



## Next in Marketing | AppsFlyer

### Episode 12: HER's Shana Summers Wants Marketers to Move Beyond Catering to the Black Community in February & the LGBTQ Community in June

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#### **Mike Shields** (19s):

Hey guys, this is Mike Shields and this week on Next in Marketing I got to talk to Shana Summers Head of Community at HER. We talked about how marketers are and aren't catering to the LGBTQ community, what she thought was the problem with a recent Facebook ad boycott, and what it's really like as a person of color looking to crack both the tech and marketing industries. Let's get started. Welcome to Shana. How are you?

#### **Shana Summers** (39s):

Hi, doing great. Thank you. Thank you for having me on.

#### **Mike Shields** (41s):

Thanks for being here. So it's funny. I was thinking I'm a middle age, white guy. Straight. Married for 13 years. Met my wife in real life. So, this is like right in my wheelhouse.

#### **Shana Summers** (54s):

Totally, totally. A professional. Right in this area. Right?



**Mike Shields** (57s):

Exactly. So tell us about HER. Tell us the origin story. What is the company all about? Do you call yourselves as a social app, a dating app? Who are you guys?

**Shana Sumers** (1m 6s):

Yeah, we've moved into the wonderful world of being a community app. And so, we have the mix of dating as well as building community. So HER was started back, it started initially as Dash and then moved into HER in 2015, I believe. And so this all started basically because our CEO found that there were not enough spaces for LGBTQ+ women. So, she went out and decided to build an app that created a safe space for women, trans, and non-binary folks to come on in date without, you know, the grossness of cis men, honestly, coming in and you know, just...

**Mike Shields** (1m 45s):

You don't have to explain that to me, I understand.

**Shana Sumers** (1m 48s):

There you go. Thank you, thank you. So we continue to build it out. And while it initially started off as the dating app, we quickly saw that this could have more value. You know, there's Hinge that wants you off the platform as soon as you meet. Where we're like, there are no physical spaces for women, trans, and non-binary folks right now. There's only 16 bars total in the U.S. That are geared towards queer women even. And that's if they survive after COVID-19.

**Mike Shields** (2m 13s):

Right. If they are open at all, right.

**Shana Sumers** (2m 16s):



Exactly, so we built this app and we've built out a whole space where there's a dating side, there is a community side, and there's an event side. So, we have this all encompassing space for our users all over the world.

**Mike Shields** (2m 28s):

Okay, so we've established, I'm not a dating app person necessarily, but you mentioned something interesting there. I imagine that most, again, generalizing, most dating apps, aren't more transactional or like getting you to meet someone and then get lost. Do I have that right? And why the focus on a community aspect here?

**Shana Sumers** (2m 46s):

Yeah. It's so much easier for heterosexual relationships to be built and taken off and moved off of a platform. As well, there's more money involved in it. You know, Tinder makes a ton of money. Bumble makes a ton of money. Everybody sees us as such a niche audience, when we're like, we have over 6 million users worldwide. Like, this isn't a niche audience. And because there is such a lack of safe spaces, you know, I can go to a bar and it would just be filled with cisgender straight people all over the place. And they don't have to think twice about it, where if I'm a black trans woman and I walk into a bar, I'm worried about my safety at all points.

**Shana Sumers** (3m 23s):

As a black girl, a woman, I go in to certain spaces, I don't feel confident or comfortable. So we knew that, especially in like rural areas where there's not a lot of LGBTQ+ community that having the app would provide them with that space to come on and make friends, even if it was virtually and at a distance, to connect with their community, to know that they are safe and appreciate it. And so that was when we decided to lean more into the community aspect.

**Mike Shields** (3m 47s):



Interesting, so there's folks in there, that it's just as important to them to talk to people in their universe and, you know, share stories and share their lifestyle and talk about things then just, I want to meet somebody to date.

**Shana Sumers** (3m 59s):

Yeah. There's plenty of people who come on in their trying to figure out their identity. There's couples who are on there trying to find other couples to just be friends with. You know? You can go out and find other couple of friends, like it's nothing. And a lot of times we have hard times doing that. Some people don't even know where to look to find events in their area, so we create a list as well as host our own so that they have access to that, and are able. Some people have traveled hours to come to our events because they don't have that in their area and so it's amazing to see that community develop.

**Mike Shields** (4m 28s):

Interesting. I will say, it is sometimes hard to find couple friends who, that you, both of you liked. That is a big problem. That is not as big a problem as things you are describing.

**Shana Sumers** (4m 38s):

That still carries over. That's why we still have the swiping aspects, right now. We don't like that couple, we got to keep it moving.

**Mike Shields** (4m 41s):

Agreement is very challenging. So anyway, let's talk about your job specifically. You're head of the community, I'm guessing that encompasses several things. Does that mean, are you marketing the product, are you trying to reach out to community members, are you trying to build a community? What does that encompass?



**Shana Sumers** (4m 59s):

Yeah, so a lot of my work focuses on driving engagement as well as marketing outreach in terms of finding successful stories and finding people who have engaged with the app and had that success, whether it was in dating or friendship and being able to share those stories out as an acquisition model. So, a lot of our marketing that goes out into the world, I don't directly do, but I source the people to be able to help do it. We do a lot of community focused marketing, so if we're sharing a wedding story, or if we're sharing people who have used the app and they think it's great based off of any of the parts that they use.

**Shana Sumers** (5m 34s):

But most of the things that I do are driving the content that happens inside of the community. I've built out the moderator team. I do the email marketing. I do our social media. I'm, co-hosting another podcast called Bad Queers. So we have multiple areas that I kind of touch upon to be able to bring people in or at least make them aware that the app is available for them.

**Mike Shields** (5m 53s):

Right. So, I wonder, you mentioned how its so important for this audience to have, to feel like they have a safe space, are most members happy to be part of marketing. Are they okay with you, you know, reaching out to them and trying to include them in messaging or outreach? Is that welcoming or is it hard to get people to participate?

**Shana Sumers** (6m 11s):

No, our community is completely supportive in every sort of outreach that we do. We automatically have a piece that says, is it okay if we reach out to you for marketing opportunities and is it okay if we use your photos for X, Y, and Z? So, we have this thing called, we met on HER, which is for couples to write in and tell us their story of how they met through the app and what their life is like now. And they'll send in photos for us and we feature them every week. When we go back, we can check to see those and say like, "oh, some of these are great photos."



**Shana Sumers** (6m 41s):

We can use them for different things and we'll reach out to them and they're very quick to get back to us or let us know whether or not they are. But, I can count on one hand probably the amount of times that somebody has said "no" in my six years that I've been at HER.

**Mike Shields** (6m 53s):

Interesting. Do you have a great, we met in HER story or one that really stands out that you'd like to share?

**Shana Sumers** (6m 59s):

Oh yeah, yeah. There was one where they met kind of twice through our app so that they had met and chatted on the app and then it kind of like fizzled out. They weren't able to. So, then they both ended up at one of our HER events in New York, and saw each other from across the room and they went and like met each other again. And then it was like, basically from that night on, they have not separated and they're currently married and they have a dog and it's just awesome to be able to see that, like that connection.

**Shana Sumers** (7m 34s):

And we've done some campaigns with them and they're just awesome. And we have another couple who is together, they have a viral photo of them kissing at one of the recent, black lives matter protests, as well as an all black lives matter protest. And they caught them kissing and the rain right by a police car. And they've been together for awhile and they're one of our favorite couples to work with and they're always reaching out to work with us. So.

**Mike Shields** (7m 58s):

Oh, that's cool. That's become an iconic image, I guess, overtime. Okay. So talk about the marketing aspects. You talked about a community outreach or a little bit. What works for you? How much of your life is trying to do the traditional, using databases and trying to find customers



are like, look-alike people on social media platforms, what does your customer acquisition strategy look like compared to a typical direct to consumer app or brand?

**Shana Sumers** (8m 25s):

Yeah. Unfortunately, we have to rely on Facebook a bit too much. Which I think a lot of companies have to do that as well. So, we do a lot of Facebook acquisition, but we've also moved over to TikTok and have done a lot more engaging videos there, which has been a really great acquisition market for us, especially around like 18 to 28 years old. And we've been doing a lot of app store testing. Thankfully, Apple really likes us and has done some great features about our story and about our CEO and how the app was started.

**Shana Sumers** (8m 57s):

And so, those are kind of like our main key areas that we work on it. But also, our events end up working really well for customer acquisition because people who have attended the events before, bring in friends again, and then those friends can receive codes and are able to download our app afterwards and continue to engage because they enjoyed the event so much. So that's kind of our side one that brings in a small numbe.

**Mike Shields** (-):

Good old fashioned word of mouth kind of.

**Shana Sumers** (9m 21s): Yeah.

**Mike Shields** (9m 23s):

You mentioned, you know, it's kind of tough to be so reliant on Facebook. Talk about that a little more. Is it that you, is there a morality to that, that they have so many good things happening on Facebook? Or is it just like you don't like having someone else—only putting all your eggs in one basket? What's your thought process on why it's not great to be totally tied to them?



**Shana Sumers** (9m 43s):

It's definitely one of those putting the eggs in the basket. It's like, they've become such a supersized company, and yeah, they have a lot of really "questionable practices." When we also know that its like, well this is, we're a start up and we have to get people onto the app, so that they're spending money on the app and its like, you hate to be in that position. But with Facebook it's just like we have a day or a couple of times where, you know, they were off or like something spiked with their stuff. And then all of a sudden we're charged a high amount or something.

**Mike Shields** (10m 13s):

You feel the waves, whatever happens there.

**Shana Sumers** (10m 16s):

And it was just like, why do we have to keep doing this for this one? And it was like before TikTok came out in other spaces for us to test, then we have to, we have to focus in this area. And so we're hoping that in the near future, we can start to slowly shift, and thankfully TikTok has helped us do that shift. And hopefully there'll be more spaces for us to try that, as well. But definitely do not want to have to just rely on one supersized thing that has way too much control.

**Mike Shields** (10m 44s):

Well thankfully, Tik Tok's future, looks very clear and stable. Nothing to worry about there.

**Shana Sumers** (10m 46s): (laughs) Yeah.

**Mike Shields** (10m 51s):

It's interesting that you said that because, I'm sure this is evolving, but I have heard from brands and this is now, it's maybe a few months old, but the idea that Tik Tok is their target's there, they





love it, but you can't do all of the really powerful, sophisticated data matching in back and targeting that you can do on Facebook and Instagram, which has been around forever. Is that a challenge for you? Is that changing?

**Shana Sumers** (11m 12s):

It's definitely something we have to look into, but I think also being in start up world, you are kind of used to having to be scrappy about the types of information that you get.

**Mike Shields** (11m 20s): Give it a shot.

**Shana Sumers** (11m 20s):

Yeah and seeing what works, you know, at the moment TikTok is able to give us the initial numbers that we can use. Even if its not as sophisticated as what Instagram and Facebook are able to do, but it does get the job done.

**Mike Shields** (11m 34s):

What did you think about the Facebook boycotts? It happened, I guess it was July for about a month and ton of brands made a lot of noise and then—I believe lots of them are back, some of them are still holding out. What was your take on the effectiveness of all that?

**Shana Sumers** (11m 48s):

Yeah, I think the boycotts, when done right, can be effective. But I think for a lot of companies it was kind of performative. I think June and July were a lot of performative things that happen, especially around like black lives matter and around this, like people are trying to say like were taking a stance, we were doing this, but then your hopping write back on the platform and realizing how much it affects your business, which is unfortunate. But unless everybody kind of collectively comes together or a new platform starts, I don't think it's going to be a hundred percent effective.



**Shana Sumers** (12m 22s):

Go for it, do it. But they're still a monster right now. Yeah.

**Mike Shields** (12m 26s):

Yeah. I've also had similar stories, where brands were talking about how "I really want to, I want to be part of this movement, but I don't want to advertise alongside anything about police or protest or anything like that. I just want to be a part of the movement though." They're a little bit half-hearted, in some of the marketing world.

**Shana Sumers** (12m 42s):

Yeah. It's pretty unfortunate. It's kind of one of those things where, if you're going to be a part of a movement, but have restrictions on the ways that you're going to be a part of it, then you're not a part of it.

**Mike Shields** (12m 51s): Right.

**Shana Sumers** (12m 51s):

Like that's where the performativeness comes in because you can't choose what parts of a movement you're going to be a part of.

**Mike Shields** (12m 58s):

Yeah. You've got to believe in it, be all in or not. Or just stay out of the way. What about, I know a big issue in the app marketing universe is what's going on with Apple and their identifier that they use to let people to track what happens. Is that something that you're monitoring? Is not a big worry when you're in your life yet or ever?



**Shana Sumers** (13m 17s):

Not for us at the moment, at least that I'm aware of, but I shy away from all of the app store.

**Mike Shields** (13m 24s):

Yeah. The ad tech drama. Okay. What about you hinted at this earlier, you mentioned that you guys have content. What do you mean specifically? Is that, are you referring to user generated content? Are you guys trying to build out like an immediate business? You talked to me about your content thinking.

**Shana Sumers** (13m 41s):

Yeah. Currently I oversee all of the written content so we have lots of blogs and we also partner with sponsors for those blogs as well. We utilize different graphics so also our visual content that goes along with it. And we're starting to dip into video, in doing more, especially virtual events, that it makes it a lot easier to record and watch and review. So we're also pushing into that area. We're not moving into being a media company.

**Shana Sumers** (14m 11s):

It's kind of more so that we have information that we put out, especially about building relationships and what healthy relationships look like. Or, you know, were talking about sex, we were talking about dating, we are talking about all different types of things that can focus on HER, but we will, and are working on partnering more with other, like LGBTQ+ media areas because those don't get a lot of visibility. And so, how can we help them drive more traffic, but also make it useful for our community to engage with it. So whether that's figuring out how we can source them to automatically update into the app, when they post a new article, or how we are able to feature those articles?

**Shana Sumers** (14m 48s):



Different things like that. So, not moving into the media area for sure.

**Mike Shields** (14m 53s):

Well, we're not talking about hiring and editorial staff and building it, you know, the next generation version out or something. Yeah.

**Shana Sumers** (14m 57s): Not at the moment.

**Mike Shields** (14m 58s):

Right. Alright. What have you found in—the obvious question, right now I'm asking everybody in the last six months. What happened with your business when the pandemic hits, people go and quarantine? I imagine that changes dating radically or people getting together. Then it also probably affects your business in terms of what are marketers are doing. Talk, take us through maybe, what's happened in the past few months for you guys?

**Shana Sumers** (15m 21s):

Yeah. So the pandemic was actually a positive effect on our business. So, it did not stop people from wanting to connect. It definitely, probably heightened it, because people were unable to connect, so it was almost like, "Oh, I got to take advantage of this dating app before or didn't want to use it." And now it's like, "this is my connection to the outlet world." Yeah. So, we started to see all of our core behaviors definitely increase. So the amount of people who were liking each other, matching and messaging, which are like our key drivers to know that like, yes, we're driving retention here.

**Shana Sumers** (15m 52s):

And if more people are doing this, there are more likely to pay X amount or stay on the app longer. And so we saw a huge spike in our daily active users and our monthly active users. And the people who are coming in, our marketing was way more effective once we did a hard pivot from



in-person events to virtual events. We hosted a minimum, I think like eight or nine events a week. That we were doing. Yeah. It was hard pivot and we have tested almost every variety of event that we could do. So it was, it was really interesting, finding a positive within this pandemic time, that this was the positive for us.

**Mike Shields** (16m 28s):

So interesting. You know, so many companies that were event-heavy or event-reliant tried. Okay. So we're going to try to do the same thing, virtual or some kind of variation of a giant zoom call. And I think success has probably been all over the place, but I thought, I wonder—you hear that those are fizzling out of the enthusiasm for that—what have you guys found? It sounds like you were trying everything and you were finding continued desire to have virtual gatherings. What have you learned over that journey?

**Shana Sumers** (16m 54s):

Yeah, we've definitely had to test out, you know, what is interesting to users? How much is too much? We started testing like a monetization process because we're definitely not anywhere near making the amount of money that we did for in person events, but we are still making money and monetizing off of it. And so, figuring out like what days of the week are best for people. What's the most consistent? We've sent out constant surveys as we were doing each event because we ranged from happy hours to sponsored events, to work outs, to movie nights, to ask-me-anythings with professionals.

**Shana Sumers** (17m 29s):

And so, figuring out which one of those are the most popular. And so we still have ones that have big spikes and we get, you know, our great numbers that we love are like, okay, we have over a hundred people on here and anything less is like, here's what's going on. So we know which ones and on which days to do that. And then which ones that were like, we're keeping going, because these are just great for the community even if we do only have around like 40 to 60 people joining in on that.



**Mike Shields** (17m 56s):

Do you think you kind of have to constantly tweak the formula, just to keep it fresh?

**Shana Sumers** (18m 1s):

At times, but, not a hundred percent. I think, especially with like, one of the things that we've kept going is speed dating. So we've brought speed dating back to do that.

**Mike Shields** (18m 9s): Okay.

**Shana Sumers** (18m 9s):

And there are like systems and software that we use to do that. So each time we're kind of like tweaking that, because before you would get like a consistent group of people and then they'd drop off because they've either met somebody or you're like, "okay, I'm never gonna meet you in person, I'm moving away," so then you have to like find that new group. So that's the one that we've probably had to tweak the most, but otherwise some of the other systems, like we have a really good process, we have a really good interview flow. People know what to expect and people like that consistency.

**Shana Sumers** (18m 39s):

So they know what they're going to see. If they come to an ask me anything or they know what they're gonna see when they come through a movie night.

**Mike Shields** (18m 45s):

Very cool. You also hinted at this earlier, you are a podcast host yourself. Right? How long have you been doing that? Is that connected with HER or is it your own thing? Tell me about your podcast life. So I can get better.



**Shana Sumers** (18m 56s):

Okay. Yeah. So I was like, you're doing great. What are you talking about? We launched Bad Queers at the end of April, so it's still fairly new and it was kind of, you know, perfect time to get it done and get it out while we were in quarantine. And we also wanted to be sure that we got it out during Pride month, so in June. And it's been a huge learning curve. It is a part of HER, but it's like a separate, it's almost like, you know, you have this brand that ties into the company. So it's like bad words is its own separate thing that ties into HER because both me and my cohost work there.

**Shana Sumers** (19m 31s):

So that gave us also some legitimacy when we were starting to say like, "Hey, we do kind of know what we're talking about because we are immersed in this community, all day everyday and we are a part of the community." So it's been awesome. We've had some amazing guests on already. We do weekly shows every Monday that come out. Yeah it's been a wild ride. But it's definitely been a positive and a new source of acquisition for people. I've received DMS that are like, "Hey, I just downloaded the app because I listened to your podcast and its great,"

**Shana Sumers** (20m 3s):

That's what we're after, going from there. So yeah.

**Mike Shields** (20m 7s):

So that's what I was going to ask you, I mean it's very early. Is the podcast, are you viewing that as a moneymaker? Are you going to try and you know, sell advertising or is it more about marketing your company bring in new leads?



**Shana Sumers** (20m 19s):

Right now it's more brand awareness, with the goal that once we hit specific numbers that we we'll be able to start like advertising, within the podcast show and are able to then continue and make it where its like, you know—once we're able to go back and do in-person events, we can host live listenings and things like that. But yeah, it's definitely right now, brand awareness, moving into that monetization piece.

**Mike Shields** (20m 44s):

I should have asked you earlier and this maybe has changed in the past months, how much of your business, as much as you can share is membership driven, ad driven, event driven and like what does that look like? And I'm wondering how much of a role of advertising is playing for you.

**Shana Sumers** (20m 59s):

Yeah. Premium subscriptions are our number one way that we earn our regular amount of money and then it would go into sponsorships, which typically include the ad service within the app. And then our events would be the next tier after that. So, that's the order of how we run it.

**Mike Shields** (21m 19s):

Right. And what have you found? And this may have changed also a lot of six months—with advertisers, are they—I often wonder if they just come in to this universe, you know, during Pride month and they much like we spoke about in black lives matter, they show that they care, but maybe they they're not here all the time versus is having a budget that's dedicated is going to target this audience. What is the advertiser journey right now in terms of connecting with brands and getting the budgets that are out there?

**Shana Sumers** (21m 47s):





Especially when all of this first started, they were a bit more cautious, about where they were putting their spend. For the companies, who were already very much bought into Pride and supporting a LGBTQ+ movement, they were like, well, we have all of this money now, so let's go and do all of this stuff with you, which was awesome. And then other companies that we would normally reach out to during Pride season were a bit more standoffish and wanted to test stuff on a smaller scale and then work their way up.

**Shana Sumers** (22m 19s):

The people that I can say, successfully, the people who did commit and worked with us, got more than their money's worth. And we were able to show that in our case studies, to each of those companies. But yeah, it was definitely interesting to see kind of how the shift was. And how we had to focus more on some like brands that were already LGBTQ+ focused, or brands that we have worked with before.

**Mike Shields** (22m 43s):

And this probably varies a lot, by company and category, but do most of your big advertisers—do they have a dedicated LGBTQ budget? Is it from the general budget? Is it testing? Is it all over the place?

**Shana Sumers** (22m 57s):

Yeah, it's a bit all over the place. Some of them do have specifics towards like, app areas or dating areas and things like that or they'll have it towards an event spend. So that was the one thing that, when we did have to do a virtual event, it was like, how do we work this in as a sponsor? And what can we do to do that and make it successful all around? So that was kind of some of our biggest tests around that. But yeah, most of them definitely have like an LGBTQ budget that they put around Pride as much as we try to advertise and prompt companies to say, "Hey, like Pride isn't just like one month just like, you don't have to only support black people in black history month."



**Shana Sumers** (23m 35s):

And things like that. Like you could move past just February and June—and actually, provided a lot of companies don't see the LGBTQ+ community, especially when it's women, trans and non-binary folk. They see it with gay men because gay men have more money, technically.

**Mike Shields** (23m 48s): Right.

**Shana Sumers** (23m 48s):

And so they're like, oh yeah, like we will go over here and do this, but they won't see the benefit a lot when it comes to our audience too.

**Mike Shields** (23m 57s):

Tell me a little bit about how you got here. You talked about the origin of the company, but how did you personally get into like this tech marketing intersection, and like, I'd love to hear maybe a little about your story, about your background and now you got into this universe.

**Shana Sumers** (24m 11s):

Sure. Yeah. Mine was kind of by accident, that I ended up here. I have a history as a music therapist. I worked as a music therapist for five years. I worked with adolescents with emotional behaviors.

**Mike Shields** (24m 23s):

The classic career path for the—you know.

**Shana Sumers** (24m 26s):



It's a natural. It's a natural move up you know, so yeah. I worked with adolescents with emotional and behavior disorders and kids and adults with developmental disabilities. So I have my bachelor's in music therapy, my master's in special education. And while I was getting my master's, I ended up becoming an ambassador for HER. And so what that meant was I was studying overseas in Australia. And while I was there, Pride was starting, they call Pride, Mardi Gras there. And so I was doing a lot of activities while I was there and so I got to write about all of my experiences.

**Shana Sumers (24m 59s):**

I was also playing soccer while I was there. So I ended up tearing my ACL and had to come home. And so while I was home, I was doing more with them because I couldn't go and work because of the physical nature of the job. Like if I had to get down and get up, help with a kid that was acting out, anything like that, I was a liability. So I stayed and volunteered with the company. I started helping with social media. I started helping add events to the app. And then I got to a point where when I was back to work and doing things, I was still doing work with HER part time.

**Shana Sumers (25m 30s):**

And one month my current boss had said, Hey, like, you're doing amazing. Do you want to make a little extra cash and oversee our social media team? I said, yeah, sure, why not? Good spending money. You know, I can treat my friends every once in a while.

**Mike Shields (25m 44s):**

Was HER where it is now, like in terms of size, in buildings, revenue, business model yet or not really?

**Shana Sumers (25m 50s):**

At that time, no. Yeah. I think it was like half of the size, on every front, probably. And so, I took the opportunity and—excuse me—within that month I reshaped what the social media team looked like and got a surprise job offer. And so at that point, and I had moved and lived in that place



where I was, in Arizona at the time, I had been there for like seven months. So I was like, "Oh, I have to quit my job."

**Mike Shields** (26m 17s): Gonna be a life change, woosh.

**Shana Sumers** (26m 21s):

I said, you know, when else is this ever going to happen? And so I waited. I was like, if you can, this was like in May at some point, I think at that time. And I was like, "If you can wait until September, I will be there." So that I had time to offload my kids and do that. So, they waited and I have not looked back.

**Mike Shields** (26m 39s):

And have you, I dunno if your company was trying to raise money during this period. I wonder, cause we've talked about this a lot recently, both the marketing industry and Silicon Valley certainly has been trying to reconcile with its history of not being— having a great track-record on diversity, and hiring and the leadership. Have you gotten, did you guys run into any obstacles, in either universe where that was harder to get funding or to get people to take you seriously or get the right hiring? What has that journey been like in your experience, or people that you've talked to in your world?

**Shana Sumers** (27m 11s):

Yeah, I came on kind of right after all of that happened, but from the stories that I do know, so HER started in London and while it was there, that was where our CEO, Robyn Exton, was having the most issues getting buy-in or getting investors for people who were here for the platform. And so she made the decision to up and move to San Francisco, where more U.S. Investors were here for the product and got it.



**Shana Sumers** (27m 41s):

And we ended up getting an amazing group of investors to be able to come into the platform and show that support. So what it was, as soon as she made the move to the U.S. was where there was way more buy-in, way more interest. Yeah.

**Mike Shields** (27m 56s):

Cool. And, and have you in generally speaking is the, I mean, I don't, I don't know. I don't know if either of us can solve all the problems if either of those industries in this podcast, certainly not. Have you found, is there, are things moving in the right direction? Is there a recognition that, you know, we, these companies need more VCs have with people of color or more leadership that makes, decision makers there? Are there—are we seeing positive change or is it going to take a little while?

**Shana Sumers** (28m 22s):

There's like sparks, I would say. You know, there are people who are actively making the change, who are starting their own VC groups that are saying like, we are only focusing on minority groups, you know, Arlan Hamilton has gone in and started that. But, she had to start that after years of being turned down herself. There are other companies, or other groups have people who are leaders in their companies like LaFond Davis, who is the VP of diversity and inclusion at Indeed.

**Shana Sumers** (28m 52s):

She just started with a group that is focusing on more women in minority groups as well. So there are sparks of people who are starting to do in these areas, but there's still not enough. Like, there are times where, you know, we're out to dinner with other founders and these things and they won't even sit and look you in the eye to have a conversation about these things. And they just turn and talk to the other person that looks just like them, to continue to talk about whatever, or they'll sit and spout about their knowledge that "they think they have", and then you come back and you're like, actually those numbers are incorrect, it's actually this.



**Shana Sumers** (29m 23s):

And they just look at you and they're like, "Okay, whatever," and continue. It was like, you weren't even speaking there, so as much as you're like—yes, I'm starting to see these things. It's like, that's also my community so I'm going to search for it, but are other people doing that who are not a part of that community? And that's where that start needs to happen.

**Mike Shields** (29m 40s):

And unfortunately it's those and networking things, where a lot of decisions get made and you need to kind of crack that universe, which is never, never easy. Do you see the same kind of dynamic in the marketing world where the sparks are happening? But you're still fighting the same kind of current.

**Shana Sumers** (29m 56s):

Absolutely. Because you can go and start to see and like, oh, this company made this amazing voice change in this. Like, you know, Nike has come out and put amazing content out in terms of their marketing. Or certain other tech companies will come out and be like, oh, like, that looks interesting, let's see who the team is behind that because it was like—it feels good, but something felt like it missed the mark. And then you look at it as an all white team of cis men, you know? So it's like, okay, great, some of you are starting to realize that you need to put this better voicing out there, but are you putting the back-end work on your people?

**Mike Shields** (30m 29s):

You need to get some help. Yeah. Don't do this just now.

**Shana Sumers** (30m 32s):

People aren't understanding the fact that you need to have diverse voices in your company to be able to move past this bias that you have, or just to sit and like check off boxes to say like, okay, in this commercial or this ad did we had an Asian person and a black person in this, all right, cool. That works. We place them in whatever. But then you don't notice the subtleties and where you



put them or where you place them, why you set them for a certain position and it's kind of absurd. So, you hear people doing a lot of the talk, but I'm still doing talks about, you know, how to be better because people still aren't being better.

**Shana Sumers** (31m 5s):

But they are starting to become more of a call-out culture with companies, which I think is great because it holds them accountable and they need to do better. But soon we are going to get sick of apologies and just need to have an action.

**Mike Shields** (31m 15s):

Yeah. And they need folks' on their staff. They can stop them from having to apologize for things hopefully.

**Shana Sumers** (31m 21s):

Well they need to focus on staff, but also they need to have that company culture to make sure that they can keep those folks on staff and keep them happy and work on it.

**Mike Shields** (31m 28s):

Not just check off as a hiring box either. Right?

**Shana Sumers** (31m 29s): Yup.

**Mike Shields** (31m 29s):

Makes total sense. Last thing is just tell us what's what is next for HER? I mean, no one can predict what's going to happen in this insane year, but is there anything you can kind of talk about where



do you think that the business is headed or in the industry is headed, or what's next for you guys in the next two, three, four months of the wonderful 2020?

**Shana Sumers** (31m 48s):

Yeah. We're definitely continuing to do more investment into our community space: highlighting people, working with people within our community, making sure that their stories are featured. We're starting to play around with more events feature, more live features and hopefully more partnerships with some more bigger names that we're able to talk about. But also just making sure that especially our U.S. Audience is voting. We are working with a lot of LGBTQ+ organizations that are out to get the vote.

**Shana Sumers** (32m 18s):

And you know, we know that a lot of how our community is going to respond is gonna be based on the November election because a lot of our audience is based in the U.S. So, we want to make sure that we're making that accessible as well.

**Mike Shields** (32m 31s):

Yeah. That is coming fast and it seems like it's gonna be kind of important, so that's great to hear. Awesome conversation Shana. It was really great to take us through what's going on with HER. We learned so much. Thanks so much for your time here.

**Shana Sumers** (32m 43s):

Thank you for having me.