Reining in the Bulls with Michael Marx
Interview with J.D. Schlough, President and CEO of Well & Lighthouse
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Name: J.D. Schlough
Current Title: President & CEO
Current Organization: Well & Lighthouse

Summary: Well and Lighthouse is primarily involved in issue related political and corporate campaigns. They facilitate digital communication strategy development, produce digital ads, determine how best to reach target audiences, and purchase ad placements on various social and traditional media platforms. JD describes how the digital marketing strategy has evolved over time from earned media to using platforms like TikTok, SnapChat, and other networks to achieve multi-channel, integrated broadcasting of content. He discusses the change from top down communication tactics to more distributed bottom up communication tactics. He discusses the key factors that determine the media strategy: the goal, the key audience(s), how to persuade them, the best way to reach them, and the available budget. JD provides examples of digital campaigns that were particularly effective and why.

00:03 Michael Marx:
JD Schlough, thank you for joining me on this interview.

00:07 JD Schlough:
Of course. Thanks for having me.

00:09 MM:
Would you give us a sense of your company? I know Well & Lighthouse, we've come to you before in a number of campaigns, but just give us a sense of the mission of your company.

00:21 JDS:
Sure. Well & Lighthouse has been around since 2009, and we're a strategic digital communications and media agency. So we help clients use the internet, and that includes paid media and social media and direct communications like email to move the ball forward on whatever they're trying to accomplish. We're a boutique, so we're on the smaller side, composed of creatives, engineers, strategists, and administrators. Our background has been really largely electoral and issue in nature. In recent years, we've done a lot more work in the climate space and in the CSR space, the corporate social responsibility space. But we've always approached our work with an eye towards engaging contests and issues that move the ball

forward for our generalized conception of progressive values. We do do some private sector work, but our portfolio is largely issue related.

01:38 JDS:
Our ultimate goal is to create positive collaborative environments and engaging with teams to really try to be a catalyst for their programs, to bring their goals and results closer in line with expectations and ultimately provide fuel for execution. So if that's paid media buying, or social media development, or creative development or video development, we try to just be there as a piece of the team that can bring loose ideas and concepts into execution on behalf of clients.

02:18 MM:
Great. So I really want to focus today on the online digital internet side of corporate campaigning. Why don't we begin with how has it evolved? I know that back in the late eighties, nineties with the internet, with emails, NGOs -- non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups would have email alerts to their activists. They could educate them on an issue, to suggest actions that they might take, et cetera, and even give out action alerts to them where they could send an email, for example, to a CEO. But, it's really evolved amazingly over the last 30 years. Can you give us a sense of how it's evolved in your mind?

03:18 JDS:
Yeah, absolutely. I've been in this space about two thirds of that time, so I don't have a full reach, but I think where you were beginning as sort of a starting place makes a lot of sense. Largely I think in the eighties, nineties, even the early 00's and even for some organizations today, their primary mode of communication is direct via email to members, to subscribers, to interested parties. I think the biggest feature of the evolution of maybe the last 10, 15 years has been the emergence of social media and user generated content as a meaningful contributor to overall communications goals. So, the analog might be instead of sending an email that's an issue alert or an action alert to call a legislator, to send an email or create pressure for either corporations or the individuals that run them, now, that story's likely to be told much more directly by members using digital tools. So social media is a big part of that, and even the social media subset has sort of evolved from just being Facebook driven to the kind of rise and waning of Twitter to the rise of TikTok and sort of, rise and wane of Snapchat. There's all these numerous networks that provide potential energy to campaigns. I think what a lot of people have come to realize is that voices of supporters taken directly in a public way, sort of directly to the public square is in some ways more powerful than the voices only being one way and generally authoritative top down from NGO or from NGOs or organizations. That's not to say that those orgs aren't still the catalyst for action. I mean, they're going to activate their members.

05:39 JDS:
What we see is a lot of integration of the new tactics with the old tactics, right? The same email alerts might go out, but they might contain content that could be shared on multiple different networks, content that users can build that's AI assisted to help them understand the

ramifications or consequences or data around campaigns. It's become much, much more multichannel.

06:10 JDS:
And that's been true, not just in our space, but in the private space, in the government space, in corporate spaces. It's really mostly about media convergence. So, evolving really, really quickly from eighties and nineties broadcast television, earned media, and email and websites themselves as sources of information being prime movers to those same channels, but integrated.

06:42 JDS:
So you might see broadcast TV for an organization that includes a bunch of hashtags, or includes a QR code to try to take advantage of what's called the second screen phenomenon, when people are consuming TV or streaming over the top products, they're also looking at their phone. We're not necessarily abandoning old techniques, it's more about trying to integrate them with new approaches. But the big gain from all this in convergence and diversity of networks is more venues for authenticity, more venues for people to speak with their own voice.

07:24 JDS:
And I think what research shows over and over paid communication is incredibly effective, but you need a lot of reach and you need the creative to generate recall. But when people learn information from trusted sources around them, they're much more likely to onboard that information than they are from a paid source.

07:46 JDS:
I live in Maryland, right? I'm a member of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and they still use stickers. You join, you still get a sticker, people slap that sticker on their car, you see a couple people in your neighborhood wearing the sticker. You're like, well, that's kind of interesting, then look into it, and you see that, oh, the values that are underpinning that little sticker are actually ones you share. And, so the wheel turns. I think the biggest things I would highlight in the last 30 years are format and network diversity. What we call digital is now on televisions, it's on tablets, it's on phones. In a lot of campaigns, more than two thirds of the visits you'll generate will be on mobile devices so mobile plays a big role. That diversity in format and network combined with this sort of small "d" democratizing force of user-generated content to generate pressure.

08:45 JDS:
And a great example in real time, is say you have a C S R campaign and you have a bunch of normal people out there every day people tweeting or posting or creating videos, people with a lot more reach, right? A celebrity or a prominent person in that space, or a prominent academic or a policy maker, has a lot more likelihood of noting that and latching onto it and promoting it, because again, they also share the same goals, the same values, and they view it as value to sort of jump on board.

09:19 JDS:
So the bandwagon effect is a real motivator. More diversity in formats, more convergence in strategy, and the elevation of content that's a lot closer to users and user generated than the old way, which was a lot like, here's our press release, here's our action center. Go send these emails, write these letters.

09:43 MM:
Great. That's very helpful. And you alluded to AI, and I don't want to get off on a whole segment on AI, but this might be an appropriate time to just say, how does AI contribute to this evolution as well?

10:01 JDS:
I think we don't know yet in a large part, right? It's similar to the rest of the world. But we know that in CSR campaigns, there is a real need for the processing of a large amount of information into easily human readable and understandable terms. And that's something AI's really good at. I think it's more about, we're going to see what implementations people come up with, because at this point, like I said, I think it's an open question. Open AI and chat GPT have sort of provided a tool set that uses a number of different models that engineers and strategists can use to build different kinds of solutions. And there's a lot of entities out there providing enterprise managed services in AI. But I think everyday people still don't have experience of how AI is going to impact organizing.

11:00 JDS:
It would mostly be dependent on the people that are going to develop the next set of tools. One area where I have seen successful implementations of AI is in writing suggestions or writing assistance. So if you're trying to compose a tweet about a certain topic, AI can suggest things that would make your arguments stronger, or that would uncover another thread that you might want to think about. Like it is in a lot of applications now, I think AI is really about improving something, but not replacing something. And we'll see. I mean, it's just like in all these other sectors, I think it's going to be really interesting to see what solutions are architected and sort of what rises to the top.

11:50 MM:
Okay. I know that one of the things you mentioned in terms of the evolution is that it's become more multidimensional, and more integrated in a way and, kind of cross sectoral as well. It's going across different dimensions. If you had to just pull these pieces apart and put them into little categories or buckets, is there a way to take the kind of the digital options, the menu out there and say, okay, these in terms of campaign would be one kind of cluster, these over here would be a kind of a second cluster.

12:32 JDS:
Sure. If you think about the umbrella of digital, it's sort of a flow chart. So the first decision is something paid or unpaid, right? Are you just activating an audience using an existing

technology? Or are you going out there trying to engage people with paid communications? Because advertising's a very loose term now, especially with digital, right? You're talking -- it could be influencers, it could be sponsored content, it could be paid social ads, it could be streaming ads.

13:10 JDS:
And the audience targeting behind that is sort of an intentionally selected audience, right? Whereas unpaid, it's a more or less organizational fixed audience of these are our supporters, these are the people we're going to talk to. And that would include not just like email subscribers, but social network followers.

13:33 JDS:
So if we think say organization X is putting out a press release, they're also going to send an email. They're also going to post a tweet, they're going to post on Facebook, they might post to other social networks. That's all part of unpaid direct communication. And like I said, those audiences are fixed to your followers, and there's certainly potential energy to reach new people via social media. That's sort of the point, right? So you'd have paid and unpaid, and within unpaid you'd have email, and you have social media; in paid, you might have sponsored content, you might have direct advertising and social media. You might have direct advertising via programmatic media. So I think those are sort of the how it starts to sort, so paid - unpaid. And then what's the tactic within the paid and unpaid world?

14:30 JDS:
And ideally, when we're architecting campaigns, you're looking to leverage as many of those pieces in both buckets as possible. Your goal is to often to create an ecosystem of message and an ecosystem of action where you have all of these; you're not making choices between, or optimizing among those buckets. You're trying to connect as many of them and integrate as many of them as possible. So paid, unpaid, email, social, on the one hand; advertising sponsored content, influencer-based content on the other. And there's still traditional forms of communication. I still have clients who buy billboards. They're very, very visible, right? Because they're placed through an exchange. It's actually technically a digital product. It's a digital billboard, but it looks like anything else. And those exist in the paid world, what we call the out-of-home world or the digital out-of-home world. So that's billboards, bus stops, dentist's office, gas stations, all sorts of advertising products that exist that can help create that ecosystem.

15:45 MM:
And are those electronic, online, or they're digital, not actual physical billboards, on the side of a highway, for example?

15:57 JDS:
The digital out-of-home products are all out in the world. So, yes, at the gas pump. Whereas if we're thinking about normal, paid communications, there's going to be social, right? That's any social media network that allows you to advertise. There's programmatic, so you're using what's being talked about or the affinities of certain audiences to serve them content, to

placement, where you're literally saying, okay, New York Times, I want my ad to show right there.

16:28 Speaker:
And the reality is, I think in modern campaigns, all of these things become integrated. So what you'll find, as people do more and more of their own research, they learn more and more about the space, they'll see the interconnectedness of it all. And it's not really about either or. It's about 'and' so efforts, networks, creative, paid, unpaid efforts -- all are additive in nature to increasing the efficacy of a campaign.

17:03 MM:
It's interesting to talk in terms of that ecosystem, because one of the things that I talk about in terms of corporate campaigns is it's so important to come in with multiple tracks on a company. There can be a field track, a digital track, a shareholder track, a legal track, a legislative track, for example. But even when you get into those tracks, particularly into the digital track, then that breaks into subcategories as well it sounds like. And again, the goal is, and I think the key word you said is, and, not or. It's how many can you activate.

17:43 MM:
Let's use that as kind of a segue into -- if you're an NGO and you really want to develop this digital track of the campaign, what principles do you need to keep in mind as you approach making your decisions about the digital campaign? What are the factors, for example, that'll really influence where you go and what it looks like?

18:14 JDS:
I think it really comes down to getting back to the fundamentals and the basics of the overall strategy. What outcome are we trying to achieve? Like defining success. Who -- what's our audience? And to your point, there might be legislators, there might be policymakers, there might be press and journalists, there might be advocates and activists on the ground. There'll be many different audiences, but understanding them, and then mindfully thinking through what aspects of our strategy are design, what tactics can we employ to reach those people? And that's really the third is reach. So how are you going to generate impressions? Just putting things out into the world is good, but it's not nearly enough to move the needle, especially in a lot of these conversations where the other side has a really, really loud megaphone.

19:18 JDS:
And then budget, how do you find efficiency? In a lot of our, especially in our climate work, when you go up against gas, oil, these kinds of entities, we can't get anywhere near the kinds of generational investments they make in moving, not just the message their way, but the culture. So I think it becomes a question of aligning your budget to the right audience to generate some positive results towards your goal. But a lot of program directors go into a conversation with not necessarily having done the due diligence of balancing those three factors. I guess the last would be creative. Develop stuff people want to watch and develop stuff people want to read and ground your efforts in real stories of real impact that aren't academic and disconnected

and contrived but are real world and relatable. And, culture mindful. There's a lot of value in trying to reach people, whether they're policymakers, press or individuals, meet them on their own terms content wise. So, for the academic crowd, an academic argument or a specific report being released might be a really big deal but that's not necessarily what people on the ground are going to respond to. They're going to respond to actual vocalizations, verbalizations and expressions of authentic people about what we're trying to achieve collectively.

21:18 JDS:
The thing that I think we have going for us is that in a lot of these fights where we're vastly out budgeted is, they may have the resources, but often our side has the people and has a lot of individual voices being activated at the same time, can counteract a lot of budget. But understanding those things going in, again, what are we saying? Who are we talking to? How are we going to reach them? And, how is our budget best utilized in that effort? I think these (answers to these questions) become the bones of program design.

22:05 MM:
You know, I would assume too, that part of it is just how much outrage does the issue you're talking about create in an audience? There's a certain kind of wildfire that campaigns are trying to start out there in terms of public attention. And it seemed like one of the factors is some organizations I know go in and say, this is a really important issue to us. But in fact, it's not; it's more intellectual. It might be injustice, et cetera, but it's just not one that's going to have a lot of popular appeal or outrage associated with it. Have you seen that, where they go in and they spend a lot of money or a lot of energy, but it just doesn't generate the kind of audience response, and that actually can backfire against the campaign if companies are seeing that -- look how much money they spent, look at what they did, and look at how few responses they're really getting.

23:11 JDS:
I think there is real risk in not completing strong research and understanding what kind of messages are persuasive, what messages do people recall? How effective is a given piece of message or creative -- all of that is important. And I do experience what you're saying is that an issue might be exactly in the wheelhouse of a water conservation organization. And the statistics and the data and studies and all of these things are heavily, heavily tilted in favor of our argument. But understanding in the current time, not as a multi-year, multi-decade guidepost, but in that little snapshot in time, in research, how we explain this to people is really important.

24:27 JDS:
Triangulation is important as well. And you and I have experience with this, but sometimes it's the threat of action. It's meeting a corporation, organization, a board of directors or a leadership group on their own terms with real activist horsepower and saying, this is our message: We know it is effective. Here is all the research where it's effective. Let's have a conversation about how we get you to listen to what we're saying. And if nothing else, begin a dialogue about how we can achieve change.

25:02 JDS:
Whether you start in the public to pressure decision makers and stakeholders, or you start with decision makers and stakeholders and pressure them to get on board and start a conversation, is an important choice because moving public opinion in real ways is massively expensive. There are always going to be campaigns that have viral moments because of a multitude of reasons, but it's not something typically that you can rely on happening. So how do you take that abstract issue and package it in a way; what is the triangulation of our audience to our strategic message to get them closer to what we want them to do? So if we only have a half million dollars, and we're talking, communicating in the state of California, it's a ton of people. It's a massive amount of people, it's not going to go incredibly far in terms of reach and recall with the general public, but aligned to 5,000 decision makers, principles and stakeholders, that could do real work. Again, that goes back to your previous question of how do you balance those inputs on the way, at the planning stage about defining success, a realistic budget, audiences and creative, and how does that get us to our goals?

26:26 JDS:
I think a lot of corporations would rather not have a public fight, and a lot of them are very resource rich and would go a long way to avoid a public fight, which I think sometimes provides an opportunity to begin a dialogue that will get us further downfield than just attempting to set them on fire every which way. Like any other entity, corporations and large organizations and elected officials, they respond to the facts and the circumstances that are right in front of them, sometimes more rapidly than they would to perceived notions of support or advocacy out in the general public, among customers or among the voting public. Does that make sense?

27:14 MM:
It does. Absolutely. And so what it suggests to me too, is that I'll bet a lot of the times before you begin a project, the group that comes to you has already done some kind of national polling or national survey research or focus groups, just to get a sense of how the public responds, how big of an issue is this for them and for that matter, what arguments they find most persuasive in terms of shifting their opinion or generating their support.

27:46 JDS:
That's the goal. That would be the goal, to do research first, to really understand an issue first. But you know, it doesn't mean that it always happens that way, because sometimes we have clients who have a very specific thing that they're pushing up against, a specific implementation of a specific bill that's being framed a certain way in the media, but that is not actually correct, something we're working on now. So how do you begin to engage them. Those projects, generally funders and program managers, managing directors have a really good idea of the effect that they want to create among a very specific population of people. In that sense, there's no way to poll that universe. There's no way you're going to put these policy makers in press and academics and thought leaders in a focus group, right? That's never going to happen. In those programs, generally folks come in with a pretty succinct idea of what it is they want to say. At that point, it's trying to be a catalyst for creating something really watchable and

readable from that. I bring that up only to say it doesn't always begin with research. Sometimes programs know who they want to reach specifically. They know what they won't want to tell them, and they're either not engaging in the research or it's sort of unnecessary.

29:19 MM:
I want to go back to something you alluded to earlier too. So it's not just a matter of knowing what to say, but also who to say it to, and given the amount of expense that's required, it suggests that you really want to be as targeted as possible in terms of focusing on making sure that those people you want to reach get the message. And, one concept that was relatively new to me when we worked with you was the idea of geofencing.

29:53 MM:
And, while I'd love to keep that a secret, it just feels like it's not a secret. The reality is that there's certain audiences, like if we want to reach a certain CEO as we did in the campaign we were talking about, we geofenced in that whole kind of corporate headquarters setting, and the employees who are highly concentrated around there, and then it would probably be, of course, many of their acquaintances around there as well. And I know that that had huge influence in getting the CEO to actually meet and talk about a solution. Are there other kinds of targeting decisions like that or things that you can make a smaller budget go a long ways?

30:39 JDS:
Absolutely. I think efficiency is the watch word in program design for digital. Generally, programs aren't going to be able to carry a broadcast budget. It's just not possible whether it's national or statewide. So we need to engage efficiency on all levels, none more critically than the target and audience development segment. Who do we actually need to reach and how are we actually going to reach them, and how do we make our advertising, our paid media dollar go as far as possible?

31:18 JDS:
And a lot of times that means understanding the data, the underlying data. Sometimes it has to do with geography, like you mentioned, and technology is to a place now where it's not even just geographies anymore. It's specific suites within complexes, it's buildings within campus. There's also a ton of runway and individual data.

31:48 JDS:
So one of the things we'd like to do in CSR campaigns is leverage B2B advertising solutions in CSR campaigns because they allow us to discover all the officers or SVPs or people in certain segments that are going to be well and squarely in our target audience. Absolutely, if we agree that efficiency is our watch word and that we are in some ways bringing a knife to a gunfight in a lot of these conversations, strategic audience development can be the difference between having a successful result or not. I think that if you're truly engaging efficiency, you're always trying to winnow your audience, if your goal going in is not broadcast goal, it's about that strategic audience development and how do you get as targeted as possible so that you can deliver the most frequency, so that you can create the biggest impact among that audience. So

rather than a hundred thousand people seeing two ads, 5,000 people are seeing 50 ads over the same period of time.

33:02 MM:
I get it. I think that efficiency is a critical one. I was going to ask you if you were to rank order the effectiveness of different digital kinds of tactics, what would be that ladder of engagement? We think of that in terms of, for example, with activists in terms of field, what are we asking them to do? We send them an alert, we ask them to sign a petition. Then maybe we send another alert, and ask them to send money. Then maybe we send something that says, tailor an email to your senator or to this, and add your own comments to it. And it kind of moves up the line. Then we say, show up at a rally; then we say, show up at a rally and bring five people or broadcast it to your networks. And we say, show up at a rally and engage in civil disobedience. There's this ladder of engagement. Do you see a ladder of engagement in the digital realm as well? And that's kind of assuming budget weren't an issue. How does that ladder of engagement or impact escalate?

34:25 JDS:
I think as you described in large part, you're going from actions that are quick and easy and don't require much commitment to going to jail for civil disobedience. So it's a data exercise in terms of managing audiences to move people through those ladders. In terms of prioritizing the ladder or prioritizing tactics within the ladder, I think it's kind of the wrong question because every campaign is going to have a different input and a different definition of success, a different audience.

35:07 JDS:
So while for membership based organizations, you sign up to join something and you get a message back welcoming you with more information about different aspects of that topic, then you might get a message a couple days later to volunteer. Those are good. I mean, the latter is a best practice in organizing, but I think you also run the risk in smaller efforts of just out optimizing yourself because you don't have enough people moving through the ladder. You're better off just hitting everybody with everything that you need and giving them a lot of different asks. And again, trying to tell stories. I think much more about like the why, than the what. So instead of sign this petition or share this content, that might be the ask. That might be at the end, but what's the petition really do, anything? What's the donation going towards? Regardless of where you are in the ladder, compelling content and a compelling message are still really important.

36:24 JDS:
So if you had an incredible message that was really thought provoking and poignant, you wouldn't just send it to one 10th of your subscribers because they're at that point in the ladder, right? You just send it to everybody and engage everybody. Because you're trying to inspire action, not complete a ladder in some ways. I think there's a real desire out there for data-driven and optimized campaigns, but also a lot of optimizing for optimizing sake, whereas it's just more important to pick a lane, make a commitment, and go.

37:03 JDS:
Because most of these efforts aren't multi quarter, multi-year efforts. Most of them are smaller than that. Most of these campaigns are happening in a crucible. I think the ladder is important, but I encourage people not to rank tactics because ultimately you want everything you can get your hands on and free things are free. And then it just becomes what's the nature of our pay campaign? What's the nature of the relationship of our budget to our plan.

37:37 MM:
Which leads me to the question, in terms of its impact, how do companies measure impact? I do recall where at one point, a group came to us one time when we were organizing some major climate campaigns and said, what we can do in your campaign against this company is we can gather big data and we can show you how the number of times this campaign is mentioned, what influencers are getting engaged, what their reach is. We can show you the trajectory of the campaign. Do companies do that same kind of analysis potentially if they're thinking "Whoa, this looks like a pretty serious campaign, we need to track whether it's growing or whether it's dying."

38:36 JDS:
I think organizations at scale are all, or if they're not, they probably should be engaging in some sort of social listening. Understanding sentiment: 'Is it growing? Is it ebbing? Is it positive? Is it negative?' is important. Ultimately, corporations are going to define success with sales. Everything else is a liability. So sentiment analysis and sentiment tracking for them will be really important because it'll be part of the feedback loop of all of their outreach and all their marketing, et cetera.

39:18 JDS:
For issue-based campaigns, if you were operating at scale, it could be really effective. A lot of traditional methods are still really important. One from the eighties that survived a hundred percent is letters to the editor, not only because they run, but because that provides content that you could deploy in future campaigns of look at this prominent person or authentic local person who's got a really well thought out position that agrees with us.

39:53 JDS:
Right? And vice versa, corporations are going to view those with raised antenna because simply more attuned, they're reprinted online and, earned media has a real role to play there. I think in a lot of efforts, traditional communications, and earned are undervalued. So right there in our overall strategy, if we're thinking about paid and unpaid, another bucket under, in our unpaid world, is *earned*, is having either consulting or internal resources that have some relationships among the journalists that you want to talk to and can reach them and open lines of communication to field arguments, to field points of view, the combination. If you're a large organization, you're a corporation or you're an NGO, you care a great deal about the traditional letter to the editor world, you care a great deal about social media and listening for what people are saying about you and you care a great deal about earned.

41:06 JDS:
What are the headlines that engage your issue, or if you're a corporation, engage you or your product. It's worth noting that some companies have reached such a gargantuan size that it doesn't really matter anymore. I think Google would probably be an example of that. Meta would be an example of that. If you look at a shareable these days, every shareable will have five or six networks, but three of them are meta owned: Facebook, Instagram, and Threads, with Threads in it's infancy, but actually growing at a pretty decent clip. So when you think about corporations like that, or Amazon is another good example, they can take a much more *devil may care* attitude because they know they're going to take a ton of heat for almost all the decisions they make. But like any corporation, they're acting almost exclusively out of concern for their bottom line, which is intertwined with better products and intertwined with those other metrics, but they care less about short-term backlash.

42:12 JDS:
The dynamic that you do want to get to is understanding what are corporations most fearful of? What's the story they absolutely do not want and will get their attention? What is the piece of creative that's really going to give them pause among their own customers? Target is a live example of this.

42:43 JDS:
I worked at Target at headquarters in Minneapolis for a number of years, in their Innovations group, and before that at the early target.com. And, it's a very values-driven and mission-driven corporation. There's been DEI (Diversity Equity & Inclusion) focus there for decades, including when I was there, and a very open, welcoming, corporate culture that valued diversity.

43:14 JDS:
But, the other side, the right has been incredibly efficient at weaponizing completely made-up information about the LGBTQ plus community that they then deploy against corporations. Anheuser-Busch is an example, and Target is an example of corporations that took real stock price hits because of the perceived furor over their actions among customers, which I think we find upon almost entirely on further examination, is a manufactured state of balance from the press.

43:53 JDS:
Most of these efforts, most of these things are drops in the ocean, but in search for stories with heat and engaging in the age old journalistic practice of false equivalency, they get elevated and ultimately, corporations can pay real prices. So, the right has been incredibly effective at weaponizing culture against corporations to achieve share of voice. And it's a really dangerous sort of evolution in their strategy because corporations are, by definition, fearful. Aside from the behemoths, even large national retailers and international beverage companies can still be affected by weaponized corporate culture campaigns. So finding out what they're afraid of and how it intersects with the outcome that we want, specifically viewed through the lens of a customer is, I think an important way to visualize the overall strategy when you're not going to

spend millions and millions and millions of dollars on broadcast television, making people think a certain thing.

45:16 MM:
When you look out there at campaigns you've been involved with, or in campaigns that you've observed, digital campaigns or at the digital track of a campaign, I'm primarily interested in corporate, but potentially political as well, are there certain ones that you go, this was remarkably effective and here's a lesson that it teaches us? Then I'll follow that up with, here's one that was, if you could share it or here's one that was remarkably ineffective and here's the lesson we could take from that. But I'd love to start with the effective ones.

46:00 JDS:
In politics, I would mention the Fetterman senate campaign in Pennsylvania. Senator Fetterman's a really unique person. He just is! He has been his entire career. He's different. He's got a real deserved brand as a truth teller. And I'd also say he has an edge. He has got a fearlessness about him, their folks really did a great job of allowing him to be himself and in fact, sort of politically monetizing who he is.

46:44 JDS:
As different, as edgy, as not typical. I think that was particularly well done because a lot of consultants, I think, would potentially be like, 'Hey, now we have to put on a suit and tie.' And they just kept him in the hoodie. Strategically they kept him in the hoodie. And I think that was really smart. Trying to make him someone he's not is a bad idea, and trying to be boring and status quo is also a bad idea. Another that was, I think, really effective, you could just open YouTube today, right? And there are loads of creators who now have brands who sell services, who built their entire operation from them and a camera and nothing else.

47:46 JDS:
They're flying completely with the power they generate and the content they generate day in, day out that has to do with whatever thing, whatever concept or activity or hobby or food or aspect of culture. Those are all, in some ways success stories because they're generating huge amounts of subscribers and huge amounts of views and ultimately revenue and brand recognition from whole cloth.

48:18 JDS:
Things that went poorly: I think you could argue that the Bud Light campaign with Dylan was started from a place of a well-intentioned, authentic piece of outreach to a minority community, to transgender Americans. And by sort of the ham-fisted way that they rolled it out and the lack of management and control in their message, and the fact that they didn't really stand up for what they actually believed in, what they said they believed in. They didn't back it up at all in any real way, allowed the other side to just co-opt them completely and turn what I think was an authentic gesture into an example of what not to do, and created an environment where corporations are going to be less likely to engage marginalized communities because of their fear of retribution from extreme right-wing culture warriors.

49:26 JDS:
Another example I think was in the methane fight, in the overall gas fight. Any inkling of the government taking away things from people, that's not actually in our policy at all. Nobody's advocating for ripping gas stoves out of people's homes. But as soon as the press can get anybody anywhere to say that, or to even hint at that, that becomes the headline everywhere, and it sets the entire movement back because ultimately we're trying to educate consumers and create narratives that allow people to make informed decisions on cost to take advantage of tax credits that were hard fought and hard won in Congress, and make the right choice to reduce their emissions and to support the overall, not just economically but culturally support the fight against climate change gets wiped away because a bunch of message promulgates that for some reason government's going to come and rip your stove out of your home and pay you a bunch of money when the reality is government's not going to do anything like that, but they will give you money to make a smarter choice that actually saves you money and does something about climate change.

50:48 JDS:
So sometimes really well-intentioned efforts, deployed poorly or managed poorly, can have deleterious effects in the overall progression of a conversation or a movement. Those are some just recent examples I think that you could point to and say, wow, that was really good, or that didn't go the way we wanted.

51:12 MM:
Those are really good examples. And your point about Fetterman is a good one too, for NGOs, because in fact, they are edgier, the ones that, on the continuum of advocacy, are willing to do field actions and go after branded corporations and expose certain malpractice. They do tend to leverage the fact that they're speaking the truth. They're willing to be edgy or they're willing to take more chances. I think of always talking with conservatives and they go, well, where's Greenpeace hanging off the building? I always knew it was an issue. I may not agree with them, but when, if Greenpeace was hanging off their buildings or Rainforest Action Network, I went, okay, wait a minute. People are willing to put their bodies on the line. There was an edginess that really I think helped spread the message and attract attention. And what I hear you saying is that that can work in terms of spreading the message.

52:19 JDS:
I think it cuts both ways. In Europe now, mostly in Western Europe, the UK, a lot of climate activists are doing their best to interrupt daily life. We had the US open this past weekend and a guy glued his feet to the floor. Of course, that room is packed with celebrities. Everything stops, players have to leave, and now that is real edge to the campaign. I think Greta would be an example of, she just calls it as she sees it and because she's really young and has a very sharp perspective, she's been really effective at getting attention that way. And I feel like those are all good things, ultimately because, so what if you interrupted a tennis tournament, so what if you delayed traffic for one hour on one day, but the people that were sitting in traffic might be your

allies and might be not as understanding. The people for whom going to the open was a lifelong dream and you brought your two kids and the whole experience becomes colored by a conversation that is really hard to have.

53:49 JDS:
Is it absolutely the right thing and, good for us to be confronted with those questions, especially in uncomfortable environments? Sure. But I think for a lot of everyday people, it also allows them to marginalize the movement as, like they're way out of the mainstream, when in fact, our positions are very mainstream. So I think there's a difference between sort of risky and edgy. I would think of Fetterman as edgy, but not risky. But I think that Greenpeace historically has been more risky and edgy because they stake up. In some ways I think Greenpeace is the model for everyone, because they set the yardstick really far downstream and said, this is where we're starting, right? In the sixties, this is where we're starting on oil and gas. This is where we're starting on maritime issues and development. This is where we're starting on sustainability and protecting oceans. And that staking out, that negotiating position allowed them to pull a big part of the movement a lot further to where they were knowing that you're not going to get everybody all the way there. It becomes a gravitational effect of bringing people closer to your position because of, not just the scale, but the attention-grabbing nature of your campaigns.

55:22 JDS:
The last is, I think edgy doesn't try to be everything to everybody. Risky says, I don't care entirely about how this is perceived because I'm doing the right thing. And if we make it to television, that's a win. Each campaign really has to understand where they want to land on that ground. But I agree with your point that in general, I think NGOs and CSR orgs and programs are too risk averse, both in culture and creative. Authenticity is a far higher priority than trying to find the safest, most effective position instead just calling it like you see it.

56:23 MM:
Thank you. I couldn't agree with you more. I really think that in fact, Greenpeace has set the norm and groups like Rainforest Action Network, now Stand.Earth, there's a whole host of them that were pulled more into that edgy zone. Any last thoughts or questions that I haven't asked you that you might want to leave for campaigns?

56:58 JDS:
Sure. For all modern campaigners from not just the digital perspective, but the generalized media perspective, everyone should pay attention to and really engage some intellectual horsepower on considering convergence. That is, that what's happening online is the same as what's happening on streaming is the same that's happening on social is the same that's happening on broadcast tv. There really is no media separation anymore.

57:31 JDS:
If you turn on the television these days, you'll see ads with vertical video. They literally have the whole TV screen, and they're showing you a vertical video and they're doing that really

intentionally. So companies and organizations and operations that are really engaging convergence, there is no separation between this media, it is all one, and ultimately that's driven by authenticity and creating content people want to watch and creating content people want to read that furthers our goals, has to be front and center. A lot of programs suffer from compartmentalization and suffer from the development of silos. And it's, 'here's what we're doing in the organizing and field space.' 'Here's what we're doing in the direct communication space.' 'Here's what we're doing in the earned space.' 'Here's what we're doing on the paid broadcast space, and here's what we're doing on the paid digital space.' All those folks need to be at the same table with a mindfulness and awareness that everybody's got to make the same movie, and it doesn't matter where that's showing up. Media and content are simply media and content now. Whether they appear in someone's feed, appear in a paid ad, appear in a letter to the editor, or as a call in on a radio show, it's all an impression now, and you generate a call in that's a really thought provoking question and response from an oil and gas executive on NPR, and then that's clipped and moved to influencers and sponsored content and blasted out via email and made into a video and put on social and activated via action centers. It's all hands all the time. I would just encourage people to do their best, not to get lost in the weeds. Trust teams drive an integrated strategy that really embraces convergence and then let people make decisions and run. The last thing I would say is the tenet that more is lost from inaction than wrong action is almost always true in our conversations. From our CSR work, these things burn hot and fast, and you got to be in there at the right time in order to create the result that you're after. So, crisp decision making is a hallmark I see from all campaigns that are successful. They make crisp decisions and move.

1:00:12 JDS:
I think there's a great number of examples out there of things that went well and things that haven't. But I think everybody agrees that on the whole, we've lost ground. We lost a lot of ground in the eighties and nineties and in the early 00's. We're struggling to regain some of that momentum. We're almost certainly not going to keep warming to safe thresholds and the stories that we tell and the programs we run and the campaigns people wage in this space over the next 20 years could have implications for 200 years. Just to try to limit the damage that we're all going to experience and our kids and our kids' kids are going to experience from climate change in particular. So it's not just an exercise. Everyone at all levels who's engaged in this fight is important. I had a client once go to an incredibly, this is many years ago, close recount. So statewide elections decided by hundreds of voters. And in the movement, like that election, every single vote will matter. Every single action matters because time really authentically, is running out on us. And CSR has such an important role to play in getting these corporate entities and corporate enterprises to act differently, to be allies and to help us make meaningful progress towards limiting warming and on a whole host of other issues. I was grateful to be asked and happy to participate, and I hope this is helpful to you in your content development and to others down the road.

1:02:05 MM:
It's been incredibly helpful. Thank you. And, actually that's the perfect place to end this interview. I really appreciate it. JD Schlough, Well & Lighthouse, thank you so much. And, no doubt, we will be talking again in future campaigns.

1:02:25 JDS:
Fantastic. Thanks again for the invite. I appreciate it very much.

1:02:28 MM:
My pleasure. Thank you.

1:02:30 JDS:
You bet.