

## Agency for Change Podcast: Rosie Siemer, Founder and CEO, FIVESEED

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- LinkedIn – <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rosiesiemer/>
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Rosie Siemer

Follow your bliss and make your own luck.

Announcer

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of Agency for Change podcast. Today, I am thrilled to have Rosie Siemer with us. She is the founder and CEO of an organization called FIVESEED. They're a leading research and strategy partner for arts, culture and conservation organizations worldwide. She has nearly a decade of experience spearheading groundbreaking initiatives. We're going to chat with her about her innovative strategies and her book on museum membership. She literally wrote the book on museum membership. Also, we're going to chat about her unique approach to enhancing audience engagement in cultural organizations. Rosie, I am eager to talk with you today to talk about your work. Welcome to the podcast.

Rosie Siemer

Thank you so much, Lyn. I'm so excited to be here with you.

Lyn Wineman

I can't wait to have this conversation because I think your work is so interesting, Rosie, but I'd love to start by having you tell us more about FIVESEED and what you do.

Rosie Siemer

Sure, so we are a research and strategy organization and we partner exclusively with arts and culture organizations and really where our core strength is is helping museums and cultural develop data-informed strategies so that they can reach new audiences, but also so that they can deepen their relationships with their existing visitors, members and donors.

Lyn Wineman

Oh, I love that so much. I love the idea of really being intentional about creating and building those relationships and I'm really interested in what is your strategy and approach for enhancing audience engagement for these arts and cultural organizations?

Rosie Siemer

Yeah, so we start all of our projects by asking just a ton of questions. You know, the answers to those questions are really what drive the research methodology and how we approach the strategy development. You know, each museum is very different and their challenges are unique, their opportunities are unique. So we really are kind of thinking about how can we create the most comprehensive approach for research and we really want to be gathering insights to better understand who our audiences are, what they care about, how we can better meet their needs. And all of that really kind of backs up to those initial questions that the organization wants to answer. And then we can from there go out and talk to the people and find out, you know, when are they visiting, why are they visiting, why aren't they visiting, why are they members? And so everything kind of flows from those initial questions.

Lyn Wineman

I really appreciate that, you know. I think what's interesting is you bring a lot of value to the organizations you serve because you understand museums, arts and cultural organizations. But assuming that they're all the same would be a huge mistake, wouldn't it?

Rosie Siemer

Not only do we have museums that are different disciplines, different sizes, but they have different cultures, they have different goals, they're in different markets, different communities, that they're serving different priorities. So, yeah, it really is important to take a couple steps back and make sure that we understand the organization and what their goals are before we start down any path for research.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, Rosie, I'm really curious, what sparked your interest in working with museums? I mean, were you an eight year old on a playground going, when I grow up, I want to be a museum audience engagement specialist.

Rosie Siemer

You know, I have to say that I was very fortunate just to kind of fall into this work. Museums have always been very important in my life. When I was little, my mom, and still to this day, is a member of everything. She's a member of the Science Center and the Art Museum and that was really how we as a family got out and explored and she always really instilled in me and my siblings this idea of being curious and the fun of learning, and so museums were always just a special place. And as an adult, I mean I think museums are incredibly important for society and they have the potential to really foster human connection. I mean, my love of museums has always been there, but I found a love of membership a little later in my career and now that I found that I am just completely fascinated by membership and I think I could spend the rest of my life working in that field and never be bored.

Lyn Wineman

I love it. Well, they say find work that you love and you'll never work a day in your life right which I know that you work very hard for your clients and for your business. But when you love it and have a passion for the organizations, that really makes it a lot more exciting to get out of bed in the morning to do the work that we're going to do. Rosie, the first time you and I talked, you were sharing with me about your member motivation study, and I was so fascinated by that because I felt some parallels to the work that KidGlov does and I just wanted to learn more. And so, for our listeners, could you walk us through that member motivation study and maybe even share some high level things that you discovered in that survey?

Rosie Siemer

Sure, so I will try to do this without the visuals.

Lyn Wineman

Okay.

Rosie Siemer

So the big idea behind the member motivation study is that ever since I started working in membership, I've always been really curious about how social identity might play a role in how people decide to become a member at a museum.

And I thought that you know, one of the best ways for us to investigate those kind of hidden motivations behind the decision to join would be to conduct a field experiment, and so we partnered with 30 organizations.

They represented all across the country, different size museums, different disciplines and we set out to test what we divide as the control, which in this case was the traditional batting proposition of membership.

So that's typically talk about membership, it's a way to visit for free all year long, to get access to these benefits, and we tested that control value proposition against four distinct social identity framed value propositions, and so those included sense of belonging, being a facilitator, sense of responsibility and what we call the explorer, kind of this idea of being a lifelong learner, and so those value propositions were very distinct to those kind of big ideas, and we had the museum send out to their email list this link that sent them to one of those five messages and then we measured the response from there. The email that went out was was very bland, not sexy marketing, it was just enough to let people self identify that they were at least interested in membership and as soon as they went, click that link, they they got dropped into our study and we can actually observe how they were responded to those messages.

Lyn Wineman

I think that's so fascinating. Now, I didn't hear in the different options you had tote bag was tote bag not, I always think of tote bag as being one of those things you expect when you're a member.

Rosie Siemer

So tote bag in this inaugural kind of initial study did not make the cut and I have to hold up on its own. But what I will say is that in some of our other research, we have found that people are really interested, some members feel very strongly about being able to display their support in the organization, and so I think tote bags do a great job of that. And you know, we're still we're still doing our research. So this was just our first year of the study and we have a lot more to learn.

Lyn Wineman

I love that. I love the whole idea behind the study. So are there, I know you're still, you know it's just the first year, but are there some, a few big insights you could share with us?

Rosie Siemer

Yes, so I think the most important takeaway that came out of this research is that we have now empirical evidence that we can be more effective, at least in some contexts, by marketing membership through this frame of social identity. So value propositions that outperformed the control at a statistically significant level included the sense of belonging, and the explorer and also our facilitator served really well. And then, depending on the type of organization if it was a history museum or a garden or an art museum we saw some differences in which messages kind of resonated most but I think you know the key for me is that it just means, it doesn't mean that we should stop talking about the kind of more transactional benefits of membership, but instead we really need to be integrating more of this social identity messaging into all of our marketing.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, I think it's so fascinating and I think that it's got to be hard as a museum director or a museum marketer. You're getting ready for membership drive. You've got some very important goals you have to meet. It's got to be hard to give up the things that you've always done, and so what I love about what you've done is you've found out some really interesting insights, but you've done it in a way that's backed with data, so it gives people the confidence to make some good decisions and try some new things. Would you say that's true about the work from the survey?

Rosie Siemer

Absolutely, and in fact, we've heard from a lot of the participating organizations and even some museums that didn't participate in our study but to have taken the findings and are putting them to work. They're doing some of their own AB testing. They're starting to put some of that messaging out on their website and in their direct mail. So, yeah, I think this is about not stopping the things that are working. If it's working, keep doing that by all means but that we can also optimize and start thinking about how to evolve and become even more effective as we're looking to engage new audiences.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, I really appreciate that. You know, actually, in addition to your study, Rosie, you've actually written the book on museum membership innovation, right? Can you tell us more about the book?

Rosie Siemer

Yeah. So I mean, this book really kind of came out of my experience working with museums for the past 13 or so years and it really kind of came from seeing that museums were struggling, that museums were lagging a bit, especially when it comes to innovation and to embracing experimenting. I really wanted to support museum leaders in thinking about how they can keep kind of doing the things that are working but also start to innovate and what are some of the ways that you can go about that. And then also really bringing forward some things that have been kind of top of mind for me as I was learning more about and just my own research into why people join and realizing that we have a big opportunity in the museum field to build more empathy and to our work, our research and also just the way that we are designing our membership programs, the way that we are messaging our audiences, to just build stronger relationships and more loyalty.

Lyn Wineman

I just am in love with you talking about empathy and the idea of combining data and empathy. I think that is such a powerful dual threat there. Right, because having data to back up your decision making, but really having an understanding for your audience and I think even the different unique niches within your audience is so important, Rosie, so I love that that's part of your framework. Now I imagine, with all of this work and thinking about innovation, you know we're seeing a lot of change across the board in marketing. How do you see the landscape of museum engagement evolving in the future? And two part question what would FIVESEED's role be in helping museums innovate?

Rosie Siemer

So I mean, first and foremost, I think museums today have found themselves in a highly competitive landscape when it comes to options for leisure and education and kind of creating shared experiences. You know, museums are competing not only with other museums and other arts and culture activities. They're competing with Netflix and YouTube and a lot of for-profit immersive experiences like Meow Wolf. So I think museums really need to get better at understanding audience needs and then meeting audiences where they are. So there's a lot of discussion in the museum field right now about how the museum experience might need to change to better meet folks where they are.

But from an engagement standpoint, and when I'm thinking about audience development, I'm really thinking about first seek to understand, and so we need to really be listening deeply with not just our current audiences, but our potential audiences, because that's one of the things that museums are challenged with right now as well as reaching out to people who maybe haven't visited yet.

And for those people who might not, you know, like, as an example in one of the, there's some really great research out there that some of the biggest barriers to participation in museums is not cost. It's actually like time is a huge barrier. And then it's barriers like transportation. It's barriers like not feeling that that place is for me. Museums have a long way to go, I think, and being more responsive to audience needs and as far as our role, I think we are here to be a partner and a facilitator, to help encourage museums to think differently about how they might more intentionally design their offerings and then really kind of bring that research forward so that we are making decisions based on data and we're not just making assumptions about who our audiences are and what they care about.

Lyn Wineman

Wow, that makes a lot of sense. You know, there's so much information on the different generations that I do think it's easy to just assume that just this generation or that generation may or may not be interested, or they may be interested in certain things. But when you really break it down to your audience and you have empathy for them, that could really change the game. So I think it's fantastic that you're doing that. You know, Rosie, we at KidGlov work with a lot of nonprofit organizations, and some of those are museums and cultural organizations, and sometimes we get some pushback that oh, they're not really nonprofits. Do you find that, and how do you address that misconception, if you do find it?

Rosie Siemer

There's quite a bit of research out there that shows not only does kind of the broader general public not necessarily know that museums are nonprofits, but even visitors and even some members may not know that a museum is a nonprofit, and this is, I think, one of those fundamental challenges that museums have.

It's how do we educate audiences about why we need their support, how their donation or their membership, even their visitation, makes a difference. That's all about communicating impact, but there's a lot of noise out there and I think for museums it's becoming increasingly difficult to cut through the clutter, to be top of mind. So I don't know that I have a great answer just yet for how to solve this, but I think at the foundational level, it's about communication and it's about messaging and making sure that we are not again not making assumptions about what people know, because we know we're very close to the organization and so we don't always think about how our audiences may not just be thinking about us day in and day out. They may not know everything so we have to do a better job of educating. I also like to encourage our clients to think about how they might set expectations for visitors and members in a way that we expect them to support us. We expect them to share with their friends and family about the wonderful experience they've had. We want to encourage those types of behaviors.

Lyn Wineman

That's great. I think most people would probably be blown away to really know the cost that it takes to facilitate a museum experience. I think that sometimes, maybe when we're paying the fee, we feel like, oh, this is kind of expensive, but really for a live type of cultural experience, that's not an easy thing to put together. So, Rosie, I love talking about your research and your work and your book. For our listeners who'd like to learn more, how can they find information about FIVESEED and the work that you're doing?

Rosie Siemer

Yeah, so our website is currently under development, but when the website coming out soon at [fiveseed.com](http://fiveseed.com). But in the meantime you could definitely check out [membershipinnovation.com](http://membershipinnovation.com). That's where we post a lot of our research findings and insights and things that are swirling in our heads. And also for those who are interested in getting more involved in the museum community, you can always connect with me and my broader team at Museums as Progress. This is a community of practice and you can find us at [museumprogress.com](http://museumprogress.com).

Lyn Wineman

That's amazing. We will put links to both of those websites in the show notes for this on kidglov.com, so anybody that wants to link directly to those, we'll get that in there. And good luck on the new website. I know that's a big project and when it's done that will be fantastic. So, Rosie, I'm going to switch gears here and I'm going to ask you my favorite question. This episode, by the way, is our 190th episode of Agency for Change. Can you believe that?

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, e're nearing into 200 there, but I have always asked this question because I'm inspired by motivational quotes and I would love to have a Rosie Seamer original quote for our listeners.

Rosie Siemer

Okay, Well, I guess, okay, I guess my words of wisdom quote might be something that's a bit of a blend between two ideas that have always inspired me. So I would say follow your bliss and make your own luck.

Lyn Wineman

Ooh, follow your bliss and make your own luck. I love that. That is fantastic, and since we're just about past St. Patrick's Day, that seems like a good St. Patrick's Day quote as well. So, Rosie, as we wrap up this great conversation and I'm so interested in the work that you're doing I'd like to ask one last question, and that is what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Rosie Siemer

Oh gosh. Well, I think I guess pushback against conventional wisdom. You know, really kind of make time and space for experimentation and challenging some of your assumptions. I think that's true in our kind of day-to-day membership program management practice, but also when we're thinking about how we want to engage with our audiences, how we go about hearing from them and really just to think about how we can be more intentional in designing experiences and from my perspective, membership can do that. You know, we can be more intentional about what we want our membership program to do for the organization and also what we want the program to feel like and be for our members.

Lyn Wineman

I think the idea of making time and space for experimentation is a really important way of life so that is just great advice, Rosie. Rosie, I fully believe the world needs more people like you. We need more museums, more arts and cultural organizations, and I'm glad that you're out there helping them on our behalf. So thank you for joining us today.

Rosie Siemer

Thank you so much, Lyn. It's been such a treat and I'm honored to have a chance to share a little bit about something that I care very deeply about.

Lyn Wineman

What a great conversation. Thank you so much.

Announcer

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