

Human-Centric Investing Podcast

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Episode 16 – The Rolling Marketing Calendar

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Featured Guest: Jill Slomski, President Niche Team, LLC.

Operator: This is the Human-centric Investing Podcast with John Diehl, where we look at the world of investing through the eyes of our clients. Take it away, John.

John Diehl: Hello, financial advisors. This is John Diehl, Senior Vice President of Strategic Markets at Hartford Funds. Welcome to episode 16 of the Human-centric Investing Podcast. Joining me today is Jill Slomski, President of Niche Team. Welcome back to the podcast, Jill.

Jill Slomski: Well thank you, John. It's nice to be here.

John Diehl: Today, we're going to discuss something Jill calls the rolling marketing calendar. Now I know for many of us it's hard enough to pull that marketing calendar together in the first place, let alone a rolling marketing calendar. So, Jill, it sounds interesting. What exactly is a rolling marketing calendar?

Jill Slomski: Well I know that, we as professionals, often times do our planning, and we start in January and we end December, and we kind of take a pause.

And what I try to get financial advisors to understand is, we need to keep planning for the next 12 months and just have it, be, rolling in natural. That way, we don't have a pause and a force of planning for another 12 months.

So if we do it in a rolling method, then it just becomes natural, part of this well oiled machine that we have in our offices and it keeps the communication flowing.

John Diehl: So why is—why is a rolling marketing calendar? I know we don't want a gap, say, in January or something like that, but why do you think it's so important to advisors to approach their marketing efforts this way?

Jill Slomski: Well, let's say you have a client come into your office and they're in there in September and they can see that you're going to have a seminar in November on retirement—social security, and that's great, and they'll say, oh gosh. Well, I'm looking at my calendar and I can't make that. Well, you can then say, well, we're having another one in February.

And so, you're not—you're not driven by a calendar, and oh, you're going to release it like some new movie, in January for the next 12 months. Your clients come in at different times of the year and so, we want them to understand that you're there to educate or be a resource or bring people together, in celebration, on a regular basis.

Your financial advisors should be a part of your regular lifestyle. It shouldn't be, that, one meeting a year where you'd share all the information about all the investments and your future goals and strategies.

The going and coming and the communication with your financial advisor if it's more regular it increases the client loyalty, it increases referrals, and it's just a more natural way to interact, as a

professional.

John Diehl: Jill, I'm going to ask you in a moment about someone implementing a rolling marketing calendar, but before I get there, a lot of—I've run into advisors who, really, haven't formally put together a marketing calendar.

If I were in a position of never really having done these, you know, all these people that says, I keep it all up here in my head, right. What are the kind of things? Is it just client events that go on a marketing calendar?

What are some of the different categories of things I should be thinking about that should be part of my rolling marketing calendar, should I choose to implement one?

Jill Slomski: That's a great question because when I tell my clients that I want them to do a 12 month rolling calendar, there's silence at end of the phone a lot of the time, and I explained that an event a month can be—is simply defined as, when you're engaging with clients outside of the normal office visits.

So, let's say that—so maybe you are going to with an advisor consultant and you're going to have an educational seminar, but it, also, can be if you're member of the chamber.

If you can sponsor one of the chamber meetings and give five or ten minutes, a talk about your business and what you do or the people who you serve, that can also count as something in marketing or some celebrations that we can talk about.

I talk about quarterly birthday parties, and the results, we've gotten from something silly like quarterly birthday parties. I had a client who gave me a lot of pushback on having events and I said, let's try something. I said, I've had great success with this with clients, quarterly birthday parties.

So you take January, February, March, and you have the birthday party in February. You invited all of—all of your clients who have birthdays in January, February, and March and tell them that one this date, in your office, from 2:00 until 6:00, you're having cupcakes and coffee, stop in.

We're celebrating your birthday, doggone it. Bring a friend. You never want to celebrate your birthday without your friend. While I've had clients have seven, I've had some people have 37 people in for quarterly birthday parties.

Never, and I mean never in all the years that we've done this, have we not had clients bring a friend who has become a client, and the last birthday party, the feed back we had just a few weeks ago was—there was a gentlemen who walked into this birthday celebration, looked my client in the eye, looked the financial advisor in the eye and said, I apologize.

I've been nonresponsive. I've been your client for three. You can't get me to come in the office. I came in for my birthday. I'm going to France with my wife next weekend, but I'm going to bring you a check before then, thanked her for the cupcake, went home, came back the next day with a check for \$375,000, over a cupcake.

So, when I say, a rolling marketing calendar, I'm not saying that you have to invite 50 people, hope that you get 20 people for dinner, and hope that the restaurant is good and the presentation is good and you become a party planner.

I'm simply asking for, engaging with clients outside of normally scheduled client appointments, so that you are more approachable and that you share information and celebrate. It makes you a more natural part of your clients—perspective clients lives.

John Diehl:

That's a great idea, Jill. What I like about it is, it seems to me like (once) you go on the marketing calendar, some things that are almost predictable, that I don't need to rethink the—how it's made. If I held a quarterly birthday party, I pretty much know how that's going to go for that given month that I'm going to do it in.

But maybe some other things or things in my community that are once a year things that I want to leverage but, again, I don't have to invent it, and then maybe there a couple of things during the year that are unique to me and my business and things that I want to do special, like an annual client event or something like that.

I think where I see advisors, often times, get exhausted is they try to feel like, not only do they have to put together an event that's going to draw a 100 people which may be difficult for them but it's almost like, gee, I'm just exhausted trying to think about what the next thing is that we're going to do.

If we can get some things that are consistent and begin to intermesh those with things that are a little bit spontaneous or unique, that's a pretty good mix, wouldn't you think?

Jill Slomski:

Absolutely, John. And it's supposed to be as natural and engaging, and doggone it, it should be fun because if you're having a good time as a financial advisor, then it's—then your clients, your perspective clients are going to pick up on that or your referral sources, so exactly.

So there's 12 months in a year. We do quarterly birthday parties. We're down to eight. So let's say that you usually have a holiday open house, all right, now we're down to only having to find seven.

In November, we have tons of clients who invite their top clients or all of their clients to come in and pick up holiday pies, believe it or not. They call and they'll say, do you want apple or pumpkin.

They stop and then give them hugs, tell them that they're thankful for having them as client, and then would you have that pie on your Thanksgiving table, oh my gosh, this pie is delicious. Where did you get it? I got it from my financial advisor.

Are you kidding me? That's amazing. Maybe have an annual picnic. Maybe you can offer a class at a local college or university.

It's easy, and then you mix that with these educational and information sharing types of events and it—the key is to just make it natural, don't over think it, and it doesn't have to be perfect. You simply need to do it. And then, by all means, it's really important for you to do some SOPs.

So, we tell our clients to take the next 12 months, write them down, jot down the things, as you said, John, that you already do on a regular basis, cuts down that list to 12, throw in some birthday parties, it cuts the list down even more, and then you just want to do some—a process for each one.

So, you do a process. You delegate so that you don't wind up having to attract clients, meet the clients. You pull your team to delegate it and maybe promote this on social media and then you keep a list of these marketing events in the office for distribution.

And so, as a client comes in for an annual meeting or maybe they're in twice a year, three times a year and posted in your office, you have a piece of paper that says, here are the events for our office for the coming year. Please mark your calendars.

And so, the impression that, that, gives your clients, as a financial advisor, is, my goodness, I can learn about social security.

I can learn about these strategic investments and gosh, I can go to my own birthday party. I'm going to bring my family to the family picnic. And so, it becomes engaging and reducing that risk to engage with a financial advisor which is an intimidating job title.

So, it makes you and your team extremely approachable, engaging. You can chat it up in your personal life and say, I'm going to a picnic. What picnic? My financial advisor has an annual picnic? Are you kidding me? And it's fabulous.

Marketing is communicating value and giving a person a reason to engage. So, even my most introverted financial advisor clients can find things that they're comfortable doing with this 12 month roll on calendar.

John Diehl:

So how do I—Jill, how do I begin implementing something like this? Do I—do I start with my team and I sitting around with a—with a calendar that kind of lays out all 12 months of the year and just start popping events onto that. How do you recommend taking the first steps?

Jill Slomski:

Well I think—I think—well, you've just said is genius because if you can get your team on board it's a lot better than a financial advisor coming out of their office and declaring, doggone it, we're going to have a marketing event every month. And you can just feel how that might be received by a team, like, holy smokes, we're already really busy here aren't we.

So if the team can have a brainstorming meeting, or put the 12 months out there and talk about things that they already do, they're, then, just simply, the face-to-face meetings that they do anyway.

Look at the—look at the things that go on in their community. Maybe there is a walk that they usually do. I have clients in Texas and gosh, parades must be huge in Texas, and they participate in the parades. All right, there's our marketing thing.

Sometimes there are community days or school districts will have events where there's community days. OK, put that in there and before you know it, you have 10 out of 12 of the events already filled in.

A little bit more creativity. We have 12. And that's the way to do it because the more you can onboard all of the energy and positivity of your team and talk about how you're going to get it done, everyone can, then, take—I'll do this.

I'll make the contacts. Let's do—should we do a written invitation? Should we e-mail? Should we pick up the phone? Who's going to put in on Facebook? Let's put it on Facebook and invite.

Always put seating is limited because that strikes everyone's urgency because, my goodness, it is universal that RSVPs are always last minute, and what you want is vital positive energy in your business, that you're not there simply to say, investments are going well. This is your risk. You're on track, blah, blah, blah.

It's a conversation about a life because when we're investing funds for our clients, we're taking care of their financial lives. Let's get to know them in a different way, also, and deepen that

relationship.

John Diehl: So, Jill, I have a question for you. I sit with my team and we get really pumped about some of the ideas that you've already shared. The quarterly birthday parties and some of things in the community, so on, so forth, and now, when we get done our first pass, we don't have 12 events, we have 42. Is there a limit to how many ...

Jill Slomski: 12.

John Diehl: I mean, at some point, we got to work, right. Is that—is that a challenge?

Jill Slomski: That's a burnout. No burnout.

John Diehl: OK.

Jill Slomski: So what you have to do is to look at impact, and boy, John, I can't—that would be really—that would be amazing, to hear that we have more events.

We—do—we do have some people who have a very large team, and that they can actually divide and conquer (events) so that if there's something going on in their community, but there's also a seminar that they really want to have for their clients, they can do a couple, but you have to watch the energy and protect fatigue.

Because as soon as—because as soon as any sort of fatigue becomes present in the business, you know what the first thing to go is, don't you? Marketing. And from my days of long ago and teaching marketing classes, you know, it—you have to go back to no good idea sells itself.

John Diehl: Yes.

Jill Slomski: No good idea sells itself. You have to be out in the community. And—and—or at least engage your clients differently.

And you go back to the Hartford Funds, you know, they will tell you, to go where your clients are—educate, congregate, recreate, and donate. And—and wear—wear your logo, be out in the community, be visible, be approachable, and—and engage.

People love to—people will spend their time if it's fun or if they're learning.

John Diehl: Yes.

Jill Slomski: So if you can combine fun and learning, you're going to have a positive impact on clients, and—and therefore help them to invest.

John Diehl: What's the biggest mistake, you think, Jill, that advisors make when they try to implement this rolling marketing calendar? What should we—again, be on the lookout for?

Jill Slomski: Doing things that they don't want to do to begin with. And it's—it—you know, where they're—where they're forcing it. And you can't. You just can't.

So if you say, OK, I'll do these 12 months, and—it—as soon as the advisor is saying, "Oh gosh, and tomorrow night is that doggone event, and it's until 8:00 and I won't be home until 8:30," then you know you're doing the wrong thing.

John Diehl: Yes.

- Jill Slomski: That if you can't see value in it, if your team can't see value in it, if it doesn't seem enjoyable or—enjoyable or valuable or timely, you should not do it.
- And the other thing is, you should never judge yourself, your team, or the value of an event based on attendance at the beginning of this process. Because you're—you're training your clients and prospective clients that you're going to be doing things on a regular basis that they can tap into or bring guests, bring family to.
- But if you're saying, well, I planned on 15 and four came, well, that's four people you've had the opportunity to talk to. In addition, at no point in time do you blast, "Well, we were expecting 20 and only got four, epic fail, number one marketing event." You just—people simply know that you had a marketing event.
- And that if that wasn't a good time, or—I live in the north—or in case you had epic snowfall, and—and people couldn't come, don't judge yourself or the event based on attendance until we get the communication process and get this ball rolling.
- John Diehl: Jill, I couldn't agree more. As someone—I probably did 130 client events last year, and as I tell everyone, I have given up handicapping client events, because I've had better client events with four attendees than I've had with 40 attendees. It all depends who shows up and what point in—in life they are, and what they're looking for, and are they the right people?
- So I definitely couldn't agree with you more. I think advisors do need to celebrate the success of the effort, versus maybe getting depressed about, well, why it didn't hit their expectations.
- Jill Slomski: Exactly.
- John Diehl: You've got to really watch out for that.
- Jill Slomski: Exactly. And—and people will talk—people think the more—the more the merrier. The more people, the less likely people are to ask questions.
- John Diehl: Yes.
- Jill Slomski: And so there's a sweet spot. And if you're having a dinner or a client appreciation something, the magic number is traditionally no more than 14.
- John Diehl: Right.
- Jill Slomski: I know that (sounds—right?) But it's no more than 14, because people can get lost in that crowd. And—and so the smaller the better. And when you're asking people to come and speak, you know, people are wonderful in saying, "I'm going to give an overview, but let's sit and have dinner—let's sit and have lunch with these folks, and let's just have a conversation."
- It's in—it's in the stress-free use of the term conversation where magic can happen in sharing information and helping people's higher good.
- John Diehl: I—I truly believe that the magic happens when the presentation is over and the mingling starts.
- Jill Slomski: Absolutely. Absolutely.
- John Diehl: And I guess one suggestion, too, Jill, I would make is—and this is just from personal experience—when we sit down with our team and that calendar, I think we ought to look critically at holidays and special days during the year.

And just as an example, I was asked this week to come out and do a large client event for an advisor team. And they said, “We really want to do it either November 6th or November 7th.” So I took—quick, took a look at my availability and I notices November 6th is Election Day, right?

Jill Slomski: (inaudible)

John Diehl: If you’re going to hold a client event in the evening of Election Day, you’re setting yourself up for disappointment, right? Just because of what’s likely to distract people or pull them away from the event.

So I think we do have to be cognizant about times of the years and special dates and—and that’s one of those things that I think will work itself out as we implement that rolling calendar, right?

Jill Slomski: Oh, absolutely. Check for conflicts. John, that’s a great point. It is. It’s a great point. And also, another rule of thumb is if you’re going to have an event, Tuesday, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are fabulous.

John Diehl: Absolutely. (That’s a)...

Jill Slomski: Mondays and Fridays are rough for attendance. And really...

John Diehl: Yes. And so Jill, as you think about these calendars, right, and thinking about people that you’ve seen actually take the step to implement them, can you share any examples of folks that you’ve worked with that have had success using this approach?

Jill Slomski: Oh sure. OK, so let’s start—January—January is traditionally information month, so let’s go to February. Many of my clients have widow and widowers luncheons, and I have a client right now who has to change venues because her annual widow’s luncheon has grown beyond the scope of her favorite restaurant.

And all the widows get flowers and candy and they bring a guest. And—and do they get new clients from it? Yes. But they also get the wonderful feeling of taking good care of these clients who, you know, who Valentine’s Day might be rough.

I have—let’s see—we get into May is traditionally a lady-something focused, female-focused. There’re all kinds of crazy things people do. Hedge—you know, there’s shopping, there’s headshots, there’s tours, there’s after-business types of hours for women. Men’s things.

(Well), you get into seasonal things as far as annual picnics—I have a client in Michigan, she did a fabulous job. I told her that I wanted her to think about doing an annual family picnic, because she didn’t know her—the children of her—of her clients. She did the (talk 25) analysis and realized she had no relationship with her—her clients’ families.

And so I said, “I want you to have an annual family picnic,” and she said, “OK, fine. When should I have it?” And—and we looked at the calendar, and we picked a day in August, and by the next time we got on a call she had invited all of her clients.

At—by the time it was over, she had 87 people at her first family picnic. We did it the colors of her business, we had her welcome, we had her then—and I—and she’s an introvert, so this was rough.

And I told her that I wanted her to tell the folks who attended that you wanted the family picnic to be twice as big the next year. The next year she had the picnic and there were 170 people at the picnic, and they wanted to know what the date was for the next one.

As far as fall is concerned, Thanksgiving cards, Thanksgiving gifts, the pie drive is amazing. I mean, the feedback on pies is incredible, and open house, whether you want to have one in—(be) somewhere between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

If you want to—instead of simply having the open house, where people just come and—and say Happy Holidays, you can also make it a philanthropic drive of some kind, where you're gathering things for—backpacks, or clothing, or toys, or animal supplies for the Humane Society, or things like that, and make it a philanthropic event, which means you also can get your local news to cover it for you, so that the drive can then aid more people, who are the recipients of your event.

And it also shines a nice PR light on you and what it is that you're doing within the community. Also post on social media that you're doing this, and ask more people to engage. It...

John Diehl: Hey, Jill, I'll tell you, I—you know, I'm an introvert, and just listening to all these ideas, I even—that even sounds like fun for me. But boy my wife—my wife would go crazy with it, right?

Jill Slomski: (I'm going to quote you).

John Diehl: Yes. So, thinking about that, do you ever get objections from advisors when you start talking about a rolling marketing calendar?

Jill Slomski: Oh yes. Oh my gosh.

John Diehl: What would they be?

Jill Slomski: Yes, "I can't—I can't do that, I don't have time, I—I—I am—I don't even know how to plan a birthday party for myself or anyone else." And I'll say, all right, now, let's—let's take this in pieces.

And I—you know, I'll say, "You already do a holiday open house, one, we're down to 11. We're going to do four cupcake parties. How hard is it to buy two dozen cupcakes? And blank out any visits for—any client appointments from 2:00 until 6:00 on a given Wednesday, this is easy. We're down to five."

And one by one, we chisel away at it. And then I make sure that I call them before, ask them how they're doing, tell them to enjoy it.

I ask them to take pictures—not of clients—but I ask them to take pictures and send me feedback immediately afterwards, and I ask them to listen to what their clients are saying at the event instead of having the voices in their head think, "Are there enough people here? Is this OK? Am I saying the right thing? Blah blah blah blah blah."

I talk them off the ledge, and—and as soon as there's some sort of positive feeling, feedback, business growth, or a thank-you note from someone, it's—that's it. It becomes—it just becomes a positive effort on behalf of the business, and—and it—you know, it makes people feel valued, and I always say, people just want to know that they matter.

And—and when you have someone in your office one or two times a year, and you're talking about their investments, you're asking them a lot of questions, but at no point in time are you giving up any information about yourself.

Not because you don't want to, not because you have nothing to say, but this gives a genuine way to develop these relationships and let people know that they matter.

I had—I had a client who—who was on the phone with me this past week, and she said, “Yes, I had someone tell me that I needed to stop doing things like sending birthday cards.”

And I didn’t know what to say. And she said, “So I—I stopped all that frivolous stuff, and I had a client come to my Christmas open house and say, ‘I missed my birthday card this year.’”

John Diehl: Oh boy.

Jill Slomski: And I said your marketing is how you’re projecting your own personal brand on your business. Certainly in a very compliant-friendly way, but you—when these marketing efforts—when these—when these monthly things feel more comfortable and you start anticipating them, you know you’ve chosen well. And then people really understand who you are.

That rolling marketing calendar, it is the key to enjoying your business, affecting positively your clients, and—and giving them an opportunity to bring more people into your fold. It’s a great way to bring in friends and family in a very natural way, other than, “You want to come with me to my annual review?” That makes no sense.

So it gives you a chance to communicate your value, because these financial advisors, by virtue of job title, are intimidating people, and we know that they’re not intimidating at all. They’re fabulous people out there, dedicated to their clients. And it—this gives you a way to—to just engage differently.

John Diehl: Jill, thanks. I mean, that—look, there’s so many ideas, but if there’s one thing that advisors should—should do today to get them started on this idea, what would you say?

Jill Slomski: Start writing down the next 12 months, and start filling them in. Don’t be scared—don’t be scared that—because how you’re going to make your clients feel, and the level of engagement and loyalty, and the growth of your business is astronomical. Just start now. Don’t overanalyze.

John Diehl: Well thanks, Jill. That was—that was a lot of fun. I really appreciate all your insight. Thanks for joining us again.

Jill Slomski: Well thank you, John.

John Diehl: And from all of us at Hartford Funds to all of you who are listening, we want to say thank you as well. And we look forward to talking to you again very soon on our next episode of the Human-Centric Investing Podcast.

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