a solution to it. That's making things out of thin air. That's the same kind of concept, and I guess the different way I'm seeing it is you're finding your problem or your goal, and you are building your own door on the side and then you are breaking through it.

Audra: And that was Louie La Vella, reminding you not to let closed doors stop you. Maybe you're not interested in being a radio or television [00:17:00] hosts, but one of the lessons you can take away in addition to not giving up is that events are all about experience. From the person who greets your guest at the door, to living up to your marketing promises. Careful attention can make your event a rock star success.

This has been Business Reimagined with Danny Iny. Join us next time as we talk to Doctor Isaac Jones.

Isaac: I remove the environmental toxins out of my body, and all of a sudden, my brain turned on. All of the symptoms that I had went away. The eczema on my skin went away, my energy skyrocketed. I ended up becoming one of the top athletes in Canada for the 800 meter dash, something that I would have never imagined, because again my body was functioning at a high efficiency, a very high level to the point where I was literally pre-Olympic qualifying.

Voiceover: Learn more about us at mirasee.com.

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