

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 47 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Have you been waiting for permission to start, and didn't even realize it? Today, Kari dePhillips and I talk about that and more when we discuss becoming an agency owner. Are you ready to become location independent but aren't sure what you can do? Schedule an hour long discovery call with me, where in addition to figuring out what your location independent career will be, we also work out a plan to get you there and give you accountability along the way. Visit compasspod.com/discovery-call to book. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Kari, welcome to the show.

Kari: Thanks for having me.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Kari: This sounds like a weird answer. Some people grow up and they want to be movie stars or singers in a band. I wanted to be an advertising executive. Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be somebody who created ads and I actually got that dream job right out of college and worked in advertising for about two years before I left. Agency life was less than ideal. I had a boss who sexually harassed me and I reported him. It was not a great experience. He was still allowed to be my manager as tends to happen in the agency world, so I've come to find and so I left the agency and started freelance writing.

Kathryn: So it sounds like you kept that dream throughout high school and college as well.

Kari: Yeah, absolutely. I was like a dog with a bone on that one. You couldn't shake it from me. I, I don't think that there's anything cooler than being able or being the person who kind of crafts the language and the images that millions of people see. And I still do that. I just do it in a, I want to say a non-agency setting, digital marketing. I'm still working at an agency, but it's, it's not an ad agency. And so things are a little bit different, but from a very young age, once I found out what propaganda was, I became just fascinated by it. And how do people craft language and craft images that resonate with people in a way that gets them, these strangers who don't even know, you don't even know the product? How do you get them to, I guess, vote with their dollars from the messages that you put in front of them? And to me that, that's, that's basically all that advertising is.

Kathryn: What did you study in college?

Kari: International business and accounting. I was premed for all of the year before I just really burned out on that. I could have hung, hung in there with it and finished it out. I, I thought that I would be able to make a lot more money and a lot more impact as a doctor, but those early mornings were just not for me. And I taught myself that the hard way. And so I went back to international business and marketing. I had a heavy

accounting focus. I like numbers a lot, and so it kind of tied in with like my personal interests and career goals pretty well.

Kathryn: So it sounds like they tie in well with what you do, but they're not necessarily directly what you do. Is there a lot you use from those studies?

Kari: For what I do, college was hugely ineffective. I don't think that people who want to get into digital marketing necessarily, need to have a college education. In fact, I dropped out my senior year. I'm one of those people that made it almost all the way through and then, and then tapped out. I got an incredible job offer based off of the series of internships that I had had. And like I said, I branched out into freelance writing. And so I pretty quickly became my own boss. And then I learned that none of my clients were asking about my college education. They were more interested in whether or not I was able to actually do the work.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Kari: Naturally. So when I was working and advertising, I had to do the whole rise and grind thing where I would wake up at like 5:30 in the morning, spend an hour getting ready, and then I'd have to commute downtown, park my car, spend like \$240 a month for that privilege and then kind of do the whole thing in reverse on the way back. And I really resented it because so much of the work that I was doing could have been done from anywhere. And I had a friend who was a freelance writer and he had the coolest lifestyle I had ever seen. He got paid to go to Italy and report on something and then he'd be in Colorado reporting on something else. And he wrote for a lot of men's magazines at the time. And I was just like, well, how do I break into that lifestyle? I, my job sucks and my boss is an [whistle] and how do I, how do I break free from that? And if the answer was to just start applying for freelance writing jobs. And so I would come home from my job in advertising and I would spend a couple of hours every single night going through Craigslist, every single city because I wasn't focused on, I lived in Pittsburgh at the time.

Kari: I wasn't focused on only jobs that were available in Pittsburgh because I wasn't trying to go anywhere. So I got my first writing job that first day and then I kind of became addicted to the process of getting more clients and leveling up my skill set. I had a portfolio within the first three months and within three months I was making more money freelance writing on the side, than I was at my day job, which paid really well. And so for me at that point, the decision was pretty clear. Plus I got to do it from anywhere. So the majority of the time I spent working from home, but I started kind of dipping my toe into the waters of digital nomadry. And not to date myself too much, but this was before anybody had ever even heard of Tim Ferris, so the term digital nomad I don't think was even a thing. If it was, I certainly hadn't heard of it and so I was just kinda traveling around and working. I would go visit friends in different States. I would go to California and visit my family and work the entire time.

Kathryn: How do you describe your job to people who are just being polite when they ask?

Kari: I make companies rank number one for Google search results. That's my particular area of expertise. My company is called The Content Factory and our tagline is we make our clients more famous and we represent brands from Astroglide to Fair Trade America to enterprise level software as a service companies and essentially the highest return on investment that they see out of the work that we do is in getting them to rank number one for particular search terms that people find their content, the content that we write for them and then they convert, they make a purchase. This is I practice what I preach for my own company as well. The content factories website generates about a million dollars a year in targeted organic traffic. We ranked number one for search terms like press release distribution. If you Google cost of social media marketing, you're going to find me right now we ranked number three, so if you look for content writers, so we dominate a lot of the search engine results pages and as a result our website gets a lot of traffic that we're able to monetize. Some of them turn into actual clients, others click our affiliate links and make purchases that way. Lots of people, about 50 people a day sign up for our email list and we're able to monetize that email list down the road.

Kathryn: How did you transition from freelance writing to your agency?

Kari: It was kind of a natural process and then it's some point I had more work than I could handle. Clients started referring me to other clients. I never stopped applying for more freelance writing work. I wanted to make sure that I always had enough and as a result I gave myself too much work. And so I had other friends who started being interested in the, you know, work from home lifestyle and I would send them my overflow writing assignments and then they would send them back to me. I would edit them, give them feedback, and essentially I kind of had a little mini army of friends who were super psyched to make side income, freelance writing. They also wanted to break into the industry. They weren't quite sure how and I, I had the work for them. So within probably a year or two I switched from being a just rando freelance writer to creating a company called The Content Factory.

Kathryn: Once you had your agency, how did you find those first clients?

Kari: I kept on the same Craigslist strategy. Actually there's a free YouTube video. If any of your listeners want to pop a Google on that. If you Google how to hack Craigslist for remote work, you'll find the workation video that kind of outlines it all. But I sourced all of my clients on Craigslist. The people that I trained to find clients in this way today are still finding clients on Craigslist. I post my jobs for The Content Factory on Craigslist. I think they, it's a widely untapped resource for people who are looking for remote work, but while I was doing that, I also started practicing what I, what I preach for my clients in that I was creating keyword targeted long form content for our blog and some of the blog posts that I back in 2011 are still ranking very well today. In fact, some of those posts have generated over \$1 million worth of business for my agency and what I mean by that is potential clients for example, search for the cost of social media marketing and they find our website, they find the blog posts that I wrote back in 2011 it's been updated many times since. We keep that one fresh, but it educates them on the cost of social media marketing.

Kari: It talks about all of the different factors that go into an effective social media marketing strategy and also includes several case studies that we've developed over the years. So it's a high conversion blog post for me in that if somebody is looking for the cost of something, in this case social media marketing, it's because they're in the research phase before making a purchase and when you're able to capture your target audience in the research phase before making a purchase and then you educate them and you demonstrate your expertise, what you kind of get is a conversion machine. And so, well over, I think we're up to over \$2 million from the cost of social media marketing posts, worth of businesses have come to me through that blog. So Astroglide for example, five years they've been on as a client, they pay us a good amount of money.

Kari: It's a big national brand Fair Trade America found us through that post and we've had them for over four years. So that post has generated quite a bit. We have other posts that haven't done quite that well but still draw and quite a bit of organic traffic and clients to us. So now I don't need to apply to Craigslist. In fact, I don't need to pitch business at all and I haven't pitched new business in at least seven years because our own site's SEO does all of the work for us. And so clients find us and I don't need to find them.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Kari: This is one that can be easily avoided. I hired a contractor at one point, this was early on, probably like year one or two of the agency and they posted an image to a client's blog that they had improperly sourced and the photographer had an attorney who was scraping the internet looking for improper use of that photographer's images. And the client got a demand letter for \$8,000 and so the client then said, well, The Content Factory, you posted this to my blog, so clearly you're responsible and I wasn't gonna let the client be stuck holding the bag for that. It ultimately the responsibility fell on me. Even though I wasn't the one who posted it, it was a contractor that I had hired. Even though I had a policy against using images that we didn't pay for it because I knew that like that could get you in hot water. This one person, this one time did not follow the process and we ended up settling that for \$3000. I only had to pay 3000 instead of the eight that the attorney initially came after me for. But I also had to pay legal costs. And so, at a time when I was just getting the company kind of off of the ground, being faced with \$8,000 plus lawyers fees was hugely intimidating to me.

Kari: I lost a lot of sleep over that. Also, how many other images are out there that I might be responsible for? So I spent thousands of dollars in labor going through every single image that we had ever posted to any client's blog over the previous two years that we'd been in business. Just to make sure that we had all of our bases covered. And again, we were able to fortunately settle for \$3,000 plus legal fees. You know that's a, that's still a lot of money and I wrote a blog post about it that again going back to the SEO thing ranks really well for I think it ranks number one for image copyright infringement and I get emails at least once a week from a blogger who has been sued by a photo agency like Getty or a photographer and you know, they want to know what they can do. They want my lawyer's information too. But for your listeners, if you are finding images just Googling them, stop doing that. There are all kinds of free image sources that you can go to. I would recommend paying the small nominal fee to make

sure that you have those receipts and proof that you paid for them and the rights to use them in your blog posts or in your clients because those fees add up and they can put you out of business.

Kathryn: How about your first major success?

Kari: If I had to really pin it down, it would be the day that I decided to bet on myself, to leave the advertising job that I had with the creepy boss who touched my leg in meetings. Taking that step out the door and realizing that I didn't really have a safety net or anyone else to rely on other than myself for a paycheck. It felt like a very bold move at the time and it kind of was. Since then, I've found that as I continue to bet on myself, those bets tend to pay off in the long run.

Kathryn: If you could go back and give your younger self just starting this business, any advice, what would you say?

Kari: Just do it. If you're sitting around and waiting for permission from somebody or an invitation for the life that you want you're going to be waiting for a long time because nobody is going to give it to you. You have to create your own opportunities. You have to take those opportunities as they're presented to you. And again, you present those opportunities to yourself. When I got sick of my job in advertising, it was me who decided that I was going to spend two hours a day looking for a way out that I could do on my own and create a lifestyle that I wanted. So I kind of engineered my career around the lifestyle that I wanted to lead and, and went from there. And I never really stopped doing that, but I could have done so sooner. I stayed in my advertising job for way longer than I probably should have after my boss got creepy with me and I felt like I didn't have any other options.

Kari: Certainly it was going to take me a long time to replace that job in an office environment, probably longer than it did for me too. Replace it with freelance writing. I could have started down that path sooner and I wish that I had. And when I look back at all of the things that like I'm kinda kicking myself now for so much of it stems from why didn't you start sooner? What were you waiting for? Again, there's not going to be an invitation that comes in the mail.

Kathryn: Odds are, there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Kari: Sure. So right now I am coming at you hot from Antalya, Turkey, which is a gorgeous beach town. The food is wonderful, the people are great and I am seven hours ahead of EST. All of my employees are based in the US. Everyone works from home. Some of my employees spend that time with their kids. I've got one guy who's in a metal band that's pretty big and he works for me while he also tours the country with his band. And he tours internationally sometimes too. So, I need to stay with my team and the majority of my clients are in the US too. So right now, like I said, I'm seven hours ahead of them, so I tend to sleep in late and work late as well. So my typical day I'll wake up around 10:00, maybe 11:00, depending. I make myself some coffee, check my email, check my

Facebook groups. I'm an admin of several large Facebook groups and that takes some time to deal with that, check in with the people that I need to be checking in with.

Kari: I try to schedule my calls in the morning on EST and keep up with Slack, do any kind of admin stuff that I need to delegate what I need to. Next week I'll be back at home in Amsterdam. I moved to Amsterdam, got a Dutch visa. So that's my home base. Typically I travel a lot, so every month or so I'm in a different country and really taking advantage of the freedom that the work from home life has afforded me.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kinds of continuing education, formal or informal?

Kari: Yeah, absolutely. And it's critically important if you're working in a dynamic industry like digital marketing where Facebook algorithms are always changing. There are new social media platforms and tools. I reevaluate the tools that we use at the content factory on a semiannual basis, so every six months or so. Some of the tools that we use have a year long minimum commitment. I spend to \$50,000 a year on various tools for the agency ranging from HootSuite to Cision to Group Funnels is a great one and so in order to understand which tools offer the best functionality, you need to also understand what functionality you need and what the trends are and the Google algorithm gets updated on a pretty frequent basis. As an SEO agency, I have to stay on top of that and so I am constantly learning. I read industry articles, I probably read like five or 10 of them a day depending on what problem I'm trying to solve or if there's anything new that I need to look into. But yes, absolutely. I do not rely on the college education I had coming up on 20 years ago to apply to to what I'm doing today. It's just that's not a realistic expectation and if you want to stay competitive in this industry, you have to competitively read up on the industry and what people are doing and how you can apply those tactics and tools to your clients and also yourself.

Kathryn: What are you excited about right now in building and growing an agency?

Kari: I'm excited for other people to come into the industry, particularly women. I like to say that that there's no glass ceiling coded into Google's algorithm and it's absolutely true. I am right now wearing yoga pants. I don't have any shoes on. I'm wearing a tee shirt and a sports bra. My hair's in a top knot and I'm like chicken [whistle] and I didn't need to spend the hour getting ready to do so. I hate the getting ready for a job that you're already ready to do routine. In fact, I, I speak about it quite frequently. I've written a lot of articles for various media outlets talking about how look that's unpaid labor and it can significantly contribute to the wage gap and the more women who are able to I guess kind of see this as an option and opportunity and then take it.

Kari: I think the better. SEO is a heavily male dominated industry. Estimates are anywhere from 70% to 90% of the industry is male. I would like to see those numbers split because like I said, it's heavily, I've advantageous for women in particular and also there's plenty of room in the industry for everyone. There is no shortage of work out here. In fact, there is an over abundance of work if you know what you're doing and can consistently deliver results for your clients. So if you know how to do the latter, then finding the work itself becomes pretty easy. And building your own reputation is pretty simple. You just need to collect those receipts. But I am super excited to kind of be a beacon or

more women to enter the digital marketing industry. But in particular with regard to SEO.

Kathryn: Now it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your income range is and how long have you been doing the work?

Kari: I started the content factory in 2010, I've been making six figures for since like 2012 and I've been doing the work for a little bit earlier than that. I think it took me about two years. So since 2008 I've been in the SEO industry. I've always made in the high five figures. That went down a little bit once I had a partner and as I was investing money into the agency, so my actual take home was a little bit lower, but it's totally possible and entirely likely that you can come into this field and make six figures.

Kathryn: What would you consider the beginning range?

Kari: It depends on what you're doing. When I first started, when I like the very first writing job that I got, I think I was making 2 cents a word, which is nowhere near six figures, but I took those jobs anyway because those gigs rather, just so that I could build up my portfolio in charge more. And so if you're breaking into the industry and you're like, well how am I going to make six figures? The answer is you don't. What you need to do is just take any job so that you can build out your portfolio and then you go to your next client, you charge more, and then you'd go to your next client and you charge more. And I'm still 10 plus years later going to my next client and charging more as a result of the knowledge that I've built up over the course of my career is a result of the talent that I have acquired at the agency and as a result of the, the actual ROI that we're able to consistently deliver to our clients. So what's the bare minimum starting? Free. Although you should not take more than one unpaid job. And if you do take that unpaid job, I would hope that it's for a charity or a nonprofit that you believe in so that you know, kind of you're benefiting, society's benefiting, and they're benefiting. Have the goal in mind of developing case studies throughout your career so that again, you can continually level up what you're charging and level up your client load as well.

Kathryn: How do you decide your pricing structure?

Kari: It varies and a lot of it is market research. Most agencies do not put their pricing out on front street. That's a key differentiating characteristic between me and The Content Factory and other agencies. If you go to content FAC, fac.com you can download our generic proposal. I make that just readily available to whoever wants it. You've got to sign up for our email list and then I'm going to market to you forever until you tell me to go away. But if you do market research, you can see what other people are charging and then you can figure out, well like how much experience do I have? Like what do, what are my clients willing and able to pay or my potential target audience, what are they willing and able to pay and you can kind of like dial down or up based on that. You got to do some market research and that's not necessarily the easiest to find. This is a huge part of the reason why my website was able to rank so well in the search engine results pages for conversion optimized search terms like the cost of social media marketing or the cost of web content writing. I did all of that research and then I wrote blog content about it and then it started getting linked to by Forbes and Inc and Entrepreneur and

industry outlets is like the resource for pricing information and so no matter what you do, you can look up those blog posts or you know, write that content on your own after doing your own market research and kind of figure it out.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for womxn looking to open their own agency?

Kari: Just do it. If you're waiting for an invitation, like I said, it's not going to come, but please let this be it. I am inviting you. Please start your own agency. Come into this industry, the water is warm, and there are plenty of people who are out here willing to help you. I founded the Sisters or cofounded with Samantha Pennington who's amazing. But I cofounded the Sisters in SEO Facebook group a little over a year ago. It has since become the most popular group in the industry for women. We have close to 4,000 members now. It's an incredibly supportive space. If you're a woman looking to break into agency life in general, I would start with checking out some Facebook groups specifically geared toward women and some are going to be a little friendlier than others.

Kari: I make sure that the Sisters in SEO group, is very friendly and people provide a lot of value. But I think that if you surround yourself with likeminded people who all have the goal of helping to lift each other up, then you'll be lifted up. And if you have questions, well all of a sudden you've got a place where you can ask them. And when you ask them in, I don't want to say a public forum, but like in a private Facebook group that kind of is a public forum, then other newbies get to benefit from the answers that you receive as well. So in addition to just start it already, just do it, check out some Facebook groups. The Workationing Facebook group is a great resource if you're looking to get into the digital nomad life Sisters and SEO is fantastic or if you want to get into the SEO industry, but there are like Women of Email is a killer group.

Kari: If you're into email marketing that's highly supportive and those ladies are awesome. The women in that group manage the email campaigns for like every major brand you can think of. So pick whatever you're interested in. There's also a Sisters in Social Media Facebook group, so like whatever niche of digital marketing or advertising that you want to break, start pulling those niches out and looking to see if there are fem centric Facebook groups. Chances are there are and there are thousands of people in them and you can go network and mingle and get answers to your questions from ladies who are grinding it out every day.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Kari: I'm gonna keep grinding it out every day. I really love what I do. I am intellectually challenged by it. There's never a dull moment. Each client is different. Each industry that we manage the client work for is, is different and so I'm constantly stimulated that way and constantly challenged and it's rewarding when you meet a challenge head on and then beat it in the form of delivering ROI for the client. I love that. I geek out over it. I don't think that there's anything better. I am going to continue with the Workationing podcast and my workcationing adventure, traveling the world and showing ladies that you can be of a certain age as I am. I like to say that I'm in my mid to late 27s (I'm 36)

and I like you can still have whatever kind of lifestyle you want and use digital marketing as kind of a springboard for other areas of your life.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Kari: You can catch me at the Workation Podcast workationing.com W O R K, A, T, I, O, N, I, N, G, workationing. We also have a Facebook group that's got like, I think we're up to over 4,000 members now. You can catch me over at The Content Factory's website and social media channels. Everything is contentfac, C, O, N, T, E, N, T, F as in Frank, a as in Apple, C as in cat.com and that's our Twitter handle and our Facebook and everything like that. Sisters and SEO is an amazing group that if you're at all interested in the SEO industry and you identify as a femme, we take a very inclusive approach to the term sister. Get on in here, lady and I'll be sure to approve your membership. You can say that you found us on the Compass podcast. I also offer a Rise and Convert SEO training course that is online and it will teach you everything that my team and I know about SEO from keyword research and competitive analysis to schema markup, to how to create content that doesn't just rank but also converts. And that's again, my particular area of expertise in what I geek out about. So you can find all of that information on our website or in the sisters' and SEO Facebook group.

Kathryn: Kari, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Kari: Thanks so much for having me. I hope your listeners dig it. If so, like I said, please come find me on the other platforms, friend me on LinkedIn. I'll approve your LinkedIn friend request or connection request and we can get our networking on. I'm all about it.

Kathryn: If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in compass insiders where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at compasspod.com/insiders Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at compasspod.com/047, that's compasspod.com/047. Join us next week when we talk with Tamar Levi, book illustrator.