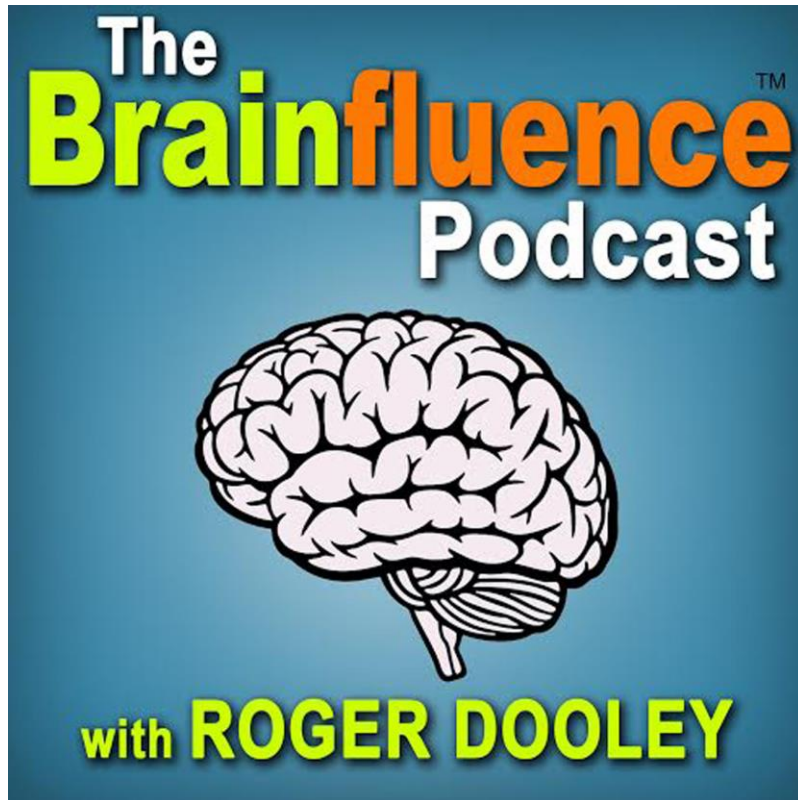


Ep #94: The Art of Marketing Art with Martin Stellar



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**Roger Dooley**

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Welcome to *The Brainfluence Podcast* with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to *The Brainfluence Podcast*. I'm Roger Dooley. My guest this week spent twelve years of his life in a monastery. While he's no longer living such a monastic existence, he has chosen to live in a small town on the coast of Spain. He's a psychology fan, a copywriter, and an expert in marketing art. Welcome to the show, Martin Stellar.

Martin Stellar: Hi, Roger. Thanks for having me on.

Roger Dooley: Well, great to have you here. We have not had an art expert before nor have we had an ex-monk, so this is I guess quite an honor for us. Let me ask you, it took you twelve years to figure out that being a monk was not right for you?

Martin: [Laughs] Well, I'm an all-or-nothing kind of guy. We had a very strict regime, so celibacy, poverty, seven meditations a day. At some point, that situation changed and I had to go and get a job to pay for my keep. After about a year of that, I decided that if I can't be a proper monk, completely cloistered, then I'll just be in the world. I don't want to have to live with one foot in both worlds.

Roger Dooley: Ah, yeah, that would be a challenge I would guess. I think that probably the monastic life has certain attractions but sort of having one foot in both camps would be difficult.

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Martin Stellar: Very difficult. I mean, you sit at night, you meditate and you're all being very devout and celibate and in the morning I worked at a sports company. So I would be driving kayaks up and down the mountains. Then I would be down in the valley at the river where the kayaks would land and girls in bikini would come out. That would be my working day.

Roger Dooley: Ah, temptation.

Martin Stellar: I would come home... temptation, yes, indeed. But just in general, it wasn't only that. It was just, I like the strong focus of having one thing that you do and that you work and you meditate. To have to divide that between different activities was just not something for me. I kind of grew out of that life and now I work with artists.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I think being an author, I could almost go for that monk-like existence for a while at least where fewer distractions, a lot of highly-focused thought on what you're going to accomplish. So where are you based now?

Martin Stellar: In the south of Spain, just south of Granada.

Roger Dooley: Oh, that's great. That's wonderful these days with now you can pretty much do business from anywhere that has internet and of course nowadays that's most places.

Martin Stellar: Yes, I'm very grateful for the internet.

Roger Dooley: So, Martin, you talk a lot about art as a business. Do you think that most artists share that view or is it

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a real process to convince them that they have to think about more than simply creating art?

Martin Stellar:

If I have to convince them, I don't try. There are different types of artists. There are those who see themselves as a professional in business and their business is creativity. There are those who understand that it should be like that and they just don't know how and they have insecurities and they have doubts.

There are people who say, "Well my art is not a product you bourgeois bastard." And that last group I can't help. If they want to sell but don't want to see themselves as a creative professional, there's no point in trying to convince them. So I work only with the first two groups.

Roger Dooley:

Makes sense. I think probably today there's less resistance simply as businesses evolve, the internet has evolved and so on. I think it's probably brought artists more into the mainstream of having to engage with other people and not just sort of sit in a garret turning out watercolors or something.

Martin Stellar:

Look, we are all publishers now. We can all have our 15 minutes of fame. Because of the internet, we have been emancipated. We are no longer slave to permission givers and gate keepers. The agents, the galleries, the art critics, they still have their job. Some of them don't have their job anymore. If they're too traditional because a lot of galleries are closing if they don't want to get modern, they get in trouble in general.

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- Roger Dooley: What does getting modern mean for a gallery?
- Martin Stellar: Well, galleries traditionally, they are very protective of their client base. That is the big problem that a gallery that doesn't let the artist communicate with the buyers themselves, it's taken to a model that doesn't work anymore. Why would an artist want to be locked in a contract like that if they can just go out and find their own client list? And a gallery needs to adjust to that new reality. We are now free.
- Roger Dooley: Right. So really you're saying that galleries can be disintermediated by the internet and the ability for artists to go direct. Much as other, same thing is happening in many industries.
- Martin Stellar: Hmm-mm. Well, disruptive is a very popular word these days. The internet has totally disrupted the traditional art market. That goes for painters, sculptors, but also dancers, musicians, composers, authors. Look at Kindle, anybody who writes fiction can now go and self-publish. So traditional publishers are in big trouble.
- Galleries are also in big trouble which is why many of them close or they suddenly drop a large percentage of their artists. Because they don't make the same amount of sales anymore which is why I think that we all have a very beautiful chance here to jump in and start building relationships of our own with potential buyers instead of letting that happen because the gallery invites these potential buyers and has the conversations.

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I don't think it should be like that. I don't think that an artist should hand off the task of building the relationship, having communication with somebody who's interested in the work, to a gallery. I mean, it's your art and people buy the artist just as much as they buy the art. So if you can get out there and you can find the people who like your type of art whether it is online or offline, and you can start a communication with that person, those buyers.

They're going to be much more likely to buy from you than seeing you in some gallery. Unless it's maybe a really fancy gallery and it's really a wealthy person who's just buying because they want to feel that they can spend so much money but that's a very rare situation. In most cases, people want to buy art because it means something to them and they're happy that they can afford it.

If you can then add the artist and that person's personality and their story and their background and their process and technique and inspiration and their muse to the mix, then the piece that a potential buyer is looking at is going to be that much more desirable.

Roger Dooley: Is the curation or endorsement effect of galleries still important? In other words, like in the book publishing industry, anybody can publish a book now and there are a lot of pretty bad ones out there. I've read a few that were self-published and they simply were not particularly good.

Martin Stellar: Yes.

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Roger Dooley: But if an author has a book with Wiley or Penguin Portfolio or somebody, there is that sort of endorsement effect that, “Okay, this is a real person, a real author, a real artist” if you will. Do galleries have that effect or since the gallery market itself as far as I know is kind of fragmented, you don’t really have that effect where there’s probably half a dozen major book publishing companies that have that sort of cachet. Do galleries have that or not really?

Martin Stellar: They do. It depends on the gallery but to a degree it does lend authority. It is a type of social proof. In a general sense, it does help. But I don’t think that it’s a justification for only going with galleries because if you know how to play your personality, essentially, if you know how to communicate with people and you develop systems and strategies for showing up, then you don’t really necessarily need that.

Yeah, it helps if you have your own sales channels, you have your website, your social media, you go to shows, whatever it is you do. And then a gallery says, “Well, we also want to have a number of your pieces.” By all means, go get it. Go and hang your work there because it does help. But I find that a lot of artists, they only focus on the galleries. When sales dry up or when they have a lot of new work that they want to put out there, the first thing they think about is finding new galleries. I think that that is a mistake.

A gallery should never be the only thing that an artist does. I don’t think it should be the first thing. I think your own audience is where everything starts.

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Besides, just like with book publishers, I mean, I was talking to a publishing coach the other day because I'd like to have a book published. She was asking me questions about how many people are in my audience and how many people on my list. She says, "Well, multiply by ten or fifty before you go and approach a publisher because they won't even look at you." You need to have your own audience.

Roger Dooley: Well, yeah, these days you have to have your platform before they'll talk to you.

Martin Stellar: Exactly.

Roger Dooley: In most cases.

Martin Stellar: It's the same thing with a gallery. In most cases, a gallery won't really want to consider you if it's a reputable gallery until you have your own platform and there's social media and a following and there's press about you. So why would you want to burn yourself up trying to get into a gallery if you're going to have to build your own audience anyway? What, just so that you can then give your audience to the gallery? That doesn't make sense.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well that's true although there is, at least in the book publishing world, that endorsement does help with credibility.

Martin Stellar: It does.

Roger Dooley: But the reason they want you to have your own platform is because they really in most cases don't intend to actively market your book. They're really



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counting on you for doing the heavy lifting in most cases.

Martin Stellar: Well, there's that.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. They're taking less risk if they know that you've got a large following. They know that they'll at least sell a few copies of the book.

Martin Stellar: How does that work? I mean, how does that make sense? You build your audience, you go to a publisher, or a gallery, and they say, "Okay, well you've got your platform. Right, we'll take you on." Then you have to go and use your own audience that you've so carefully built up painstakingly and bring it off to the publisher?

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, you know, it's kind of a different story I guess in the case of artwork because that is the ultimate product. For most book authors, unless you're writing *Harry Potter* books or are Malcom Gladwell, the books themselves will not really produce that much income. Instead people rely on paid speaking engagements, they rely on consulting in some cases, or other means of monetization, perhaps higher-priced products that they can—.

From the standpoint of driving speaking engagements, having a major publisher's endorsement is a good thing. In other words, if you've got five Kindle books out, that is not going to convince a conference that you should be their keynote. On the other hand, if you've had a good selling book out from a major publisher, then there's less risk on their part.

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I think in a lot of cases, risk is a factor, even I think in buying art there's an element of risk that you feel like, okay, is this person real? Is this piece of art worth that kind of money or is it a terrible investment? I wouldn't ever suggest really buying art as an investment per se, as a financial investment but you just hate to find out that you paid three times as much for the work that you bought as the previous five buyers and the subsequent five buyers paid.

Martin Stellar: Well there is definitely a tendency to treat art as bullion. To specifically go out and buy things that you know are going to increase in value. There are many people who do that.

Roger Dooley: Right. Although actually bullion hasn't done so well the last few years either [laughs]. It's true and I guess if you have a good eye and you invest in things that you like and you really appreciate, that perhaps it's not necessarily a bad investment. You don't know, maybe you'll just end up deriving enjoyment from looking at them but maybe other people will eventually discover the same artist and your works will appreciate.

Martin Stellar: Yeah, well, I think if you want to treat art as an investment vehicle, you have to approach it basically like an investor. If you're going to buy stock, you want to know what the market is doing. You want to follow the news, you want to understand the history of the different—I don't much about investing, but from the people I've spoken to, they know a lot about what's going in the world. And

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that's what they base their decision on to buy something or not.

So you can't go and buy a piece of art and say, "Well this is a really good artist. This is a high quality piece of work." If that artist doesn't do anything except sit in their studio, it's a bad investment because that artist is never going to grow and become a very recognized individual which means that the piece of art that you buy isn't going to go up in value.

Roger Dooley: So there's certain things that you would have to look for, although buying art as investment kind of takes some of the romance out of it.

Martin Stellar: It takes the fun away, yes.

Roger Dooley: Do you think that in most cases art purchases are driven by emotion and does that make marketing art more challenging than other kinds of products?

Martin Stellar: There is a lot of emotion in it, yes. Art speaks to—and we're talking about art in a broad definition—so it can be dance, sculpture, painting, music, crochet if you're very artistic at it, who knows. These products or these works of art, they have a rational and intellectual appeal. So you can admire the way things have been done, the technique, a composition, the treatment of light, but there's also very very strong emotional effects.

It's kind of telepathy, like if you take the Stephen King explanation, he says, "Writing is telepathy." I write about a bunny and he's got a little figure eight painted on his back and you are now seeing in your

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minds a bunny with a figure eight painted on its back. So I put this over the span of several years into your mind. I don't know if it was a bunny with a figure eight but something like that. So an artist gets inspired, the muse starts talking to him, or he comes up with an idea, or he pieces influences together and he says, "This is what I'm going to make."

From that feeling, which comes who knows where, you don't know what actually triggered that, you create something. You put that out into the world, somebody else looks at it and they get their own experience which is a very emotional experience. So the buying decision is very much influenced by those emotions.

But the difficulty is you don't know what someone is going to experience from the art that you make. It can be something completely different. You might have something very abstract that you put on a canvas and for somebody seeing it, it becomes something very symbolic because of interpretation, you know. It gets filtered through the person's perception and they make out of it what they want.

So that makes the sales process very difficult because how are you going to communicate your inspiration, your motives, in such a way that it will trigger a desire to buy it when you don't know, you have no clue, what kind of emotion that person is experiencing on seeing it or hearing it.

Roger Dooley:

Right. Although I suppose the ideal artist would have an emotion they wanted to evoke and be skillful at creating a piece of art that would end up at

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least for many of its viewers they would experience that same emotion in the same way that a storyteller knows how to create a frightening story or an exciting story or a sad story and so on.

Martin Stellar: Hmm-mm.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I think that mix of sort of rational and non-rational buying is somewhat unique. I mean, every purchase involves both rational and non-rational elements or conscious and nonconscious elements.

But a few years ago—I'm not a big personal purchaser of fine art—but a few years ago I was co-chair of an Art in Public Places committee in the city I lived in at the time. We were tasked with choosing a sculptor and sculpture for a particular location and purpose. It was to honor educators. The process that we went through was really quite strange because first of all, you've got a committee making a decision on this, which any committee-made decision is always more of a challenge.

Martin Stellar: Yes.

Roger Dooley: But you also had this weird mix of people reacting to different kinds of art, then having to express their reaction to everybody else and ultimately try and get consensus. It was really weird because we had very different artists proposing very different concepts where everything from figurative sculptures that were very representational and look like maybe a teacher or something like that, to a very stylized archway with colorful elements in it. Some other sort

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of abstract sculpture shapes and it was just, how do you compare these?

How do you get this group of people to interact with each other and explain why they like one more than the other? So it was pretty interesting. Ultimately we did come up with I think a good decision and a good choice. The sculpture is still standing there in a prominent place so I guess so far it stood the test of time.

Martin Stellar: So how did you get to the ultimate decision?

Roger Dooley: Well, I think we eliminated some just based on the fact that sort of inadequate support. If one person, only one person, liked a particular submission and everybody else didn't like it then that one pretty much got voted down. Then near the end it came down to a couple of artists I think that had submitted pretty good proposals and I forget the exact process. I think maybe they were invited to submit a more detailed proposal or even create a maquette of what they were proposing. Then a final decision was made.

Although even that wasn't without controversy because it was originally supposed to go in one location on the city school's property and for whatever reason the school administration or the school board did not like our final selection and did not want it placed there. So we ended up having to place it someplace else in the city. Although the ultimate location was far better. It went in right at an entryway to the city in a beautiful city park so it was ultimately a better location.

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But I mean again, it just goes to show how difficult the art purchasing and flipside of it, the art marketing process is because everybody has an opinion of what they like. Trying to get people to agree on it is difficult. I mean, fortunately, usually it's one artist dealing perhaps with one collector, so it's not quite as confusing. But this was one of the stranger processes I've been involved in. It was very satisfying and fun at the end of it but going through the process was not so much fun.

Martin Stellar: I wouldn't wish it on any artist.

Roger Dooley: Well, no, it had to be horrible for them too. Where you've got all these people who are varying degrees of either expertise or cluelessness about art who are providing you with feedback on what they should do or shouldn't do. That had to be brutal for them as well.

Martin Stellar: Yeah. And besides, contests, I mean, there are so many different reasons to want to own a piece of art and quality is very subjective. You have a set of criteria for when something is quality or not. But that even by itself doesn't really say whether something is good or not. So then you submit your work to a contest and then what? There's a commission that goes and decides, or there's going to be votes.

I don't know, I think it's kind of exciting. I've never submitted anything because I don't really make art but I don't think I would want to be in a commission because then people are going to—no, I'd want to talk to a viewer and ask them questions and find out, what do you see there? What does that make

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you feel? Why are you looking at this one and not that one? I see you came back to this one, tell me what's happening. You know, I want to understand what's going on with this person. Why they feel something. What is it that they feel?

Roger Dooley:

Yeah, Martin, we talked about maybe artists not necessarily wanting to be business people but it's sort of a necessity to at least have some of that going on. In one of your written things you talked about the Japanese concept of playing at something. I wonder if you could expand on that a little bit because I think that would be interesting to our listeners regardless of what field they're in.

Martin Stellar:

Okay, well, this kind of comes from my background as a monk. Life can be difficult. If you live in a monastery, you put yourself up against big challenges, confrontations with your hang-ups, your demons you can say. It can be tough. At some point, I read in a book that in Japan there is a way of expressing things. I later checked this with somebody in Japan and it's not exactly, it's not all that common.

But they use a word, *asobimasu*, I believe it is, which I just butchered just now. That's not how you say it I think. It means "to play" like children play. It gets used in the form of, "I see you're playing at being in Tokyo." Which is very deferential. You're in control. You're not here to work. You're not traveling to Tok—no, you're just playing. You're out having some fun coming to Tokyo. "I hear you're playing at having a new job." And apparently it even gets used in the context at "I hear his father is playing at being



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dead.” Like, this guy is so in control, even life and death is just a game for him.

Once I read that and I contemplated on it, I started to experiment with it. I discovered that if you can take things like play, like it’s just a chess match, you know? You move pieces. You lose one, you capture one. Things become so much easier. It’s like reframing the way you see yourself in your world, in your life, in a way where there’s no stress. There’s no disaster. Nothing is going terribly wrong and if it does, well, then you have to set the board up again and continue a new match.

This for me has been a massive discovery for everything in my life essentially. I've had hardships. My previous company went bankrupt. Yeah, I didn't like it. I didn't get beaten down by it though. I just picked myself up and I started something new. Just because...

Roger Dooley: You were playing at having a company.

Martin Stellar: [Laughs] Maybe that’s why I went bankrupt. But yeah, exactly. I was just going through the game of trying to win, and I didn’t. Well, okay, so I lost a match, started a new one. Turns out it’s working. And because I took that attitude and made it something fundamental in how I see myself, things don’t really bother me so much. I don’t need to get upset when something goes wrong.

Roger Dooley: Right. I think it is a great way to frame one’s activities and life because it implies control but also a—not that there are no consequences for failing—

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but it also puts it in the context that assuming that whatever mistake you made wasn't fatal, that you'll get past that and you can play at something else.

Martin Stellar: Exactly.

Roger Dooley: So I really like that concept. I hadn't heard that before and that's kind of fun. Do you think that there are any lessons from marketing art specifically that you could apply to broader fields of marketing?

Martin Stellar: Ask. Listen and ask questions. Find out what moves people.

Roger Dooley: So how would an artist do that for example? I mean, in what context? Because I mean I visualize an artist sitting in a room somewhere creating art sort of in isolation but where does this dialogue with the buyer come in?

Martin Stellar: Well not in the studio. That's the first thing that an artist has to—and that goes for any kind of business. I mean, you can create beautiful software, a car, computer, painting. If you make it and you don't go out there to show it to people, well, you're not going to have conversations and the sale only happens in a conversation, regardless of what you make.

So you need to get out there and start talking about it with people. Go to places where you know the right kind of people gather and then see if there's anybody who's interested in talking to you which unless you're being very pushy or self-serving, you're going to find that people are actually very interested in talking to you. Especially if you start

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asking questions because the moment you come and you say, “Well, I’m an artist” or “I’m an author and I write books about...” people know enough people who are self-involved. They are not going to care.

But if you come in with a bit of modesty and a genuine interest in other people, they're going to pay attention. They're going to notice that you're different than a lot of other people and that's interesting. When you start to try to find out what makes other people tick, they're going take a different look at you.

That's why I created the marketing system called LEAP which is Listen, Explain, Ask, Prosper. These four steps are so simple and so effective and so crucial to any marketing. You need to listen to people. Even Steve Jobs, who famously made what he wanted to make, and Henry Ford, “If I would have asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”

Roger Dooley: Right.

Martin Stellar: Well, no, but those people also knew from listening, from observing, from seeing tendencies, what people actually want. They had figured out what people are going to be looking for. So you need to listen to people.

Roger Dooley: Right, that makes a lot of sense. I think my friend and fellow Austinite, Ryan Levesque would have liked your one-word answer there, “Ask.” That's also

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the title of his book, *Ask*, which is an excellent book if you haven't read it.

Martin Stellar: It is, it's an excellent book, yes.

Roger Dooley: Okay, as a reminder, let me tell our audience, we're speaking with ex-monk and art marketing expert, Martin Stellar. Martin, how can people find you and your content online?

Martin Stellar: You can find me at [MartinStellar.com](http://MartinStellar.com) and if you want to see me go a little bit crazy then you can find me on Twitter where I like to have a lot of fun.

Roger Dooley: Great, and are you also Martin Stellar on Twitter?

Martin Stellar: Yes, @MartinStellar.

Roger Dooley: Okay, great. We'll have links to those as well as a text version of our conversation and we'll link to anything else, any other resources we discussed in the course of the show on the show notes page at [RogerDooley.com/Podcast](http://RogerDooley.com/Podcast). Martin, thanks for being on the show.

Martin Stellar: Very welcome, thanks a lot for having me on.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of *The Brainfluence Podcast*. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at [RogerDooley.com](http://RogerDooley.com).