Client Meeting – Yard

Interviewee: Amber Caldwell – Company Director at Yard

Question 1: Please tell me about your business?

Answer: The Yard is a art house community centre and cultural hub based in Birmingham. It is an iteration of Maia (https://www.maiagroup.co) which is a Community Interest Company (CIC). We originally applied for funding from developers with the idea of creating an art hotel, however with lockdown etc the developer instead gave us just a small amount of money to get us started which is why we are in this space now. Since then, we are essentially running on grants for our community outreach side so it would be good to have more bookings. Especially Yard takeovers where a corporation rents the entire space.

Yard's objective is to change the way people look at art and artists. We want artists to be seen as system shapers and be taken seriously as contributors to the formation of our society. We achieve our objective by following three ethos:

1. <u>Resource the movement</u> – Fighting for proper wages for artists, though our support and services
2. <u>Sights for imagination</u> – Supporting the transformation of our spaces and imagination of our artist by not limiting the artist vision.
3. <u>Art for liberation</u> – Creating a culture of the world we want to live starting at Yard

Question 2: Can you tell me about your team?

Answer: Amahra is the Creative Director, and I am the Company Director (operations). We have a team of 6 including me and Amara. We are the only full-time employees, the rest work part time, although we are in the process of hiring another person full time. The rest of the team, work within their areas of expertise for the company for example one of our team members oversees the communications and another team member oversees the graphics etc, but we all take turns in hosting the space and chipping in where we need to.

Question 3: What are you working on now?

Answer: The business model of Yard is very unusual. It has several arms to it:
- Consultancy
- Community Outreach
- Corporate

<u>CONSULTANCY</u>
HS2 have a cultural budget. Yard are providing consultancy on what art looks like along the line i.e. what art should be visible from the train track or at the stations etc

We have also conducted a feasibility study for the museums in Birmingham for the Birmingham Museums Trust.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A minimum of three days a week Yard is used as a community space. 3 days of the week is community:

Wednesday - Wednesday wellness (taster sessions for holistic arts) & Artist Drop-In (space for artists to work and connect)
Thursday – Open House (Anyone to come, work, chill, plan projects)
Friday – Yard Sessions (Prioritise activates for music artists)
Last Monday every month – Yard Brunch (meet people in your community and enjoy free food)

We also arrange special sessions to provide advice for artists – We have talks on money, art funding and one coming up about NFTs. Eventually we hope to have an Art school.

CORPORATE

We have local businesses conducting meetings and corporate events at Yard. We have had people filming cooking shows, how to videos, recording podcasts in the past.

Our main difficulty is ensuring a good balance between the different sectors. This is why it would be good to have the calendar and booking system sorted, so that everything is transparent, but because we host so many events and in different spaces, I am not entirely sure what that would look like.

Question 4: How do you choose people to partner with for events of to host workshop?

Answer: We have built up such a great network that we come across lots of talented people with creative ideas and invite them along to have a chat with us, things develop from there.

We have two pricing systems, one for larger corporate businesses and one for community events. This way we ensure we are not pricing community group and individuals out of using the space for their ideas.

Question 5: You have mentioned the booking and calendar system in an initial conversation with me before. What do you need from this?

Answer: BOOKING
- We need people to be able to book separate areas of the building
- We need the booking to automatically show on a calendar that can be viewed by everyone, including those who are planning on booking the space.
- We need client to be able to enter card details and make deposit to secure booking.

At the moment this is all done manually by me which is very labour and time intensive. The current process is this:

1. Clients fill in a booking request form for a room/space

2. Form is viewed by me
3. I respond to their request ie availability and requirements
4. I send an Invoice from a separate platform to the client
5. Client pays deposit
6. I send confirmation of payment and add requested period to our internal calendar
7. Client pays rest of the invoice on or before day of event

CALENDAR
It would be great to have a YARD events calendar on the website. However, I am not sure how this would work as there are so many rooms and spaces being used for different things. I can't envision how it would look.

Question 6: Is there a particular type(s) of people that often make booking or inquire about bookings?

Answer: We have people from all walks of life who are doing lots of different and interesting projects inquire about bookings. There is not one particular type of person. We have had people doing podcasts, filming for a movie, cooperate meetings, gallery events, we have a lady who is organising a black business retreat here in the summer. Our doors are open to everyone and it's down to the person renting the space to make the most of it and what they can do with it. The only constraint we have to consider is that it we are in a residential area, so we have to take that into account when accepting projects.

With regards to this project however, I am really excited and have already spoken to the team, we have never had usability testing on our site so it will be interesting to see what we learn from it.