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Audio Transcript

Episode 216 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with *Mike Blinder*

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The banner features the E&P Reports Vodcast logo on the left, which includes a Wi-Fi symbol and the text 'E&P REPORTS VODCAST'. To the right of the logo is the URL 'EditorandPublisher.com/Vodcasts'. On the far right, there are images of a camera lens and a professional microphone. Below the banner is a video player showing two participants: Shannon Kinney on the left and Mike Blinder on the right. Shannon Kinney is identified as the Founder & Client Success Offices at Dream Local Digital. Mike Blinder is identified as the Publisher of E&P Magazine. The episode sponsor, BLOX Digital, is also mentioned in the bottom right corner of the video player area.

[Shannon Kinney's entrepreneurial advice](#)

In this episode of "E&P Reports," we chat with respected media executive Shannon Kinney about the entrepreneurial advice she offers that is derived from her 25+ year journey, starting as an integral part of legacy media's early adoption of the digital world to today's massively complex multimedia ecosystem.



0:00:04.2 Announcer: This is E&P Reports, a vodcast from Editor and Publisher Magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

0:00:19.9 Mike Blinder: And greetings once again, Mike Blinder, Publisher E&P Magazine. As always, we bore our audience first with housekeeping. If you are listening on a podcast platform of choice, there's some alliteration right there, follow us, watching on YouTube, then you will please go to the subscribe button below, smash, click, do something with the bell to the right, and you'll get an update each and every time we upload the weekly vodcast series, E&P Reports. Shannon, I think I've known you longest in this industry, but one of the... You and I go so far back, it's hard to... And you look the same and I got old and fat. How did that happen?

[laughter]

0:01:00.3 Shannon Kinney: It's true. It has been since the mid '90s you and I have been in this business.

0:01:05.2 MB: We were... I love what you wrote in your last piece. That's why I reached out to you. We're gonna get to that in a second. We talked about the days at Maine today 'cause we were pioneers. I mean, you were in Maine, I was in Maine. I was brought over from the radio side and you were brought over from the newspaper up in Maine, and we didn't have any IAB then. We were making up ad sizes, weren't we? We were just...

0:01:27.1 SK: Absolutely. Absolutely. It's one of the first three newspapers online in the US.

0:01:33.7 MB: The other one that was online with us was the Boston.com. So Lisa DeSisto used to come up, who I'm sure you're friends with up in Maine 'cause you used to live...

0:01:41.3 SK: Absolutely.

0:01:41.9 MB: I bailed... I moved south, 'cause I couldn't, I mean, but you're still there, which is wonderful.

0:01:46.4 SK: Yes.

0:01:47.9 MB: And you're freezing, I bet, right?

[laughter]

0:01:49.8 SK: Yeah. It is going into the cold season up here, that's for sure.

0:01:54.5 MB: And congratulations on your engagement to another media icon.

0:02:00.4 SK: Thank you.

0:02:00.5 MB: You guys, I mean... There's so much going on with you, but you hit a nerve with me



when I read your advice to entrepreneurs. And I figured now that we're turning into a new year, we should get some amazing advice from Shannon Kinney. If you've lived under a rock, you've never heard of her, but she is the founder and client success officer of Dream Local Digital. You have over 25 years of key news media, digital advertising experience. You were a pioneer in verticals. You were there figuring things out and how to show cars and homes and stuff way before anyone else. But here we are, going into 2024, you and I are both still alive. So, we'll chat on all of this on the backside of this message.

0:02:44.8 Announcer: This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. BLOX Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management, and more. Join the over 2,000 news publishers worldwide that power their ongoing digital transformation with BLOX Digital, serving over 141 million monthly users who view over 6.5 billion pages of content each year. You can trust BLOX Digital to empower you, to connect you, at scale with the community you need to reach. BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews, now reimaged to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond. Learn more at bloxdigital.com.

0:03:48.9 MB: All right. Shannon, it all came in an email just recently, six tips from Shannon Kinney's entrepreneurial journey. Some that I agree with and some I don't. I mean, I don't disagree with what you're saying, but they are hurtful in some ways.

0:04:06.0 SK: Yes. Yeah I get it.

0:04:08.2 MB: Because you basically didn't pull any punches on this. You said from a lobster boat in a small fishing village of Spruce Head, Maine, which I've been to, it was Silicon Valley and back 'cause you have worked in the center of Silicon Valley. I mean, you actually were there when we were all figuring this thing out. You've seen it, you've done it. And let's just do a little speed dating here. Let's run them down and discuss them, if that's okay with you.

0:04:31.7 SK: Absolutely.

0:04:32.5 MB: And then if we still have time, let's talk about the future of media. So, you said pack your backpack. What do you mean by that?

0:04:41.9 SK: So, I think when... For entrepreneurs, and honestly, I think everybody in digital media, your audience, people in traditional media trying to build digital businesses are entrepreneurs. You're trying to build something new in many cases. Packing your backpack is really about recognizing what you don't know and what you need to learn and seeking it out, even if it doesn't come naturally to you through your business. So, I make sure I know the right contacts, that I am reading the right blogs or publications to make sure I'm top of mind, that I'm really keeping myself educated and constantly learning. Because in this business, even though both of you and I have been in it a long time, it changes every few weeks. And so we have to really constantly be learning.

0:05:33.3 MB: I agree completely with that. But I also sensed between the lines, don't be fearful of

change. No, no, this was more about making sure that you know what you know and know what you don't know, right? Kinda...

0:05:46.2 SK: Yeah. And being really thoughtful about it and seeking out information and skills or practice where you don't have it, because running the business the old way doesn't work. You've gotta pack your backpack with new info.

0:06:00.7 MB: Well, you and I had real jobs. We were working for a company that sold. I think you and I were there, it was called at the time, Giganet Communications. We were a team of about five very talented people. I mean, it was a great group. And what we were doing was figuring out the internet for not just the Portland Press Herald and their sister paper, but television as well. So, we had all that experience going on behind the scenes. I left after the sale to... 'Cause it was a good opportunity for me to go off and start a consulting firm. You left shortly after, right? You moved on?

0:06:39.1 SK: Yes. Yeah, I went to cars.com. So, I had all these ideas. So, my next tip was that big things come from small places and it was that I was drawing all these ideas about how to search for cars online. I just felt like it was gonna be a thing and that people would want to buy vehicles that way and so I had these drawings all over and I was like talking about them on some email Listservs because back then that's how people connected, ICQ chat rooms and email Listservs talking about it. And I got a call from the Chicago Tribune team in Chicago that was trying to find a team to build a car website. And so I left South Portland just before the sale and went to cars.com.

0:07:27.0 MB: So, that brings us to number three. Don't know what you don't know, but I...

0:07:33.7 SK: Yeah.

0:07:34.4 MB: I think that was... You say this can sometimes be good, but in this instance it means I didn't know I wouldn't financially benefit from this idea. You were trying different things. You were moving. It reminded me my first Newspaper Association America conference when I went as a young unknown consultant, Guy Kawasaki was speaking and he was on the stage. You may have been at this one, I don't know 'cause we were both just finding our way.

0:08:01.2 SK: We were both there, yeah.

0:08:02.0 MB: And he said Kinney, this is when he was still with Apple. Remember way back when he said, "You guys think too much. Why don't you all have an Internet presence right now? Why..." 'Cause remember, the print world was thinking it has to be perfect when it goes to press. And it doesn't have... And he said these famous words. He said at Apple, we ship it, then we fix it. I'm thinking it's true. So, you just...

0:08:26.1 SK: It's true. It's so true.

0:08:29.3 MB: You just run with it. Got an idea. Go with it quick. So you had cars.com slowing you down. That's what you said in here, correct? You said...



0:08:35.5 SK: Well, what it was was I made a deal to go to one of our investors Knight Ridder. And they wanted me to lead classifieds and product development and get them all making money online nationwide. And it was a huge opportunity for me. And I was really excited about it. I just didn't recognize I was a naive girl from Maine and didn't recognize that I would lose all my vested interest in cars when I left. I would never trade cars.com in for the world. It was one of the best experiences of my life. And Knight Ridder following it was another incredible opportunity. But I just was too naive to understand what was happening like today, I would have made that decision very differently.

0:09:16.4 MB: Well, how many times do you want to talk to yourself back then? I mean...
[laughter]

0:09:19.5 SK: I know, like, "Hey, keep your stock. It's a thing."

0:09:22.9 MB: Yeah. I mean I could go on and on. I keep fantasizing about going back to that day and telling myself the things that I know now, but it's normal for us. But that was a fascinating story because you moved on to Knight Ridder, then you did a stint at the New York Times company, right? Did you get...

0:09:40.7 SK: Yes. I went back to Boston after that. So, I was at Knight Ridder for many years. And then I went to Boston to...

0:09:45.9 MB: Where some of the best people in the industry were meeting.

0:09:48.5 SK: Incredible.

0:09:49.2 MB: Were you...

0:09:49.9 SK: It was all a great experience.

0:09:51.8 MB: That I believe was during the day of my favorite billboard of all time 'cause remember, the big dig was going on and you were working in Boston, so the whole city was shut down for the biggest, to this date, I think, municipal construction project in history. They had to bury a highway under a major city and this billboard for Boston.com just said, "Boston.com, the only site in Boston not under construction." I thought that was amazing [laughter] which it was.

0:10:16.7 SK: It was like, that was a fantastic group of people.

0:10:19.6 MB: The best of the best.

0:10:20.7 SK: It really was.

0:10:21.5 MB: All right...

0:10:22.0 SK: Right around that time was the fourth topic, which was disruptors can look really naive until they don't. And I think that's something that our industry, like many other industries, has

really faced. The music industry faced it. You see this small little disruptor like Google or Facebook, and you think ah that's not a big deal. I'm the newspaper. I'm a big deal. And we had opportunities to have significant ownership stakes. At Knight Ridder, we had opportunities to have significant ownership stakes in eBay, in Google, and many other companies that we just, a few of us who had been in it for a while really thought were a big deal.

0:11:07.5 SK: But the newspaper leadership didn't and didn't see those opportunities. Very similar to you saying what Guy shared with all of us at that conference, you think that it's a small, little weird company in Silicon Valley, and then all of a sudden they're getting the majority of the ad dollars in the world. And so I think as an industry, we need to let go of hubris and recognize that disruption can come in a lot of ways. And it could come from a little blogger in your town. And what you need to do is really look at them as opportunities to innovate yourself.

0:11:46.7 MB: Well, this is so common. It's not just our industry. Every industry was disrupted and is still being disrupted by digital. I mean, that's one of the advantages you have now of dealing with so many businesses because you're able to help them. I can even get prescriptions now. I can get online with a doctor 1000 miles away. I can... Real estate is under siege, the local jewelry store that maybe can give you better advice on cut and clarity. Everybody has been... I can go on buy Uber, that's it.

0:12:21.8 SK: True. Yes.

0:12:24.0 MB: And that's still, I mean, I think it reminds me of that old joke, how many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is one. But the light bulb has to want to change in the first place. And so many people in senior positions don't want to change. They want to just ignore it. And you watch businesses that you thought would last forever, ain't there anymore. So, let me ask you this, because we're gonna get into the last topic for a second. That's the one that hurt a little, but it's true. It's just that you took a shot at us. When I say us, I mean the industry you and I grew up in. Let's be honest, you have ink in your veins. You came out of them.

0:13:04.2 SK: Absolutely.

0:13:05.3 MB: But like me, and I came from the radio and TV side, but I managed a news team at a radio station, I managed a news team at a TV station. I still believe in local journalism, but legacy and local journalism is the issue at hand right now. But you got that ink in your veins. That's still there, and you see the mission. God, you were on the board of LMA.

0:13:26.4 SK: For 10 years. I am so passionate about local media and creating successful, sustainable business models for local media, and I built Dream Local Digital to facilitate that. I literally put my own money on the line for that passion and built this business, and the business turns 15 in two weeks. I've been at it a long time trying to help create digital opportunities, but I think my last point in that that I think is the one that hurts for both you and I was don't be the frog. The metaphor of a frog won't jump into a pot of boiling water, but if you turn the heat up gradually, they don't realize they're boiling. And that's definitely happened to me in that I've leaned in so hard trying to help media companies that weren't ready to really push and prioritize digital. And, I think for me, it's been painful. I've been the frog because I wanted it to work. I want them to realize how



critical this is and not say, oh, we're too busy to sell this month or, you know, we have too many things to sell, like I...

0:14:36.0 MB: Let me take you back a few years. You are located in... Do you still live in Camden? Is that where you are?

0:14:44.8 SK: Yeah. We're right here in Maine, yes.

0:14:46.3 MB: Okay. It's a beautiful area. But you used to work in Bangor, so you won up, and this was years ago, but I remember following it, and you took over the advertising for the Bangor Daily News, correct? But while you were still running your digital agency, you just said, hell with it, I'm gonna go up there and do it. And then after a full year, you wrote this long, incredibly well sourced document on why it did not work. And it basically was a slap in the face of an industry that got... May I say it, we got fat and lazy. We worked decades and decades and decades, and we became a distribution industry. We never decided we really wanted to be the partners of our advertisers. We were simply the place they stuck their inserts, stuck their ads, learn our stupid rate cards. If you don't know what a column inch is, then you can't buy advertising.

0:15:35.3 SK: Remember the phone room where thousands of people called you to spend money? Like oh my goodness.

0:15:40.8 MB: I remember touring that and going, this is...

0:15:42.4 SK: I loved the phone rooms.

0:15:44.3 MB: I think my advantage was coming from radio. When we interviewed Gordon Burrell on the latest data, or was it, or I think we interviewed his president.

0:15:55.3 SK: Yeah. Jim.

0:15:56.2 MB: Jim. Yeah. He kept talking radio, radio, radio. Radio still... And I said, why? That's the most disrupted industry in the world right now, because nope, everybody is sinking their phones in their cars. Everybody's got their playlists. He said, it's not the media, it's the reps.

0:16:14.6 SK: The hustle.

0:16:15.9 MB: The hustle. They're out there. And I remember my radio days, we always got the crumbs off the table. It was yellow pages first, then the newspaper, then the TV station, and then the little guys on the bottom picking up the extra 20%. So you didn't have that. When you were in Bangor, they did not have fire in their belly. Is that what I'm hearing? They just didn't wanna change?

0:16:36.5 SK: Incredible leadership, like visionary leadership that they still have, which is fantastic. And that website is so successful. What happened, I think, was the sales team, right? We really struggled to get the sales organization to prioritize it. On the product side, it was outstanding, and it still is. Content side, incredible. It was the sales side making the effort and prioritizing digital sales.



And the whole dimes versus dollars thing, guys, it's been almost 30 years we've been talking about it. It's something that is here, and it's evolving, and we need to prioritize it. And so I think that's... And that's the same thing, frankly, that I hear nationwide is our sales teams are overwhelmed. They don't know how to sell this. They have too many things to sell. And the point is...

0:17:32.6 MB: But I've been hearing that for 25 years.

0:17:35.4 SK: We've been hearing it for 25 years, and startups would fix the problem. Yes.

0:17:39.5 MB: Alright. So Shannon, you're still young. You're still here. You're still gonna do the good fight for us.

0:17:47.7 SK: I'm here.

0:17:47.8 MB: In this industry. What's next for Dream Local? Am I allowed to ask? New plans? Anything? Just to keeping up.

0:17:52.8 SK: Absolutely. Yeah. So, we've launched a coaching program for small businesses that want to try to do their marketing themselves because they're still out there. There's a lot of really talented businesses. So that coaching program, The SkillsBuilder Marketing Coach Program is going really well. We're working with, even more deeply with media partners, but just a lot fewer of them, and really helping them transform and create successful sales organizations. And then on the direct side we're selling upmarket a lot, which is... It's fantastic. It's been a big part of my business, but it's also helping us bring all that knowledge of how to do that back to our media partners.

0:18:36.4 MB: But you're still getting it in there. Ryan Dohrn was on this show just a few weeks ago, and he was screaming, Mike, you got to go back in the field and do those workshops. They're begging, they're begging, they're begging.

0:18:44.4 SK: Yes. I'm actually doing a couple with Ryan in April.

0:18:48.7 MB: All right. So, you are going into markets. You're getting on the plane still? Oh, how can I help you?

0:18:51.0 SK: Sure thing. Sure thing. If people want us there, I'm there.

0:18:54.8 MB: I don't miss those days as a road worker. I just...

0:19:00.1 SK: I feel you on some of it. That's for sure. I think the hardest thing for me was to go through all that. And like you, we'd have a room with 300 people and they'd be ready to buy something and I'd fly home and nothing would get stolen.

0:19:12.4 MB: My model was different. Then I parachuted in a team and did the closing.

0:19:15.5 SK: Right. For your own company. But when you and I were doing it for other ones, like we're the talent, but we're not the ones who can close it. And that's what I think important. Media



companies need to learn about lead generation and then, hey, those are leads. Let's nurture them and follow up. And let's have a real process around that. Because that's what startups do.

0:19:35.3 MB: Nothing has really changed. Whenever I'm giving advice, I say, I've been through this now for years. I said in the 1600s, to sell a cow, you nailed a note to a tree. Remember this? I stole that from the head of Guy Gannett, what was his name? James Shaffer.

0:19:48.9 SK: I remember that.

0:19:49.8 MB: And he said we just still notes and trees. And that's what we have to get back to, is just don't worry about the media. Worry about how you can get results for the damn advertiser through that media. And just...

0:20:05.3 SK: Right. Exactly, right.

0:20:06.3 MB: It changes. Shannon Kinney, if anyone wants to get a hold of you, you have a very difficult email address. I'm just kidding. What is it?

0:20:13.1 SK: Shannon@dreamlocal.com.

0:20:16.3 MB: There you go. Dream Local Digital is up and running. By the way, you still white label for media companies, right?

0:20:22.4 SK: We sure do. We white label.

0:20:23.4 MB: And you've got a great... All I hear is success. I hear about great customer support. I just hear good things.

0:20:29.4 SK: 96% retention rate. Clients.

0:20:32.2 MB: There you go. Congratulations on your success.

0:20:33.9 SK: Thank you.

0:20:34.2 Announcer: Congratulations on your marriage and keep us in foot at E&P.

0:20:38.0 MB: Thank you Great. Thank you so much.

[music]