

Building a community of SMEs - Samantha Kelly

Samantha Kelly is a social media consultant but more than that; she is a champion of Irish SMEs. With an ear to the ground where SMEs do battle, Kelly is all too aware of the challenges small firms face.

Having founded and then sold her first company, [FunkyGoddess](#), Samantha Kelly says it was this journey that gave her the skills she now uses to help others.

The entrepreneurial journey

"When I started FunkyGoddess, I used social media, Twitter and Facebook, to market it. I didn't have a marketing budget. What I didn't realise at the time was that I was developing an authentic social media voice and other social media skills. I learned so much from that experience. For brands, being authentic on social media is now essential. It's what I teach my clients, the habit of being authentic and how to build a community of followers and advocates. Being 'real' mean being honest, it's why I think many corporates fail at social media but where small business owners can win."

Supports for SMEs or lack of

#IrishBizParty is an online Twitter 'party' that happens on Twitter every Wednesday night from 9 pm – 11 pm. It's a network for SMEs to seek support, share advice and even do business. "I started the hashtag #IrishBizParty out of a real need. I thought to myself; I can't be the only one experiencing the frustrations of being a startup, wanting to make a go of it as a business but finding no support. It turns out I was right, and we've since launched the IrishBizParty website, and we also host [conferences](#) (that attract over 200 SME owners each time)."

On life online and dealing with trolls

"Communicating online with other business owners can be an amazing and helpful experience. However, when I started using the [@TweetingGoddess](#) handle on Twitter, I got quite a negative reaction from some in Ireland. I suppose people thought I was boasting, but it was just a fun handle, meant to attract attention and it worked. The American's love it, though! The way I deal with online bullies or trolls is to ignore them and then block them. I advise all my clients to do the same. Don't give the trolls oxygen."

The importance of mentors

"I believe in the importance of mentors and getting the right ones to advise you as a business person. [Bill Liao](#) and Tony Ennis in Wexford are two of mine."

Has Twitter changed since the early days, is it harder to get heard without buying promoted tweets?



"I don't think so. If you work at it properly. Some SME owners are just too busy to promote themselves on Twitter so I can save them that time. I solve that problem for them. But I also advise others how to communicate in a real way on Twitter. Most of it is common sense, but people need to hear it. As you spend more time on Twitter, you get to know what works and what doesn't, what people find interesting. It's also an instant feedback channel, so it shouldn't be discounted as part of an overall business plan."

On finding time to tweet

"For me, the best time is from 9 pm to 11 pm when the kids are in bed, and I have a little me-time. Most SME owners are the same - time poor, cash poor and juggling a family life with the uncertainties of running a business. It's tough being an SME owner in Ireland, very tough for most. There should be more supports but in their absence, we have to do it for ourselves, and that's why #IrishBizParty was born. The need to share stories and seek advice."

New tools and other initiatives

"I'm fascinated by [Blab](#) at the moment, a great online community where you can have video chats with really experienced business people who are there to help and advise. I think, for SMEs, Blab is a great platform. I'm also working on the next [IrishBizParty conference](#) to be held in Fermanagh.

Finally, any entrepreneurs on Twitter you would recommend following?

"Certainly, [Niamh](#) from Holos Skincare, the [Funky Crayon Lady](#), [The Brand Geeks](#), [Avalanche Design](#) and [Paul Dunphy](#) are a few good business people in Ireland using Twitter correctly. Also, [@Tedrubin](#) and [@isocialfanz](#) in the U.S."