



Richard: Gemma, thanks for joining me! How are you?

Gemma Telford: I am good. Thank you.

Richard: Cool. Thank you for joining me today. Now, you have been in the IT arena for quite some time. Tell us a little bit about your background and where you come from before you set up the IT Marketing Agency.

Gemma: Okay I have been in the IT channel for a number of years now. I guess my first kind of big role was of a Head of Marketing at Ingram Micro. So I headed a marketing team there of about 15 people, looking after all vendor and reseller marketing for the UK Channel. And I left there a few years back now. I went back to Agency Land and then to IT Marketing Agency in the spring of 2013.

Richard: Cool. How have things gone since you set things up?

Gemma: They have gone really well and the business is good, going from strength to strength. We are now up to 10 people this year and we've got a number of clients on board that were working with across a whole range of things from strategy, to marketing execution, across content social, web marketing, and digital whole range. It has been actually a brilliant year.

Richard: What does a typical client look like for your business?

Gemma: We work across the channel so we work with vendors, and resellers, and DCs. I think the strength about what we do is we offer marketing as a service. So we have got a range of services that we can wrap around depending on what that client needs.

We are not prescriptive about how we do marketing. It is very much looking at how marketing and sales are aligned, and what the end goals of the businesses are and what they are trying to get to, and really helping them from a strategy down viewpoint to realise those goals.

Richard: Obviously, we have known each other for a while now and I am very aware of your experience within the IT market as a whole. But there are going to be some IT solution providers watching today and thinking, "Oh great. Another marketing person starting at their own marketing agency." Why is what you are doing different to any other marketing business out there?

Gemma: Because we center very much on marketing for the channel. I have been in marketing now for a long time but I think there is a real lack of marketing agencies who know the channel really well.

Obviously, having worked Ingram, I know the distributed channel very well. I have worked with a number of vendors independently and also worked with resellers. I worked with Network Group for a while helping them set up their strategic marketing. And I have worked with individual resellers.

And I think the good thing about the team that we have put together is they are real experts in the channel. We understand the dynamics of how the channel works and we understand how to leverage that to get the best out of it.

Richard: Let us talk about resellers, IT solution providers for a moment. In your experience, what are the biggest mistakes that MSPs and IT solution providers make when it comes to marketing?

Gemma: I think the biggest mistake that MSPs and solution providers make is not to do any marketing. Many businesses are set up by often a technical person and it is just not something they know about or they are not comfortable with. And apart from that I think really is a lack of knowledge.

What does good marketing look like? There is always that joke about marketing being the covering development, the branding, elements, and things like that are really important. But again for us, marketing is always linked to sales. And it is about getting that end result and the return on your investment. I think In terms of mistakes that people make, it is just one from not knowing where to go and what good marketing looks like.

Richard: What about the free resources that are out there? You come a from a vendor world, from the distributor world there's many available from marketing development funds. There is co-branded marketing. Current IT solution providers may--I could say may do--but can IT solution providers use this material and get good results?

Gemma: Yes, certainly I think there is a whole plethora of different materials out there from vendors and distributors. And I am sure in a limited way that can certainly help resellers it's certainly than doing nothing.

But I think there are a couple of problems around that. One is the vendor message is going out to market and that ties you into that vendor. And secondly, there is no targeting around your own businesses. No messaging about what your business does that is different to anyone else in that space. Why is solution provider is X better than solution provider Y? What do you do that is different? What can you bring to the party?

And I think the other danger is that some of the big vendor brands are sending out campaigns nationally all at the same time. So potentially, your end user customer might get exactly the same email from you and the competitor all at the same time. Again, there is nothing there to differentiate your business.

Richard: The vast majority of MSPs that I work with tends to be owner/managers who are technical in nature. And they almost feel, across the board, almost embarrass about putting themselves out there blowing their own trumpets.

And that is existentially what marketing is, putting yourself out there and saying how good you are.

How do IT business owners overcome their reluctance to do marketing and that very British thing about not telling people how good you are?

Gemma: It is something that, believe or not, I sympathize. You got me to do this video and I am terrible at putting myself out there personally as well so I completely get that.

Working with a good marketing agency, what they'll help you to do is to draw that story out of you. It does not mean sitting down in a room and you say, "Okay." What we do that is great is actually through a conversation you can help people to identify what are the strengths in their business. What have they done really well?

And often when you get them talking about clients that they have worked with or projects that they have worked on, it becomes clear that there are key things that they are doing right. And sometimes it is just as simple as saying, "Well, that was great wasn't it?" And they go, "Oh yes."

Richard: In your experience for Managed Service Providers, what is the biggest challenge for them working with a marketing agency that might meet down their local BNI or breakfast networking group. What are the biggest challenges they might come across working with a marketing agency like that?

Gemma: I think the thing is that unlike case finder marketing agency who specializes in their arena. While the principles of marketing are the same regardless of which vertical you are in or which space. I think that someone that you meet at BNI would probably be doing marketing and branding for a number of businesses. They won't have the in depth knowledge. They won't have the technical understanding of what the solution providers are trying to get across. They won't necessarily understand from an end user point of view. What are the things that those end users are looking for?

Again, it is not just getting out the messaging about you and your business. It is understanding what the audience is looking for from you and helping to provide that content back to them.

Richard: What about when it comes to budget? A lot of IT solution providers would be thinking that, "We need new clients through the door. We want new clients through the door." But it seems like an awful lot of money if we go to a

marketing agency they are going to charge us the earth for these big productions, and these big campaigns, and everything. Realistically, from your experience in the industry, is that the case or working with marketing teams do you get a good return of investments?

Gemma: I think that it easy to spend a lot of money on marketing and a lot of that can be around doing things that look really good or thinking you have to have a professionally printed brochure and you need 5,000 of them. And actually it is straightforward these days particularly with social media and things like that to develop a core of content that works for you really well and works hard for you. And it does not need to be that expensive.

The other thing to consider about in investment in marketing is that it does a number of things for you so it can help you often cross sales and in your existing customers as well. You also need to consider what the lifetime value of new clients is.

So you might be investing 5,000 in marketing. But if it bring in five new clients, they are spending 5,000 pounds a year with you and they're likely to be a costumer for five years actually when you look at that return on that investment it is much greater than your initial investment.

I think one other thing to consider is that marketing is not a quick fix. You do not send out an email and one month then you have five new customers. It is a drip feed. And actually some recent researchers showed that if a customer has never heard of you, getting from never having heard of you to buying process can actually take up to seven or eight touches. You need to be out there consistently with your messaging.

Richard: Which lead us to one of the biggest challenges that IT companies have in that they do not have a consistent pipeline. They typically think about marketing when times are getting tough. And by then it's often too late is that true?

Gemma: Absolutely yes. Again, I think it is one of those things that something we talked about earlier is that some businesses are waiting until everything is perfect before they get going on the marketing push. But actually you can do things that have an impact immediatly and everything does not need to be perfect but you do need to keep going out there the same as you do with your sales effort. You do not suddenly pick up the phone when you realize that there are no orders in that month. You need to be building those conversations and relationships overtime.

Richard: It is interesting something that you said earlier on about upselling. Most people think about marketing as bringing in new clients but of course, for Managed Service Providers watching and listening in today. Across the board, nearly everyone I speak to has not sold every solution that they provide. Not nearly every solution to all of their customers. Talk to me a little bit about upselling and the amount of money that MSP is leaving on the table there.

Gemma: Yes, absolutely. The hardest part of any new customer or new customer win is actually the bit before you got them over the threshold. If you're looking at your existing customer base and looking what else you can sell to them, those people already know you, they already trust you, and they already made the decision to buy from you.

Like you say Richard it's leaving money on the table if you are not selling those solutions. But also, you want the best for your customers and perhaps there are things that they are not aware of that that they could be buying from you or that they should be doing for their business. Different services, manage antivirus, back up, and all these kinds of things.

They often go for one thing that's your in but if you are not telling them about the other things that you are doing, you are doing them a disservice but you are also doing a disservice for your own business.

Richard: Indeed and a lot of the services that MSPs sell as well as increasing recurring revenue, it actually decreases their customer support. It lowers their customer support. MSPs make sure you are doing upselling to your existing client's market and to your existing clients as well.

Moving forward with your business now, you have got a new initiative that I am involved with. Would you like to tell everyone listening and watching a little bit more about that?

Gemma: Sure. We are launching the [MSP Marketing Academy](#) and it is basically a managed solution for Managed Service Providers. It is marketing and service. And there are a number of different options according to what people are looking for but essentially, what it delivers is a monthly marketing campaign which is then diagnostic and all the collateral around that.

With each campaign there will be an email, a landing page, a blog, some kind of thought leadership, or download document, and some suggested social media or output. And it is written by experts in the channel. It is UK based so people with lots of experience who understand those kind of issues. And it is

available for people to take in as a campaign in the bottom push out themselves through their own systems or as a fully managed service.

Richard: Again, that is what we were saying about the upselling. It strikes me that it would be really easy for an MSP to pick up one of your campaigns and to use that to market in their existing clients.

Gemma: Absolutely yes. And that is definitely what we are hoping. And again, a number of the MSPs that we've talked to have said that they want to do that because there is a number of clients that are only buying one service from them. And actually reaching out to their existing clients and to new clients with professionally branded material which is going out through platforms that help to measure that return on investment as well and give you good intelligence coming back from that. It is really important.

Richard: For those businesses who are interested in the MSP Marketing Academy but again, their concern of maybe they have done marketing before and marketing does not work for us, they've had a bad experience perhaps or they are thinking, "Hmm, I probably haven't got the budget for that." What are the options available to them? What they could they do instead of engaging with the MSP Marketing Academy?

Gemma: There are a number of options. Again, I guess, if they are wanting to do some kind of marketing, then they got the option of doing some vendor marketing if there are vendors that they are particularly engaged with.

And one of the other thing that we are offering as a part of the Marketing Academy is a quarterly meeting which we are calling the gathering which will be looking at marketing for part of the day and then the afternoon will be spent looking at some of the aspects of running a managed service business which are more general.

We will be having a selection of different speakers coming to those events. There will be workshop elements of those events so people will be able to come along, find out what is a value proposition, how do I go and create that for my own business, and then take that away at the end of the day.

There will be real value from those meetings. And then that maybe a stepping stone for them to get on to do some marketing for their own business or they may decide actually there is really no option here that we can just take in and get it done.

Richard: Yeah just as they say marketing in the box and then get the clients coming through the door.

From a personal perspective I am really excited about joining. I really appreciate that you sent an invitation to me. One of the biggest challenges within my business of course is that I am just one person.

As much as I'd love to work with every MSP out there, I cannot. Most MSPs have come to me initially. Some have marketing is one of the big challenges so I think the MSP Marketing Academy is going to give them a good voice to do that. I am going to be a part of it. So I am about to speak with a lot of MSPs. I am really looking forward to that.

You mentioned about the gathering. That is going to be a good place for MSPs to get together with experts and their peers to learn how to do marketing. But what about those MSPs who are thinking, "I should be able to do this on my own. I should not." What are the other options that are available to them?

Gemma: I guess that is one of the things that we hear most commonly, "I should be able to do that," or even with the best intentions people go and try to do some of this stuff.

I think the danger for most MSPs is that they do not do anything. You might read a book and think that is great and I will go away and I will have the marketing plan. But then it actually does not happen same as many things. Doing nothing is the key danger.

And then there is also looking at someone from your local BNI. Are they going to know your business well enough to do a good job for you? Therefore, do we get in to the marketing that does not work for me?

Richard: And typically costs as much as working with the IT Marketing Agency or anyone of concern.

Gemma: Exactly yes. I think another option is that you work with a specific agency. They create a lot of bespoke material for you and that is great but certainly the investment for that would be quite heavy.

And the last option is you look at employing somebody in the business. Again, there is a risk associated with that. There is cost associated with that and also in terms of the level of person that you go for.

You probably do not need a senior marketing person in the business so many people go for a junior or a graduate marketing person. And they may be great at some elements of marketing like social media but they perhaps don't know the right copy. They do not have the tools available to do the design in house. There are still gaps in what you are trying to do there.

What we have tried to do with the MSP Marketing Academy is provide a route for the marketing of the service which is tailored for your business, which is diagnostic, which you can get out there really quickly.

Richard: It is interesting, is not it? The amount of MSPs out there, when they speak to their client, they say, "Hey, you did not go in to business to be an IT person." How are you writing after this what's wrong with it. Why do you think that so few IT Companies have outsourced their marketing?

Gemma: I think it is one of those things that most companies perhaps do not know any better. They are not sure where to start. They are doing okay. So it is not marketing. It is not something that you urgently, suddenly have to do. It is something easy to leave.

I guess it is like going on a diet or an exercise program. You know it will be good for you if you do it. But actually, first of all, you have to take the first step and then you have to continue to do it to get results. I think there are two hurdles there that sometimes people just do not get over because they do not see it as an urgent need for their business.

Richard: And then leave it until it is too late until the pipelines-

Gemma: Exactly.

Richard: Until the end of the pipeline and go at it blindly we're going to go out and get someone. Let us do marketing and it will magically appears. It does not work like that.

For anybody listening or for anybody watching who wants to find more about the MSP Marketing Academy your new initiative, how do they find out more detail?

Gemma: We have a website which is www.mspmarketingacademy.co.uk or they can contact me on LinkedIn, or they can contact you if they know you. And we have a team of people who would be happy to help.

Richard: Wonderful. Well Gemma, thank you for your time today. I am looking forward to working with you on MSP Marketing Academy

Gemma: Great.