

## **19\_RFG\_Ashley Elleby.mp3**

**Billy Loewen** [00:00:02] Hi! Welcome to Room for Growth.

**Billy Fischer** [00:00:04] A WillowTree podcast about growth marketing hosted by Billy Loewen and me, Billy Fischer.

**Billy Loewen** [00:00:09] Whether you're an industry expert or just getting started...

**Billy Fischer** [00:00:12] ...there's plenty of room to grow.

**Billy Loewen** [00:00:14] Share this episode with your favorite coworker, follow us wherever you enjoy podcasts, and reach out if you'd like to join the show.

**Billy Fischer** [00:00:20] You ready, Billie?

**Billy Loewen** [00:00:21] I'm ready, Billy.

**Billy Fischer** [00:00:22] Let's go.

**Billy Loewen** [00:00:23] Let's f\*\*\*\*\* grow.

**Billy Fischer** [00:00:28] Hey, welcome everyone to another episode of Room for Growth. Today we have Ashley on the podcast. Ashley is the Global Head of Lifecycle Marketing at Amazon Music. So we're super pumped to have her insights. And, we were just talking about the Taylor Swift album drops recently, and so boom, we got somebody from the music industry on the podcast. She's also unique in terms of a lifecycle marketer, but also with a technical background. And so, Billy, I know we really enjoyed our conversation with Ashley talking about skillset. Sometimes, the technical aspects of what we do can hold people up — particularly if they are, if they're purely marketing. So, what's your take on combining the skillsets?

**Billy Loewen** [00:01:15] Thing number one: holy smokes. Ashley is so bada\*\*. She starts talking and she's like, "Let me explain how I started a company in fashion to solve a problem that I saw in the industry. I was a college athlete at one of the best universities for sports. By the way, I have an MBA and now I lead music here after working at huge other brands." There were stars in my eyeballs for her, she's awesome.

**Billy Loewen** [00:01:41] But yeah, she touches on something that I think is changing marketing that's really critical. It's definitely something that we offer at WillowTree and is a huge differentiator for us — which is the technical skill set that marketers have in their toolbelt more and more often in order to enable campaigns that are high-performing, that are personalized, that have things like unique coupon codes in them, or unique offers unique content models that are deployed across these different audience segments. You have to just be increasingly technical. Also, how different lifecycle messages ultimately drive people to an app or a web experience — we need marketers who are more in control and able to speak the technical language to build both experiences out. And I think that that's something that Ashley kind of underplays in her bio is that her engineering background has really helped her advance in a marketing space, and is certainly a trend that we are paying attention to and that we're hiring towards.

**Billy Fischer** [00:02:41] Billy, I've got to acknowledge that yesterday — as we're recording this today — yesterday was Halloween. And you've got a little bit of your Halloween vibes going on. Would you want to share what you went for Halloween this year, Billy?

**Billy Loewen** [00:02:57] Yeah, I'm only mildly embarrassed as a 32 year old woman ... But, you all know that we're extremely brand loyal to our clients. We've talked about this brand before. We've talked about this person before. I love her. She's a queen. She is outrageously talented — such a boss. So I'm proud to do it. I went as Charlotte Flair from the WWE.

**Billy Fischer** [00:03:18] Nice. I did not go as anything this year, which is the most lame. I should have gone as one of the wrestlers. I'm not sure who — maybe Seth Rollins is my alter ego.

**Billy Loewen** [00:03:29] But you have pre-teen and teen daughters. So, would you please give us a quick, deep-dive into how Gen Z girls are thinking about Halloween. Did you go trick-or-treating? What did they dress as? What are the trends?

**Billy Fischer** [00:03:42] We went trick-or-treating. I saw some Pokémon. That was probably the most popular costume, which is kind of interesting. What I've discovered about Gen Z is that it's all about the group costumes. Nobody is an individual. You organize your costume around all of your friend groups. One of my daughters was the Hocus Pocus trio with two of her friends, and then another was randomly Winnie the Pooh with a group of her friends. So, it's all just about the group costumes, I think is what Gen Z is all about.

**Billy Loewen** [00:04:12] I have a Gen Z trend that I don't want to alarm you with — but I think it's going to be very alarming — which is that of my Gen Z friends, the number of them that can name the best movie scene in Halloween cinematic history, understand the song reference that goes with it, and just recognize this character pains me: how do people not know Beetlejuice anymore? I feel like Beetlejuice has just not followed with Gen Z — and it's such a Gen Z movie!

**Billy Fischer** [00:04:45] It's kind of a weird movie, so I think it just doesn't carry. It's got very, very weird '80s vibes. Was it released in the '80s or early '90s?

**Billy Loewen** [00:04:53] But it's so great. The scene in the kitchen where the spirits have possessed the dinner — the crew that's having a dinner party — and they do that ridiculous dance. If anyone is having a bad day, stop what you're doing. Go Google "dinner party scene and Beetlejuice" and just have two minutes of delight.

**Billy Fischer** [00:05:13] I think Hocus Pocus has stolen Gen Z. I saw Hocus Pocus decorations and yards. So it seems like it's more "in" than Beetlejuice.

**Billy Loewen** [00:05:21] I do not get it. I think Hocus Pocus is out. I would rather have Casper, certainly Beetlejuice, bring back Edward Scissorhands.

**Billy Fischer** [00:05:31] I don't know. I think we like we like fun vibes and that's what Hocus Pocus brings here.

**Billy Loewen** [00:05:37] That's a good point. Alright. Well, I feel like you and I have descended into holiday madness yet again, and we should indeed just get over to our guest Ashley Elleby.

**Billy Loewen** [00:05:54] Hi, Ashley. Welcome to Room for Growth. We are so excited to have you here today. For our listeners, Ashley is the Global Head of Lifecycle Marketing at Amazon Music. She has a rich background in digital marketing, global brand product strategy and product development. Before her role at Amazon, Ashley worked for other companies like Google and Pepsi — a couple of small names you might have heard before. Ashley is an expert in driving growth for global brands through engagement, retention and product differentiation strategies. She also has a huge entrepreneurial spirit that we're excited to dive into a little bit. She served as the marketing lead for New York City startups such as Mrs. Dorsey's Kitchen and founded the tall women's apparel brand Alyssa Vermell Apparel. Something we're super eager to talk to Ashley about is the advocacy that she's doing to increase women and minority representation in startups and in tech. And then if that were not enough of a resumé, in Ashley's free time, she also mentors small business owners, hopeful entrepreneurs and grads going into tech. Ashley, welcome to the show.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:06:56] Thank you. Thank you for having me.

**Billy Fischer** [00:06:58] Ashley, we're super excited to get to know you and share some of your expertise with our listeners to get us started. Could you tell us about what your introduction to tech was, and how you started developing a love for lifecycle marketing?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:07:16] My initial introduction to tech was actually my undergrad degree. I actually went to a technical college, Georgia Institute of Technology. I have an engineering

background. As an engineer, even though I didn't do computer science or software engineering there, everyone there had to learn how to code. It was a requirement to graduate that everyone had to code — at least Java — and some SQL. So even though I did industrial and biomedical engineering, I kind of had that little bug like, "Oh, how does this actually come out in terms of an actual product?" And after spending some years away doing regular engineering, doing some entrepreneurship, working in CPG marketing, I realized that I wanted to be a part of what is the next foray of the world of marketing — the world of product development. For me, that was tech. So at the time when I first started interviewing for tech companies, I had actually quit my job at Pepsi and had been working full-time doing my apparel company in New York, Alyssa Vermell. And honestly, Google reached out via LinkedIn and was like, "Hey, we know you're over here to do your own thing, but we saw your background and we think you could do this role." Their team for growth marketing is called Growth Lab kind of programs at Google. And of course, everyone gets excited when you see a message from Google like, "Hey!" and asking you to come to them versus you throwing your resume into a vault where they probably never get seen. So, I actually took the interview, took the conversation, not really expecting it to go anywhere, given I had been removed from corporate work for a while. And, I got the offer and I decided to take it mainly because I thought would be a great marriage between my engineering world. I'm doing industrial engineering, which is really process-oriented, understanding how to develop bigger products as well as the marketing world that I had been living in post my MBA, where I could really figure out how do I make products more efficient? How do I make the process of consumers who engage with those products more efficient and kind of bridging that gap between the engineering world and the marketing world — which honestly, very few marketers know how to do. I felt that had a foot in each of those spaces. I thought I could do well in that role.

**Billy Loewen [00:09:38]** I was curious what got you into, first of all, a clothing line. An apparel line feels intimidating in and of itself. What took you down that path? What made you think, "I just need to start my own clothing line?" And how did you have the background to be confident that you were going to be successful at that?

**Ashley Elleby [00:09:55]** So the main driver for the clothing line is, I'm pretty tall. You probably can't tell because I'm sitting down. So I'm about six feet tall and I was a high school athlete. I was a college athlete at Georgia Tech. And, you know, honestly, I quickly learned I wasn't going to go pro in my sport. I did track and field, then I walked on to the basketball team — and both of which were, you know, short stints where I was like, "Okay, this is cool for a little bit, but I will not make money with this." Nor, did I want to — knowing like how much women athletes are typically paid, unless you're like Serena Williams.

**Ashley Elleby [00:10:31]** I realized I needed to get a job, and I didn't have access to business casual clothes that fit a taller athletic frame. Myself, and my other basketball team members, my track and volleyball friends — we all were having the same struggles. I even write in one of my bios for my clothing line is that my first business suit was men's suit that I had my mom tailor. That was the only way I could find pants that were long enough for my legs and long enough for my arms and back. So I had to have them taken in, like the chest and the waist, to make it not look like a box. And so that was to me, the first "aha," like this is a problem I want to solve, right?

**Ashley Elleby [00:11:13]** I didn't know I was going to be successful. However, I'm just generally an ambitious person and believe I can do whatever I put my mind to. But, I did take some design classes. I had enrolled in a fashion design school and spent about a year and a half by getting a certificate and understanding fashion design while I worked my full-time job — just so I could talk the language to designers. My superpower is business. I can build any business and scale any business. I was not trying to be like in the back sewing, you know, sketching things out. That is not my wheelhouse. But, I knew I could outsource that. I wanted to make sure I could speak the language of those designers so that they could be efficient and do what I needed them to do.

**Ashley Elleby [00:12:02]** So I took the time to educate myself about the history of the fashion business, how to build a clothing line, figuring out what the actual gap was, what the total addressable market is for tall women globally and in the U.S. and understood the competitors — all the basic stuff. This was before I went to business school; I don't even know how I knew all this. But you know, I did it and I started that. And then business school is really what helped me catapult that understanding of "How do I grow this business? How do I get investment? How do I

drive an e-commerce business? How does social play a role in this? How do partnerships play a role in this?" So I leveraged my business school degree at that time to really try to scale it. This way, I got to really find a way to operationalize this business and serve this community of tall women — who still to this day, honestly, don't have a great offering of clothing options.

**Billy Loewen** [00:12:57] I'm so impressed. Yeah. Okay, cool. Excellent start. Those were all the fun facts. So, Ashley, we've been talking a ton about music platforms on Room for Growth. It's just such an interesting space, this intersection of the product experience and how you can make music sticky in interesting ways. You can personalize it in interesting ways. But, talk to us a little bit about how Amazon differentiates itself in such a competitive landscape where you have Spotify. You've got Apple Music. You've got so many potential platforms to listen and choose from.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:13:27] Yeah, this is a great question. This is what consumes me daily at this job, it's really thinking, how do we differentiate ourselves? Because I'll be honest, Amazon Music is not the number one platform, right? Let's just put that out there right now. But that's totally okay, because what does differentiate us is that we have a large suite of other Amazon products that come along with our Prime membership — which no one else can do, right.? So Spotify can't replicate the offering that Amazon can give you for the price that we do. Same with Apple. So, what I think our biggest differentiator is, for example, if you are a Prime customer, you get Amazon Music for free. And we actually just launched today a new version of Amazon Music for our Prime customers, where we now offer you the entire suite of catalog that we own and operate for free. As an Amazon Prime customer, you would have to pay an additional, you know, \$10 or \$15 depending on the tier that you have a spot of our apple to get access to that same ad-free music or podcast, right? So that's something that only Amazon can do that I can get really excited about — I can get really behind.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:14:43] It's really more about, "How do I communicate to Amazon Prime members that they have this benefit?" Because the majority of the people who have Amazon Prime, to be honest, don't know that Amazon Music comes with this benefit — myself included. Before I took this job, I was like, "Oh, really? I get this for free? Oh!" You know? So that's part of what my job is, right? To drive that awareness, drive that engagement with Prime customers — as well as make sure they understand all the great things that you get as a Prime member. And then, of course, if you want additional features, that's where we can upsell you and say, "Hey, okay, do you want this extra little razzle dazzle? Then you've got to pay," right? But we've got an opportunity to give a really good, solid baseline of platform that Spotify and Apple can't match for free, right? So that's what I would say our biggest differentiator is.

**Billy Fischer** [00:15:38] I saw an article in the last couple of days that Spotify is thinking about a price increase. And at the same time, with all these headlines about economic recession stuff, I would think that it set you up to be in a really great place. And when users realize, "Oh, this is free? And Spotify just got more expensive? Why don't I just use this service?"

**Billy Loewen** [00:16:03] One of the things that I love about the music industry, in particular, is that people who listen to music have fairly complicated needs. It wouldn't seem it on the surface, but figuring out how to serve them the right content? So, a mix of what they've listened to in the past and clearly love — maybe things they haven't tried in the future. There are so many ways to personalize. There's so much potential content and audience segmentation that you can apply that it's actually extremely complicated. How do you think about the basic problem of audience segmentation and personalization?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:16:40] The first thing is understanding what is the highest order of their needs, and that is making sure that whenever they come to the platform — whether it's on their morning commute, whether it's while they're at the gym or, you know, their evening downtime — that we're giving them exactly what they came there for. So, knowing why they're there and knowing what's their normal cadence. And that's the very first thing you have to provide for them — for a recommendation engine — is their baseline needs.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:17:07] Then, you can stack on top of that anything that we think could continue to delight them. So, a sound-alike album or a sound-alike podcast or something net-new if they

are a customer that tends to like discovering brand new things that are unique, but adjacent to what they would normally listen to.

**Ashley Elleby [00:17:29]** Then, the third thing you can tackle on top of that is how we engage with our industry artists, right? Sometimes we'll hear from a label and say, "Hey, we really want to promote X Artist." And so, we'll do a livestream for them. We'll build some kind of additional content for them. That's like the icing on the cake because we want to do two things: one, please and repeat our artists, our labels and that side of the house. But ultimately, don't do it to the point where we're over-serving our customers — where they're annoyed and they're like, "Why do I keep getting a push about Megan Thee Stallion? I only listen to one song of hers".

**Ashley Elleby [00:18:04]** You know, that happens a lot. Sometimes people are over-indexing on industry needs versus the customer needs. So how I typically look at it as, adding that third layer to only incorporate industry needs or artist-level content to make sure you don't just disrupt the customer's journey into the platform. So, they can still be delighted with their normal everyday experience — but then get a little bit of insight to things that they could like, or we may hope that they like. Because they want them to interact with it and tell that "yes" or "no" so we can then improve our algorithm for the next time they come to the app.

**Billy Loewen [00:18:41]** I love that. So part of what you think about is, how do we not disrupt what they're doing in the day, but make sure that if they're coming for some surprise and delight — if they want news, if they want what's new in the industry, it's right there. It's readymade. But, what an interesting choice. How much pushback do you get on that decision and how do you fight against the monetization of a terrible user experience?

**Ashley Elleby [00:19:05]** It's very hard. Because at the end of the day, we are a business, right? We are trying to make money. The more money we make, the better. It's very hard to be profitable in the music industry in general because label costs are so expensive, right? Everyone's on a pay-per-stream or some kind of breakdown of that. And of course, the more people listen, the more you have to pay. So it's hard to sometimes only put the need of your customer ahead of your business needs. That's where the conflict comes. We're constantly in a battle of saying, "OK, what is the most important thing?" We need people to stay. At the end of the day, if we don't have good retention ... which is my role as engagement and retention lead — is making sure people stay.

**Ashley Elleby [00:19:58]** So we have to balance the desire to drive ads and the desire to drive content that's been monetized with our artists, with the desire to make sure people stay engaged and delighted and they stay long-term. Because that customer LTV will only get larger the longer people stay on the platform. That's kind of the way I constantly go back and forth is from a financial standpoint. It's like, hey, we see that LTV starts to lag or we see retention or churn starts to lag when we over communicate X or we under communicate Y. Right? Being able to always tie back to a financial metric that we know leadership cares about — they care about revenue, they care about LTV, they care about how long people retain on the platform — that is how we're able to win some of those battles over whether or not we're doing the right thing on behalf of our customers.

**Billy F [00:20:56]** You know, in the introduction you mentioned some of your technical experience and then paired with your entrepreneurial experience. But how would you say your technical background helps you in a growth marketing job on the day-to-day?

**Ashley Elleby [00:21:09]** Yeah. So for me, it really helps me understand the product team's point of view and how the product team is motivated and incentivized. Half of my job is understanding what are the right marketing communications or marketing channels necessary to bring people through the lifecycle of the product. But, the other half is taking customer feedback or brand information and improving the product itself, which will inherently help customers go through the lifecycle better. So by having a technical background, I know how to code, I know how to do code review, I understand how developers are incentivized. So when I build brand new shiny things, they don't want to make iterations of the same thing over and over again — but yet, those developers don't have marketing experience or understand the customers.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:22:02] So I'm able to decipher the customer need, the brand need, the marketing need, and the way that a developer needs to understand it, to say, "Hey, if you want people to engage with this feature or a feature, it needs to be something they're actually asking for. Just because we can build it, doesn't mean that we should. We should only be focusing on things that are going to improve the customer journey — that improve the customer experience. Here's the brand tracker feedback. Here's the customer segmentation that we were looking at. This is why we need to be focusing on young adults, and this is a way you can build your product to appeal to young adults differently than 40 year olds, whatever that may be. And so that's kind of how I use my technical background — to help the product folks understand the marketing business needs in a way that they can understand how they can be incentivized to do that work and prioritize that work.

**Billy Loewen** [00:23:00] Actually, I think that being a leader of a growth team is challenging for a few reasons because on one hand, you have to have a really creative experience — the creative of the marketing messages you're sending has to be great, it has to be personalized. To your point, it has to be fairly technical in the setup of how you automate. On the other hand, you have to be super data-driven. You have to bring insights to light, and you have to use data to make decisions, and it has to all be based in ROI. And then there's also a product experience that has to be built. There's how you interact with engineers and your entire tech stack. I heard a smart executive coach of mine once say that our direct reports respect what we inspect — meaning, whatever we pay the most attention to, that's what a team is going to understand as most important. As a leader, what do you look for in your team to indicate that they're doing a great job? Like, what do you really reward, and how do you lead your team in a way that helps motivate all these different areas where they have to be successful?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:24:02] I think for me, there are three main things. I look for my team to see progress, or see growth and how they are performing. One: it's about looking ahead, right? So, we all have our standard list of things to work on, our projects that are day-to-day work. But, people who I think are going to be the most successful are the ones that can look one to two steps ahead of that and say, "Hey, that's what I'm doing right now, but I'm seeing this thing off in the distance that I'm a little bit concerned about or I want to investigate further." And, they proactively go after that as well. Not so much like adding extra work to their plate, but they're at least being mindful of that. There are other factors happening around them that they need to consider. So that's one.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:24:49] The other thing is I look for people who are really great collaborators. I am a person ... I know I can't do everything by myself. So, I often encourage and seek out others who want to work with me. And so when my team takes on a similar approach, it makes me feel good that they're going to care about a working style that I care about, and not trying to hoard all of the work — not try to take credit for everything and like only being about them — and being able to share that work, share the opportunity, and make sure they're not getting overburdened with efforts or projects, but they're also talking to the right stakeholders to make sure we actually have all the right voices in the room to get their product done and ultimately being the best collaborator.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:25:36] The third thing that I look for in my team is people who are great creatives, innovative thinkers, and problem solvers. So for me, one thing I love about my engineering degree is I think it's made me a really good critical thinker and a really good problem solver where I can easily break down bigger issues into smaller buckets and figure out a creative way to solve that. So I look for my team to be able to do the same thing and bring to the table a different point of view — and again, be able to tap into their creative instincts to say, "Hey, this is what I think this could be. I thought this through. This is a reason why this could work." And that really to me sets my team apart from others who may not be assessing problems in the same way.

**Billy Fischer** [00:26:23] In our intro, we mentioned your mentorship — that is a thing that you love to do on the side. I'm curious, what advice you would give to young women? I'm a dad of two daughters who sometimes exhibit all sorts of entrepreneurial spirit. And I'm just curious, what advice would you give to two young women from super young, to in college, or maybe just starting their careers and who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:26:50] The first thing I would say is ... just do it, right? Not to like byte Nike, but I think that that's the number one thing that holds not just women up, but people in general — that fear of failure. And, do what you can to quiet that voice that says the "what-ifs," the "maybes," the "oh, I don't know, someone might not like it" — as long as they can. Quiet that voice and just push through and see what you can do with it, right? I think becoming an entrepreneur just means that you are really someone who is okay with failure, right? I failed many times. I've lost lots of money making mistakes with my own business, or investing in other businesses. But, you have to be willing to make those mistakes and try but also learn from that mistake or your next iteration.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:27:45] The other thing I would say is entrepreneurship is not a solo project. That's something I had to learn a long time ago. I was like, "Oh, it's my idea." They'll always tell you that no one ever will love your idea the way you love it so just go forward on your own — which is cool, but you're going to struggle. It's going to take you way, way longer to achieve that goal than if you were to find someone to go along with you. Whether it's an employee, whether it's a business partner, whether it's just like a good friend that, you know, is here to support your business ideas and you can bounce things off of — but, you're never going to be super successful trying to accomplish it all by yourself. So get comfortable with sharing your ideas with others early and getting feedback. And I think with those two things — the no fear attitude and being willing to work with others — will move yourself forward in any kind of entrepreneurship endeavor.

**Billy Loewen** [00:28:44] A common question that we get from all kinds of different brands and from marketing leaders —when they're trying to increase the lifespan of a customer or they're trying to increase conversion or they're trying to increase basket sizes — but in particular, increase the duration of time that somebody will spend with the brand — they typically don't know how to think about solving that problem. They will do all kinds of things — will throw new offers, or they'll try content or go X, Y and Z. When you think about how do we just get a user to stay with us for X amount more time, how do you pick the duration of times that's correct for an increase in retention as a goal? Do you go for three months? Do you start with a week? Do you start with days? And then, how do you think about solving that problem using owned channels in particular, but paid media as well?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:29:38] So in terms of the timeline, it's going to be product specific. I can't say like, "Oh, for Amazon Music, if you spend one extra week with us, you'll get X dollars more," because lifetime value models are typically three to five years out. So, like a day here or a week here or even a month here, that may not be as impactful. What I think the best way to think about it is, I guess my financial standpoint, is looking at how you or your company calculates your LTV. Is it based off of three years? Is it based off of number of hours you're listening? And, get really clear on what the right metric is that you need to move in order to keep people engaged more. Because for music, for example, is it doesn't matter whether you're a ... of course, I want you to be a subscriber for a longer. So, how I think about retention is whether or not you continue to pay us month-to-month. But, you have to step that back and say, "What does it require a customer to do on a daily basis for them to want to stay an additional month and pay us additional ... whatever?" And for us, it's around increasing the engagement. So increasing the hours listened, increasing the number of songs that they streamed, or a number of podcasts we listen to, right? Increase the way they engage with the app. How many app opens were happening on a regular on a monthly basis, on a weekly basis?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:31:09] So you have to go really deep to understand what's the right metric that you need to move to get people to stay longer. Is it a month? Is it a week? That's a secondary ask. The question is, what is the baseline metric you have to move first to get them to stay engaged longer? And then, you can do some testing and learning with your LTV models to say, "Is it if we improve LTV by you know ... Or we improve engagement of retention by X month, our LTV increases by X dollars, right?" That's a financial exercise. But, you really first need to go from a product standpoint engagement to say what metric has to move first. So that's the intro for the first part.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:31:52] The second part, how do you understand on which channels paid doesn't really work. Once you're already in the product, we've already acquired you — I shouldn't be

spending any more money for you to stay, right? If anything, only thing I would offer is like if you're going to cancel, maybe I'll offer an incentive to like, "Hey, take this same experience for a little bit less," for a short period of time to kind of keep them here. That's a cancel-save initiative — like a retention initiative — but that's a last resort. But, you shouldn't be spending additional money to keep people in. If you have to give away discounts and a bunch of stuff to keep people, then you are basically training people to expect free stuff, free money. And that's not a good way to keep your customers engaged. Instead, it's better to understand what's the right channel communication and then what's the right content that's necessary to keep that person engaged and delighted with your product.

**Ashley Elleby [00:32:51]** For example, email. A lot of people like to default to email. But, a lot of people don't understand that most people not reading those d\*\*\* emails. No one's reading those emails. People are typically opting out of those emails — once someone opts out of that email, you lose the ability to talk to them forever. You have to be really careful about what you email and how often you email so you don't encourage an early opt-out and you lose that customer channel forever. Same with push notifications. In that communication, we'll have to do a deep-dive of how your customers engage with your product to understand what's the right channel first and then what's the right content that's really important for them to understand. So for music, do people really care about understanding the new albums that are coming out? Do we really want to discover new artists? Or do they really care about their own thing? What is it about the product that keeps them excited and keep giving them more and more of that? And that's going to be different for each customer segmentation — which is why clear segmentation is really important: so you can be able to push different things from people at the right time based on how we want them to continue to engage.

**Billy Loewen [00:34:07]** And what's your theory there? Is your theory to test different offers and then whatever people respond to, repeat it again in the future and assume the past is a predictor? Or, how do you even start — when there's, you know, maybe 10 reasons why somebody might stay — determining what's best for that segment?

**Ashley Elleby [00:34:23]** So a lot of these goals it's about how deep in your data go, in terms of understanding how customers engage, right? For example, if I push a new feature that helps randomly generate a new playlist based off of the past — if just go to some group of people like that now, does not necessarily always mean that they will continue to like that. It's really around making sure your data can consistently tell you whether or not those metrics continue to matter. So we here at Amazon — I'm sure most companies like Spotify do it the same way, I'm sure Apple does the same thing — every time someone engages with the product in any way, we're collecting information about that and being able to track that to retention metrics. So I don't have the mentality of just because it worked well in the past, it always work well in the future.

**Ashley Elleby [00:35:18]** There are some baseline things that that does scan for — basic things like liking certain songs or creating a playlist, for example — we know will always be an indicator of longer term engagement. But if I tell you how to use this new cool feature, maybe for the month that we're promoting it on the platform, people like it. Once we stop promoting on the platform, people forget about it and we won't know that that feature, no one really cares about it. We can't rely on those types of features for content engagement because it tests something else. So we always have to be in an experimentation mode to see what is working. And this is also important to understand for regional audiences, and a global audience as well. What works in the U.S. doesn't always work in Japan or Latin America or Europe, right? And so global companies tend to get into the headspace of letting the U.S. guide all their strategies. But sometimes you have to get really clear about your local strategy, as well, in order to understand how people in Latin America listen to music differently than those in France, and those in Japan, and be able to be tracking different metrics to make sure that we're promoting the right thing to drive that engagement.

**Billy Fischer [00:36:33]** Is there a feature or a tactic that you swore would work? And through these test-and-learn cycles, you found did not work? Or maybe the opposite of that — something that you were just not so sure about and turns out users loved it or responded to it?

**Ashley Elleby [00:36:48]** I'll give an example around what we call ATC, or our artist case collection. It's one of the first splash screens that customers see when they're first installing

Amazon Music. We thought that that was going to be such an easy win to like grab people's data upfront and their preferences upfront so we can immediately started getting good recommendations. What we didn't realize is that people were just so anxious to jump into the product that they skipped it. And without knowing that them entering that short survey was the key thing to enjoying their experience on the product. And so once we saw that customer behavior, we had to rethink how we introduced ATC, or how we reintroduced it later. If someone did choose to skip it, we had to say, "Okay, great. The next time they come back to the app, we have to reshew it again and then explain why it's important." So it's not enough to just put it there, but you have to say, "Hey, give us this information, because this informs your recommendation." And once we did that, we reintroduced it after the second app open and explained it. People thought, "Oh, I need to do this thing," right? And so we just inherently thought that people would just know what to do, but they didn't. And we had to kind of backtrack a little bit and relaunch that feature a different way so we got better engagement.

**Billy Loewen** [00:38:15] Ashley, what do you see as the major roadblock to creating a more equitable and diverse corporate environment, particularly in technology?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:38:24] Oh, I can talk about this all day. But, as a Black woman in the tech world, I'm one of few. I'm sure you've heard this from a lot of people. I think it is hard to say, "Oh, you just hire more black people, or hire more women." That doesn't really get the job done. What it does, you need to put those people in high enough positions where they have decision-making ability and they have a leadership opportunity — just how we know representation matters in everyday life, it also matters in your work. So I need to see, is there somebody above me — one level or two levels above me — that looks like me and say, "Okay, great. I can achieve here." And as there's more people of color or women in those leadership positions, that's going to get people to be more excited about coming into that space where they now can feel like maybe I can be accepted.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:39:21] I can speak for my time at Google. I was living in San Francisco when I first joined my team. I was the only Black person on the team. When I left the team, I was still the only Black person on that team. That's not a good thing, right? And so that's feedback that I gave, you know, my organization — over the five, four-and-a-half years that I was there, we did not improve. I was the only person, I guess I was able to get promoted and move up. But, there are issues with the fact that I can be here for four-and-a-half years on the same team and never see someone else that looks like me — above me or below me. And so that's one of those things where I think we need to continue to push our tech leadership to understand that where you place people is important, that the opportunities that you give them is important.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:40:10] And then also, the last thing is opening up where those people can work. Part of the reason why it was hard to recruit Black and brown people to tech is because tech was centered in San Francisco, which is not a Black and brown people friendly place. So I love that there are places like Atlanta that are budding with great tech scene. I love that New York is starting to bud as a tech scene, as well as Austin, Texas. So there's a lot more diversity in locations where people no longer feel they have to move and uproot their lives to one of the most expensive cities in the country to have a job in tech.

**Billy Loewen** [00:40:50] Totally understand the idea that there have to be more women and people of color in leadership positions that can serve as representation for a path to get there. But for you, with people who are your direct reports, what's the conversation that you have with, say, a Black woman on your team? Or what conversations would you encourage listeners to have to say, "Hey, I want you to have more power over how we shape our culture and how we shape our hiring practices, how we help make sure that we're an ecosystem that is extremely welcoming to people of all backgrounds because this is important." Like, how do you have that conversation? How do you make sure that your team helps feel that sense of empowerment and that invitation to speak up about what their experience is so they can either start to create it for others in a better way or make sure that there's a good check-and-balance system happening when hiring decisions in particular are being made.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:41:40] Yeah, I think the biggest thing is, as you said, to make sure there's an open door policy for feedback to not just me as the hiring manager, but to overall HR who is

making these hiring decisions. One thing that I appreciated that we had at Google — as I was leaving, they had trained a diversity hiring council. So everybody had to be — like any new person, whether you are a person of color or not — had to still be vetted by this council to make sure Google was doing a good enough job of hiring people that were adding value versus just looking the same. So that's something I would encourage my team and my direct reports to participate in or lead or kickstart something like that.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:42:25] I would recommend that they would also get involved in company ERGs. It's typically ERGs that are leading the way here in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion. The work that they do then informs what HR is required to do. So get involved there as well. And the other thing I also ask my team to get involved in is if they are a person of color, get your friends, call your friends, share these roles with your network, posted to your LinkedIn as well. I'm open for direct referrals for open roles, and so I know smart people have smart friends. So bring your people on board and don't be afraid to invite them. That's what everyone else is doing, right? So let's do the same thing and make sure we tap into our other super smart women or people of color and bring them into their fold and not be shy about that.

**Billy Fischer** [00:43:21] So actually, we love to end with a couple of fun questions and dig into your brain a little bit and some of the things that you're thinking about. I'm curious, is there an industry or a trend — you know, outside of music apps and entertainment apps — is there an industry or trend that you're watching right now, or super curious and excited about?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:43:42] I always keep an eye on the fashion industry, even though I'm not actively involved in fashion anymore. I'm always watching to see how they innovate and something that I've been super excited to see it that there has been a shift with the different ways that we show our bodies. There are full-size women with disabilities, you know, mannequins now are plus size, you know, all these different things. I'm super excited to see that it's no longer just like lip service — that we serve all sides and we serve all brands is showing up in our advertising. It's showing up in the way we're not over-editing photos. You know, we're getting people who have maybe only one limb or Winnie Harlow is a great example of a model who has vitiligo, I believe is what it's called, where she's got discoloration on her skin. But she's one of the top models in the world and they don't require her to cover that up. So I love seeing that representation in the fashion and cosmetic industry — that it's allowing for more people to see themselves in that space. And we don't we don't all have to adhere to one standard of beauty and one standard of athleticism.

**Billy Loewen** [00:45:03] And what a celebration — this notion that now brands who are not inclusive are just like losing out entirely. The financial results say like, "Sorry, you've got to totally change your ways or you're never going to keep up." It's such a nice empowering change. Ashley, my favorite question to ask: I always like to invite everybody to either call it talk positive trash or to just gossip about a brand that you really love. What's a brand that you're truly loyal to? They have a really great user experience or they offer some kind of value to you that keeps you coming back. What's a brand you're loyal to and why?

**Ashley Elleby** [00:45:36] So this is going to be, again, more into the fashion space. I still love Nike. I know we nodded to them earlier. This is because one, as an athlete, I have always been like dressed in Nike apparel — from whatever team I've been on. My love for Nike has been brewing since I was a child. But what I love is that they are probably the ones who are spearheading that trend of being inclusive. You know, they had the first marketing ads with the woman in a hijab, right? And with things like that, I'm always going to be brand loyal. I don't really care how much the shoes cost. I don't care that these leggings cost \$120. I'm doing this, going to the gym, and then I'm going to buy only Nike leggings, right? Because I feel that they get me all the time, right? I never have the question of whether my sizing will work; I never have the question of if the shoes will be comfortable. It's consistent with the things that matter, but innovative with the things that I didn't think about — and that is what I really love. My favorite book is actually "Shoe Dog" by the founder of Nike. Any person in marketing, any person who wants to be an entrepreneur — I highly recommend you read Shoe Dog because it is super inspiring to understand how if someone comes up with these ideas, how you pull it together and get the doubters to finally believe in you, right? It's the entire story and the brand arc of the company. I think they've got really smart people working there from a marketing and product development standpoint. And I will always stand for Nike.

**Billy Fischer** [00:47:17] Love it. I literally have a calendar item on my calendar tomorrow that's like "Check Nike app" because there's a pair of Dunk Lows that I want dropping at 10:00 and I'm like, I better not forget because I got to get in there. Not many brands can pull that off.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:47:33] Yeah. They continue to really reinvent the fandom. It's amazing. It's an amazing business that they have there. And the way that they've created this loyalty. The products are always top notch. The service is great. It's the same. We need to be the same, and inventive when you don't or when you didn't expect it. And that's the best combination for a brand and product match-up.

**Billy Fischer** [00:47:57] Awesome. Ashley, thanks so much for joining us on Room for Growth. Before we go, is there a place people can find you on the web, anything that if somebody were to want to connect with you, that you could share.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:48:10] Basic LinkedIn, honestly. I don't have a website for myself. I probably should make one, but yeah, find me on LinkedIn. I'm happy to chat. I love marketing. I love product. I love sharing the story and helping others, and if anyone wants to reach out, I'm happy to chat.

**Billy Loewen** [00:48:28] So glad you joined us today. This conversation was super fun. I feel like I say this every week and mean it every week, which is I wish we could have spent another hour just digging into the nerdy side of marketing and talking tactics and talking shop. So, I have to call you again soon and see if we can get you back on. But for today, thank you for being here. Thank you to our listeners for joining us today. It's good to have you all here. We'll see you next week.

**Ashley Elleby** [00:48:52] Thank you.