

WTC 'Testing the Waters' with Amy Smiley

[00:00:00] **Christi Powell:** Hey, podcast family. This is Christi Powell with Women Talk Construction, and I'm here with my co-host Angela Gardner.

[00:00:08] Hello, how are you doing today, Angela?

[00:00:15] **Angela Gardner:** I am awesome. How are you?

[00:00:16] **Christi Powell:** Good. I'm really excited to introduce our guests. Yeah. Today, um, Amy Smiley, our VP of 84 Lumber, um, our marketing department, and she's also handling some of the PR too. Is that right now, Amy?

[00:00:30] **Amy Smiley:** Yes, that's right. All of our PR is under our marketing umbrella.

[00:00:37] **Christi Powell:** Nice. Thank you for being with us today.

[00:00:39] **Amy Smiley:** Absolutely. It's a pleasure.

[00:00:40] **Christi Powell:** We appreciate you being on today. You're gonna inspire a lot of young girls. So, um, we want to start out by asking. Obviously you're one of the most successful marketing teams in construction and we love that. I definitely love that because I work for 84.

[00:00:56] Mm-hmm. But, um, I just wanted to ask some questions to maybe inspire others to consider a marketing career in the future. So, as the VP of Marketing 84, what strategies are you implementing to establish the company as a leader in the industry?

[00:01:11] **Amy Smiley:** Well, first of all, thank you so much. That's so kind and you hit on it.

[00:01:16] It's my team. It's not just me. It, it really takes a village and I am, I'm so honored to be able to talk to you all about my team and kind of what we've been working on. So, um, kind of our strategies are focused around digital marketing. So if you are following us on social media, I'm sure you see our huge presence.

[00:01:38] I, I feel like we are kind of. One of the first dealers that was really kind of taking this serious and really focusing on building out our platforms. And so, um, we have goals every month that, that we try to reach and we, we've been crushing those goals and, you know, using it, uh, for key marketing strategies.

[00:02:01] Um, we do a lot with Facebook, Instagram, meta. We've explored into other platforms. If you're on TikTok, we're on there. Even our vendors are like, we're not on there yet. And I'm like, you gotta get on board. Absolutely. And obviously, you know now with Threads coming out, that was the big thing last week. We have a Threads account, which nice.

[00:02:23] If you're up, if you're up for some laughs, go on our 84 lumber page because Okay. Everybody's really having fun with that platform right now. And so, We're kind of testing the waters and yeah, it's been great. And you know, so focusing on our digital strategies. And then you had mentioned earlier about, uh, pr, so you know, really focusing on creating great content and, and, you know, sharing what we're doing as far as the company.

[00:02:51] Mm-hmm. We're expanding, we're growing, we're hiring. And we're doing amazing things in the community. Mm-hmm. And we wanna make sure people know that about us. Yeah. And so, um, we've really been focusing on, on sharing those key messages across, across the nation. So sometimes we focus, you know, it's very hyper-local and other times it's, it's large national thing.

[00:03:16] So Maggie was just featured in the Wall Street Journal. That article came out a few weeks ago. Um, and we've got, we've got other really great plans, um, in the works for the rest of the year and already thinking into 2024 already. Nice.

[00:03:31] **Christi Powell:** So with Maggie being the owner of one, the largest privately held building company in the United States, How, how does that change your strategy?

[00:03:41] Does it change it at all, or, or has it helped you to be able to create a better platform? Since I feel like we are, we have the best platform.

[00:03:51] **Amy Smiley:** Yeah. So it obviously makes us unique. And it sets us apart. And I think you are always looking for ways to set yourself apart from the competition. And we're we're lucky.

[00:04:05] Lucky in two ways. One, being a woman owned business and two being a f. Family owned, privately held company, and you know, a lot of the competition can't say that and it's such an advantage and we've really been exploring that message through reading campaigns such as, you know, women in Construction Week mm-hmm.

[00:04:29] And Women's History Month, and we've created some. Great platforms with other, um, brands like the Pittsburgh Penguins. We created this Empower Her Grant, and so other people wanna lean into that too. And it's really opened a lot of different opportunities that we probably wouldn't have if we, if we weren't a woman owned business.

[00:04:53] And so being able to share what you do, Christie and. Having some of those powerful messages behind that. And I'm sure you know that's helpful for you when you go out and you're talking to Yes. Essential customers. And so really focusing on cultivating those stories, um, and showcasing, you know, women that work at 84 and we have so many amazing women here.

[00:05:18] Um, we do. Besides, besides you? Besides myself, besides Maggie. Mm-hmm. I mean, we have, we just did the video on Shannon, who's a co-manager, you know, up in Millersport, New York, and she's a single mom. Yes. Raising two daughters and like there's, so when you start to really peel back the layers and you start to go down this path of understanding people's journeys.

[00:05:41] Mm-hmm. At 84, everyone has a different journey. They do. My journey is different than yours versus, you know, anybody. And so, It's just so powerful. Mm-hmm. When you actually share that out with people, I think people say, oh, you work for 84, it's all men, blah, blah, blah. Yeah. Yeah. But it's not, it's not, or, you know, we have, we have a lot of diversity.

[00:06:05] Mm-hmm. We just need to do a better job of sharing that. Mm-hmm. And so we're really focused on that. We did something for Hispanic Heritage Month. I saw that. So we, you know, we're, we're working on. Just doing a better job of, of sharing those powerful stories.

[00:06:20] **Christi Powell:** Well, you're doing a great job. And those powerful stories are, I feel like, and I'm sure, uh, Angela does too, really speak to

[00:06:27] **Amy Smiley:** people

[00:06:28] **Christi Powell:** where they're at.

[00:06:29] Right? Mm-hmm. When you share stories versus a picture and some words. Mm-hmm. I feel like that, I mean, that resonates with me when I hear people's stories. Just like what you said, you know, Shannon being a single mom with two kids. Mm-hmm. I mean, that speaks to a lot of women who may not be young, that have never considered a, a career in the construction industry, and it's a great career.

[00:06:49] It really is a great career. Mm-hmm. So thank you for doing that. We appreciate it.

[00:06:59] 84 Lumber Company is the nation's largest privately held supplier of building materials, manufactured components, and industry leading services for single and multifamily residences and commercial buildings. The company operates 310 facilities, which includes stores, component manufacturing plants, custom door shops, and engineered wood product centers.

[00:07:19] And 35 states, 84 Lumber company also offers turn. Key installation services for a variety of products, including framing, installation, siding, windows, roofing, decking, and drywall. For more information, visit 84lumber.com.

[00:07:40] **Angela Gardner:** Oh yeah, and I think even that part about being a privately owned family business is a. I mean that's a diamond right there. Cause yeah, I mean the backbone of America I think has family business written all over it and I come from that, so I understand it very well. But, um, I'm gonna kind of change things up a little bit here cuz I wanna ask you this question.

[00:08:01] A lot of times when Kristy and I and uh, many other women in our community go into these career centers, you know, we're talking to the students in non-traditional roles, female students, but. A lot of times I ask them, well, why don't you bring in the marketing students because they don't understand. Cause believe me, Amy, I have a team behind me too.

[00:08:22] It is not me. I have a whole big team and they need to understand the verbiage. And, and what people wanna see. You know, they wanna see our teams, they wanna see those hard hats. Mm-hmm. So what advice would you give to aspiring marketers? Um, and that could be younger, whatever, if you wanna dive into it later on, like what would you tell them to do?

[00:08:44] What path and. And even if you wanna navigate it down the supply chain industry, you know?

[00:08:50] **Amy Smiley:** Yeah. I think the great thing about marketing is that it can be in any industry. I've worked in a variety of different industries. Before I came here, I worked for G N C, I worked for a supplement company, health Nutrition.

[00:09:04] And so I would say, my advice is don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to step into a job or a company where you don't. Know what they do.

[00:09:20] The great thing about 84 is, is that we train our people. Mm-hmm. You know, we, we talk about even becoming a manager trainee, like you don't have to have a construction background. You don't have to have a de college degree in that. We can teach you everything you need to know. Same as if you come in as a marketing professional.

[00:09:40] We can teach you. We have an amazing training and development team here at. 84 that really can teach you the basics. And then, I mean, I'm learning every day. That's the really good and exciting thing about this is that I'm never gonna know it all. No. I'm always gonna learn. No. Yeah. And so if you want a career where you're always constantly learning, I would say building industry is definitely for you for sure.

[00:10:03] Also changes every day. There's never a dull moment, let's be honest. Okay. And so I think also too, it's be curious, ask questions. You know, that's how you really learn and that's how you get to know people too. And we are family-owned business and it really is like a family here. Mm-hmm. I'm sure Kristy can attest to that.

[00:10:25] Yes. There are people that you've worked with, they feel like a family member and, and you get that by being curious and you're getting to know people. Um, to pivot from that, I have two interns in marketing this summer and they are just, they're so great and they're diving in and they are going. To lumber camp.

[00:10:46] They're going to sales camp. Nice. They're doing all kinds of training, you know, they're learning, you know, from top to bottom. And it's, it's so exciting too, to have younger generation I know, here know. Yeah. And getting their insight and what they like, what they like. And we're recruiting people, so having them being involved with some recruit recruitment, marketing ideas has just been great.

[00:11:12] And I think, you know, I. Whatever we can do to help that next generation. And you know, they may come to work at 84, they may not, but you know what? They have that experience and it's something that is gonna take them through the rest of their career and they're gonna remember that that opportunity that they did have.

[00:11:29] Oh

[00:11:30] **Angela Gardner:** yeah.

[00:11:30] **Amy Smiley:** Yeah.

[00:11:30] **Christi Powell:** Yes, for sure. So one of the questions that I wanted to ask is, I know with you being a leader in the marketing role in construction, you have had some major hurdles and some challenges that you have had to overcome. Can you share with us what those are and how you were able to, to just have the grit to

[00:11:50] **Amy Smiley:** get through it?

[00:11:52] Yeah. I think the big thing for me was, Coming in here and I obviously had a different perspective on marketing, working in different industries and having experience and you know, coming in and saying, okay, we're gonna do this Facebook, we're gonna do this, we're gonna do that. And everyone's like, whoa.

[00:12:11] We're not doing that. Our customers aren't on there. I don't understand what you're even talking about. And there's this whole thing of like, you're afraid of what you don't know. Mm-hmm. So a lot of people didn't understand social media. They didn't understand digital marketing because it wasn't something that we really had focused on before.

[00:12:29] It was still kind of a new thing. Yeah. Especially in this industry kind of still is. Um, yeah. Yeah. And so I think there's this perception that marketing is tickets and marketing is golf outings and marketing is print ads or sales flyers, and so we really had to kind of, I say, create this internal PR campaign.

[00:12:55] Mm-hmm. Here's what we're doing. Here's who our team is, here's what their roles and responsibilities are, getting in front of them at a manager camp and kind of talking about how it works and how we can support you and that, you know, during the downturn it was everybody was just doing whatever they could do to save money or stores were doing stuff on their own.

[00:13:17] And it's like we're past those days. We now have this amazing team. We're here to support you so that you can go out and you can focus on your sales. You can focus on your store operations. You don't need to be worrying about planning a barbecue event at your store, right? We have people that can help you with that if that's what you wanna do.

[00:13:37] Um, and so, you know, proving to them and showing them, the great thing about digital is that you have those real time mm-hmm. Analytics and that data mm-hmm. That you can show them and you get those results quick versus a print ad or you know, a billboard, which I'm not saying those aren't great. I like to do an omni-channel approach.

[00:13:57] Mm-hmm. I think we have to hit people from all points. But showing them the data and saying like, this is how many people saw your ad. This is how many people responded to it. Here are real time leads of people who are interested in. Whatever we were pushing. Right? Yeah. And so it takes time. It's not gonna be mm-hmm.

[00:14:15] A year. A year. I'm going into eight years here and you know, I feel like we're really getting into a good footing. Mm-hmm. People respect us, they know what we're doing, they understand what we're doing. They understand that it's important and that it's necessary. And I kept saying, you know, your customers might not be on there now, but they're going to be right.

[00:14:34] Guess what? They're there, or you know, it goes back to that family business, right? So that next generation. Of ownership is now that millennial mm-hmm. And younger age. And where are they going to get their information? Do they get excited when 84 Lumber shares their project mm-hmm. And their, what they're working on.

[00:14:56] Absolutely. Yeah. And so, um, it's, it's been a journey. Mm-hmm. It's been a great journey though. I mean, People pushing back and asking questions is how you get to know people. Right. And how you build those relationships. I joke around with one of the area managers, I'm like, you hated me at first. Cause. Cause I was an outsider.

[00:15:18] I came in, I didn't come up, I didn't come up through the ranks, through the store. Right. I was hired as a next, an external hire to come in. And, and, and do marketing. And so I was kind of an alien. And so it takes a while. That's a good word to win, to win people over. And now I'm one of his favorite people and I always laugh about it because I'm like, you couldn't stand me.

[00:15:41] You were like, who are you and what you doing? This isn't what we do at 84, blah, blah, blah. Now he is like, calls me all the time and, and just loves my team. Nice and and feels confident, and so I love a challenge. I do

[00:15:57] **Christi Powell:** too. I think you have to love a challenge and you have to love not being bored to be in this industry.

[00:16:02] Don't you agree?

[00:16:03] **Amy Smiley:** Absolutely. Yeah. Oh yeah.

[00:16:10] **Christi Powell:** At Women Confidence Builders, our mission is to educate, mentor, disciple, and empower all people while building confidence and creating inclusivity. We wanna grow

[00:16:21] **Amy Smiley:** a sustainable, healthy environment where women, men, and

[00:16:23] **Christi Powell:** children feel the effects of the love and care our organization has for our communities.

[00:16:29] Businesses growth and the economic impact we can make together supporting our next generation of leaders in a way only in intentionality will change. Please join us at our quarterly events and please visit us on our website at Women Confidence Builders. Dot com.

[00:16:52] So what would you tell a young person who was really wanting to get into marketing and construction? Is there something I. Is, is there, are there any steps that you could provide for them that would help them just look for ways to get into construction through their marketing channels if they are pursuing marketing?

[00:17:10] **Amy Smiley:** Yeah, I mean, I think it goes back to internships or even

a mentorship. Mm-hmm. And just, you know, creating those relationships. You know, I think. Now we're in that age where people reach out on LinkedIn, you have these connections. Mm-hmm. You're following people. I think you need to understand what companies are doing in this space.

[00:17:32] And so I, I think, I think those are kind of just some easy ways to get into it. But again, I think it's making a connection with somebody in this industry, with somebody like yourself, Christie or, or me or somebody on my team. And, and I think that's, that's a great way to approach it.

[00:17:49] **Christi Powell:** And all they have to do is ask.

[00:17:50] Right. Absolutely mean. Absolutely. I feel like you and me and Angela and your team, and actually a lot of our team members at 84 Lumber, if somebody were to come to them, a young person and say, Hey, I wanna learn more about construction, I don't see a single one of us saying, no

[00:18:05] **Amy Smiley:** way. Right? Right. Like, we're like, really?

[00:18:08] Ok,

[00:18:09] **Christi Powell:** cool. Let's do this. But I think that's really important. Don't be afraid. Right. Yeah. Don't be afraid to ask us. And a lot of people are intimidated, especially young people, when they see leaders, they think that they, um, were not approachable, but I feel like, um, we are all approachable and we wanna see more folks in the construction industry.

[00:18:29] **Amy Smiley:** Yes. Especially young women.

[00:18:31] **Christi Powell:** Yes. Especially young women. Absolutely. Because they're making a great big difference, Alex, that works for me. Like just the transformation in one year. I'm sure you see the same thing mm-hmm. As you bring people on your team, Angela and, and Amy. Mm-hmm. Just the transformation in a year.

[00:18:46] I'm like, wow, she's gonna be way better than me. You know? Yeah. Like it's crazy. I'm like so happy and it's so fulfilling to be able to do that too. Yeah. Agree. Yeah.

[00:18:56] **Amy Smiley:** Fulfilling. Yeah.

[00:18:57] **Christi Powell:** Are we doing more as a company? Um, as far as sharing. At schools, at high schools, are we getting into the lower level grades yet?

[00:19:06] Do you, can you share a little bit about that?

[00:19:12] **Amy Smiley:** Yeah, so we've actually forged an amazing relationship with our HR and our recruiting team. Because we're doing a lot of recruitment, marketing efforts. Mm-hmm. And it's all in house. We don't have an agency that's helping. We've taken that on. And so we're managing the content. We know where the hotspots are, we know where we can turn on ads and we need to run things, help with hiring events.

[00:19:37] I know that there are, um, some key individuals on the recruitment team mm-hmm. That focus on reaching out to trade schools, colleges, I believe some high schools that have the VO-tech program. And things like that. So I know that it is, uh, part of their overall plan and I know that, um, I know Judy does some great stuff.

[00:19:58] Yeah. I think through the NHA N A H B, but yeah, I mean it's definitely the younger we can get, you know, in there. And they're that message and, you know, partnering with the house that she built Yes. Book and everything that they're doing. We have that amazing partnership with them. And I, I even took the book and I read it to my daughter's kindergarten class.

[00:20:20] I saw that and they loved it and I gave them all copy and I had so many parents that were like, this is amazing. This is awesome. And I mean, I know they're six, but just to have that conversation that there are all these job opportunities, I think just really it is fantastic and it, and it sets this tone of, you know, the world is so big.

[00:20:44] Yes. And. You don't have to be put into this box, and that there are so many opportunities for not just young girls, but young girls too, right? Yeah.

[00:20:53] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. They just see the options, right? Mm-hmm. Like all the options. I feel like when we were in school that they just kind of gave us a track and we just had to follow it, right?

[00:21:02] Where now I think we're being more intentional. 84 lumber's being more intentional about. We wanna show you all the opportunities that we have. A lot of big companies are trying to get in front of the younger schools. Mm-hmm. Just so they have, because by the time they get to high school, sometimes they've already made up their mind.

[00:21:19] Yeah. Right. Yeah. So, um, it is cool to see that that shift

[00:21:23] **Amy Smiley:** happening. And we had done that, uh, partnership with Skills USA for their national signing day. So we did things with them. I know Judy still does some stuff with the, they do different competitions and we sponsor that and we've been supplying materials for different chapters across the country.

[00:21:41] Nawi, we did that

[00:21:42] **Christi Powell:** recently. Mm-hmm. For

[00:21:43] **Amy Smiley:** their summer camp girls. Yeah, so I think, you know, we're definitely open to opportunities. If there's people listening and they're like, Hey, I've got an opportunity. I mean, we're always, you know, open to entertaining and, and seeing if it makes sense from an 84 perspective.

[00:22:01] Awesome. Oh, that's great.

[00:22:03] **Angela Gardner:** I love it. Do we have time for any more questions, Kristen? Or? Sure. If you got, if you got some. Well, I was gonna ask one more, um, and Amy kind of, I don't know if she did it while we were recording or not, but talked a little bit about the ever evolving marketing trends, like mm-hmm.

[00:22:17] Now there's threads. So that, that's kind of my next question is, you know, how do you stay on top of all of that and what tools and strategies keep you aware so that your team can always be like, you know, pushing that next boundary of marketing.

[00:22:33] **Amy Smiley:** Yeah, so I, part of our team in development plans is how to we.

[00:22:39] Keep up to date, and whether that's going to trainings, it's webinars, going to marketing specific conferences, not just building industry like what is going on in marketing. Mm-hmm. So, you know, people are going to different ones throughout the year just to kinda see. Sometimes it's a very B2C focus, but you can understand what.

[00:23:00] Some of those larger companies are doing, and how do we apply that to a B2B and to mm-hmm. The building industry. And so I really challenged my team to always grow, develop, learn. We shouldn't be happy with status quo. And, you know, we, we've gotta, we've gotta be at the forefront. And 84 has gotta be out there first.

[00:23:22] Yes. Agreed. And my team, they, they are on board, they love it. They're super passionate. You know, and that excites people that Oh yeah. You don't wanna always do the same things. Yeah. Yes, we have things that we do every year, but, you know, thinking about what are we doing that's different this year for mm-hmm.

[00:23:41] You know, some of our, our military appreciation that we always do, or our breast cancer awareness, or what are we doing different for the holidays? Like we shouldn't just say, oh, we did this last year, we're gonna do it again this year. Yeah. And so challenging your team to be innovative. I think subscribing.

[00:23:58] Staying on top of what's going on in the world, in the news. LinkedIn's great cuz they always have that I know what's trending. Um, Google as well. Mm-hmm. You know, just subscribing to those, those outlets also helps you stay on point. But being on social media, that's our job. So if something's new, we know about it and, uh, I love it.

[00:24:20] Yeah, we, as soon as threads came out, you know, Amanda, she, she's our social media manager. Love it. She's, man, she's like, here's all the things that I've proposed. I mean, I don't even have to ask. They're, they're, oh, that's cool. They're fabulous. So, You know, we, we like to be hip here, Marco. Yeah.

[00:24:38] **Christi Powell:** We like you being hip even though I'm not sure I'm hip.

[00:24:41] I think we like you being hip, that's for sure. So speaking of following in social media, tell our audience like how they can follow 84 Lumber, how they can, um, if they're a customer, how do they get engaged? Mm-hmm. With 84 Lumber, um, all

[00:24:57] **Amy Smiley:** the things. Yeah. So follow us on all the platforms. We are on Facebook, we're on Instagram, we're on Twitter, we're on TikTok, we're on Pinterest.

[00:25:08] We have a YouTube channel, and now we're on Threads. Threads. Um, I'm sure I forgot something. Twitter. I think you missed Twitter. No, I, I think I did. I did. You we're on Twitter. I forget that sometimes. So yes, we are on Twitter. Uh, so we're on all the platforms. So follow us. Just 84 Lumber Company. I think on Instagram we're at at 84 Lumber, uh, LinkedIn.

[00:25:31] That's probably the one that I forgot. Yeah. Like, I know I'm forgetting one. There's so many. Mm-hmm. But LinkedIn is huge for us. Mm-hmm. We're always on there. We have great, um, career journeys. We, we try to keep that up to date. Um, a lot of our. Executives are, are on there. Our leadership, they're, they're very involved and engaged.

[00:25:50] So you can, you know, reach out to any of us. We're happy to answer any questions you have. Customers. Again, same thing. Follow us and, you know, we're here to help. If you have questions and you, and you need help with your platforms, we're more than happy to assist you with that. And then, you know, reach out to me, Amy, anybody who has any marketing questions or wants some help in this industry, I'm, I'm more than happy to.

[00:26:14] To be there for some advice.

[00:26:16] **Christi Powell:** Thank you for all that you're doing for women, for our industry, and just being a beacon of light for marketing and how important it is to bring the younger generation into our industry. Thanks for everything, Amy, and thank you so much for being on today.

[00:26:33] **Amy Smiley:** Well, thank you both.

[00:26:34] I'm, I'm so thrilled to be on, and, uh, I look forward to hearing the episode. Yay. We're excited.

[00:26:45] Well,

[00:26:45] **Christi Powell:** that's all for this episode. Thank you so much for listening to the Women's Talk Construction Podcast with your host, Kristy Powell and Angela Gardner. See you next

[00:26:54] **Amy Smiley:** time.