



## Episode 208 – Live from ESTO: Storytelling Award Winners

**Intro:** Recorded live at ESTO in Columbus, Ohio, this is Brand USA Talks Travel. Get ready to take mental notes from the top minds and creative thinkers who are driving innovation in destination marketing, content, research, public relations, policy, and more. Now, here's your host, Mark Lapidus.

**Mark Lapidus [0:19]:** The GoUSA TV Storytelling Awards were last night, and I can't wait to introduce you to the people that won. Here we go, in this podcast. You are all clearly creative people, so it's appropriate that we start by asking you to use your imagination. If you could magically transport into any book, movie, or tv show universe, what would you choose and why? Mandy?

**Mandy Barton [0:39]:** I've been reading the book *Eloise* to my two-year-old daughter, and every time I pick it up, I wish I could just jump in and live my life in the Plaza Hotel. Have room service for every meal, know all the secret passageways, know all the people by first-name basis. Like, wouldn't that just be the most lovely existence?

**Mark Lapidus [0:57]:** Stuart.

**Stuart Butler [0:58]:** Anyone that knows me knows exactly what I'm gonna say: it's the Star Wars universe. The greatest stories ever told me, the mythology there. I mean, the backstories, I read books on the background characters from the movies, because they've fleshed out every little story angle from every character. It's the greatest story ever told. So to live in that world, I don't know how long I'd last, but it would be a lot of fun while it did.

**Mark Lapidus [1:19]:** Jordan.

**Jordan Wollman [1:20]:** Well, since Stuart stole my answer, I'm gonna go with *Tron*, actually. That has become a huge tradition in my family. I've got a couple of small kids, and they absolutely love the big, imaginative world. Everything's shiny and digital and infinite, and that's a great little universe to live in.

**Mark Lapidus [1:37]:** Sharon.

**Sharon Broussard [1:38]:** Right, since y'all were both Star Wars geeks, I'm a geek, too, but I think mine's more in line with Mandy, because - the Owen Wilson movie *Midnight in Paris*. I would love to be his character, because Paris in the twenties is just fascinating to me. The elegance of the clothing, and the music, jazz, and the cocktails. Can I talk about cocktails here?

**Mark Lapidus [1:57]:** Of course you can.

**Sharon Broussard [1:57]:** Okay, so the cocktails, and just the whole elegance of the era, the architecture. I mean, come on, Paris. Although the hotel, knowing all the secret passages, would be fabulous.

**Mark Lapidus [2:07]:** I'm a Three Stooges guy, so, you know, that says a lot about me, right? We've got a full podcast for you today, and I mean that quite literally. We only have three microphones and four guests, so this is going to be quite interesting to see how it plays out. I'm pleased to welcome back Stuart Butler, Chief Marketing Officer of Visit Myrtle Beach; along with Mandy Barton, Manager of Marketing and Special Projects at New Orleans & Company; Sharon Broussard, Advertising and Campaigns Manager at Explore Louisiana; and Jordan Wollman, Vice President of Brand Miles Partnership, and Jordan is also Head of Creative and Development at Odyssey Studios. Our guests are all here today because, as I just mentioned, they are all GoUSA TV Storytelling Award winners here at ESTO. Congratulations all. Sharon and Jordan, your show Amplify Louisiana won an Outstanding Video Storytelling Award For a State or Territory. The show explores how Louisiana's music transcends time, culture, and class - that's what it says here in my copy, and I know it to be a fact, 'cause I watched it - and how local artists impact and are impacted by the communities where they are popular. So let's hear about it. Sharon, Louisiana's Office of Tourism designated 2024 as the Year of Music. What's that about?

**Sharon Broussard [3:18]:** Well, the video series, as you said, looks at our music, our culture, and they're just so intertwined all over the state. Whether it's the jazz in New Orleans or the zydeco music in south Louisiana, it's just ingrained in the people there. So when you take somebody like Sean Ardoin, who has just this wonderful personality, and you talk to him, and in two minutes you feel like you've known him forever. So send him out to talk to all these people around the state, people that play zydeco, people that play jazz, people that play country, and just talk about how they came to be musicians, and how their own personal histories and their lives just fed into what they're doing, and just intrinsically Louisiana stories. And then, of course, you know, they always end up somewhere eating, which is also very Louisiana. And it also feeds into next year being our Year of Food celebrations.

**Mark Lapidus [4:10]:** Jordan, you were the executive producer for Amplify Louisiana. How did you find the talent?

**Jordan Wollman [4:14]:** It's a great question. So we worked pretty closely with the state, with our client. We worked with the host, four-time Grammy award nominee Sean Ardoin.

**Mark Lapidus [4:25]:** Let's hear it for him!

**Mandy Barton [4:26]:** Yay!

**Jordan Wollman [4:27]:** Yeah, it's a lot of networking. I mean, just like anywhere else. So we did a lot of desk research; I have a whole production team that worked on this. We did a lot of desk research, we did a lot of interviews with the artists themselves and say, who's exciting? Who's exciting in this space? Who's up and coming? Who's making big waves? Alex Smith, a country artist, for instance, was just on the top of a brand-new hit that he had released, so we wanted to hit that. Perfect timing. But ultimately, it really came from a whole bunch of work by a whole lot of people who were talking to each other.

**Mark Lapidus [4:56]:** How'd you get the rights?

**Jordan Wollman [4:57]:** Oh, rights are always the hard part. So, you know, there's different layers of rights. There's the mechanical rights and the recording. So we kind of fell into two camps. One was, with a number of the artists, we worked with things that were in the public domain. So music that was in the public domain, that-

**Mark Lapidus [5:11]:** This is a good tip for listeners, by the way.

**Jordan Wollman [5:13]:** This is really good. This took a lot of work. So that's one direction to go. Anything that's in the public domain, you can perform, you can re-record, and you can then put in a tv show. On the other side of it, we were working with the artist to say, what do you own all of the rights to? So the label doesn't own the rights. A lot of times that was unreleased music, things that they had been developing, that they had not recorded with a label yet. And so we leaned into that. But ultimately, we chose to stay away from licensing from recording labels, because that gets, one, it gets expensive, and then you have, most of the time, a limitation on usage, and you have a limitation on time. And because this is evergreen content that we want to live out there forever, and we didn't want to constantly be going back to the negotiating table. We really focused on things that we could own inside the show.

**Mark Lapidus [6:02]:** To put a fine point on this, I was shooting something with the BBC, actually in New Orleans about two years ago with a star by the name of Jordana Spiro. She's actually in Ozark on Netflix. And we were sitting in- what's the famous coffee shop in New Orleans?

**Mandy Barton [6:17]:** Cafe du Monde.

**Mark Lapidus [6:18]:** Thank you very much. From a New Orleans native. I should remember that. Anyway, we're sitting there, and of course, you know, there are always bands outside in the street, and they just look so cool. And I said, let's put the band in the thing. And the producer said, I'm not sure we can get the rights to this. And I said, just have them play something in the public domain and we won't have to worry about it. And so they went over, talked to them, and they did something that I thought was just fantastic - they paid them.

**Mandy Barton [6:40]:** Oh, yeah, that's great.

**Mark Lapidus [6:41]:** Yeah. Because a lot of times, production companies will try to get off cheap and just ask for it without actually paying the artist, which personally, I think that's really, really important. Stuart, Myrtle Beach won for Best Video Storytelling About a City with your series Chef Swap At the Beach. It featured two chefs going head-to-head to prepare a perfect dish in 60 minutes, not a lot of time, and you had the added twist in there that they swapped kitchens. How did you balance showcasing the culinary aspect of the destination and promoting the beach and attractions at the same time?

**Stuart Butler [7:11]:** So culinary is one of our story pillars. We talk a lot about the things that make Myrtle Beach unique, and obviously, we're known for the 60 miles of beautiful, wide open beaches, but also known by the folks that go there - but not by people that don't go there - as a culinary destination, we have over 2,000 restaurants. It's more per capita than Paris, so it's a lot of restaurants. We have to feed a lot of people. When you get almost 20 million people visit your destination a year, and a lot of them are very hungry and with families, you know, so we have a lot of restaurants, and we've always been known for pancake houses and seafood buffets, and we have plenty of that. But we also, over the

last 20 years especially, have just developed this really local farm-to-table culture there as well. So there's a lot of really cool, unique chefs, and we wanted to tell that story and bring it to a wide audience. And we, you know, at Visit Myrtle Beach, have been leaning into this concept of branded entertainment. Telling a story that is a marketing story and persuading people to come visit, but doing it in the guise of entertainment. I heard Ryan this morning on stage, from Odyssey, talking about entertainment-first content, right? And so that was the initial thought for Chef Swap. We said, how do we create something that, to the viewer, looks like it's an entertainment show, but embedded in that is the message that we want to get across? And so we came up with this concept of a competition-style show for chefs. And we knew that if we wanted to make it interesting, we believe storytelling is about people, passion and purpose.

**Mark Lapidus [8:30]:** Hmm, I like that.

**Stuart Butler [8:32]:** And so we had to put the people and their passions and their purpose at the heart of it. And so from the very first episode, where we featured Johnny D's kitchen in Winna's Kitchen, which is right downtown Myrtle Beach, two female chefs that have tremendous stories. You know, Jess Sagan was someone that had suffered with addiction, and she had found herself on the streets without a home. And she had found a community there locally, a church community, that had helped her out of that situation. And she wanted to give back to the community, and so she created Winna's Kitchen, which was named after her grandmother. And one of the unique things they do, which we wanted to focus on the show, was anyone that could go in there, they can order their food, they can also order a "Number 1" from the menu. And what that is, is you're basically giving \$5 to feed someone else, anyone in need. And so anyone at any time that needs some food can go in and just order a "Number 1" and be treated like any other guest.

**Mark Lapidus [9:25]:** This is a great idea.

**Stuart Butler [9:26]:** And so that passion from her life experience really shone through. And so we could tell the story that Winna's kitchen is this beautiful farm-to-table, fresh, great food, right? And some people would, that would resonate. But when we tell a deeper story that connects with people, passion, and purpose, it really resonates at a deeper level. And so we're now turning the corner on season three of Chef Swap's going to launch on Cooking Channel this coming Saturday. And we featured over 40 chefs, 40 restaurants in the three seasons. You know, season one launched two years ago, and we still have people going to those restaurants that found out about it from Chef Swap. And we talk to these chefs all the time, and they're like, "We're still getting people." And so the ROI on that has been tremendous. But what we didn't realize was, we sort of knew to a degree that the local sentiment was going to be there, but we had no idea just how much the local community would rally behind this show. Not just the restaurants and people surrounding those restaurants, but the elected officials, the media, everyone. It's like a badge of honor and source of community pride for the entire community. It's been phenomenal. Movement, is what we call it, because that's really what it is.

**Mark Lapidus [10:29]:** Fantastic, congratulations on all that. Mandy, your destination won for Outstanding Video Storytelling That Shows a Destination From Diverse Perspectives. The series is called Icons in New Orleans. It shines a spotlight on the tradition and history of the Black Masking Indians of New Orleans. So first of all, you got to tell us about the Black Masking Indians. What is that, and how did the idea surface?

**Mandy Barton [10:50]:** The Black Masking Indians are various tribes around New Orleans, and it's a huge part of black culture in our city. And every year, these different tribes, whether they're uptown or downtown, hand sew these beautiful, extravagant, ornate suits with beadwork and feathers. And so if you live in New Orleans, or if you've visited during second line season, or come down for Jazz Fest or during Mardi Gras, you've most likely seen a Black Masking Indian, and you have an idea and you kind of understand.

**Mark Lapidus [11:24]:** I have, now that you're saying it.

**Mandy Barton [11:26]:** But if you haven't done any of that, and you just come across a photo on social media or on the Internet, you might be like, what is this? What are they doing? Why? And so we wanted to hear the story. We wanted to understand the history, the significance. Why are they doing this? And we wanted to hear it from them. So we connected with Big Chief Shaka Zulu, and we said, will you just go on camera and just talk to us? Just tell us what it all means. How did it start? Let's sort of set the record straight. So if people are googling and they end up on Wikipedia or wherever, whoever thinks that they know the real story, let's actually tell the real story and let's get it documented. So we did a couple of different videos with Shaka, and it's just lovely to hear where it all comes from. And I'll try to explain it and not ruin it. So a long time ago, when there were slaves in New Orleans - because there were slaves in New Orleans - they would escape or find refuge with indigenous people, with the tribes in Louisiana. And because their skin colors were similar, they could dress up like the indigenous people and be safe, be, you know, camouflaged. And so they started this tradition of dressing like them as a way to say thank you, as a way to show their appreciation. And then fast forward several decades later, black people were not always allowed to gather in the streets or have parades. And they found this loophole that on Fat Tuesday, on Mardi Gras day, they could put on these beautiful suits and go out into the street and not get in trouble, not get arrested, not draw attention to themselves. And so a lot of people will refer to them as Mardi Gras Indians. But again, with this video series talking with Shaka, we're also trying to rewrite it a little bit and let people know that they want to call themselves. They do call themselves Black Masking Indians, so it's really lovely. It's a labor of love, these suits that they make. And they build a new suit every year. And some tribes are even so superstitious about it that they will destroy their suit each year. And what's also cool about Black Masking Indians is that, if you are an uptown tribe or a downtown tribe, your suits actually look different. So if you see the big plumes, the big feathers, that's indicative of a certain area of town tribe. And then if you see the ones that are more of the beautiful beadwork, that's different area of town. So even within that subculture, there's different facets. It's such a lovely piece of New Orleans.

**Mark Lapidus [14:23]:** Well, all three of you have had a lot of success with the series, that's why you're sitting here today, and it sounds like it's gone over very well with your constituents, so tell me what your future plans are. Let's start with Sharon.

**Sharon Broussard [14:34]:** Yeah, we were really pleased with how this series turned out, with the music and everything, and looking ahead to our Year of Food, we have some projects that are lined up, and we're just waiting to get those in the door and out the door.

**Mark Lapidus [14:46]:** Excellent. Mandy.

**Mandy Barton [14:47]:** We've been working on this really great video series where we connect with a chef or a food influencer, and we have them take us around and explain to us a certain facet of our culinary scene in New Orleans. It's so diverse; we're not just Cajun and Creole food, we have Vietnamese

food and Thai food and Haitian food and all these different lovely flavors and cultures that are present in New Orleans. And if you don't know that, then you don't know. And so we have been connecting with various chefs. We did a video with Charly Pierre of Fritai. He has a Haitian restaurant in the Treme. And he took us around to several other black-owned restaurants. And we sit down with the chefs or the owners, and we have them talk about a dish, talk about the history of their restaurant, talk about why they love to cook and how it brings people together, and then sort of copied and pasted and we did it with our Vietnamese food scene. So we had chef Ann Liu, who does Vietnamese pop-ups, and she took us around to some Vietnamese-owned restaurants. And there's a huge Vietnamese population in New Orleans. And so we actually went out to a co-op farm and met some Vietnamese farmers, and talked about pho and banh mi and the significance and the blending of Louisiana produce and these different traditional dishes. And then we have one coming up, we're gonna do another one with a food influencer who's part Cuban, and she's gonna take us around to some Hispanic-owned restaurants and pop-ups in New Orleans. And I think what works really well in this food series that we've been doing, is that we let them tell us where to go. Cause we might think we know the best black-owned restaurants or the best Hispanic restaurants, but we're like, we don't know anything. Who should we talk to? Where should we eat? What dishes? What matters? What's the culture? Where are we going? And that's been really successful because it's genuine, and it's a different perspective than what we as destination marketers might think we need to do or where we need to go.

**Mark Lapidus [16:42]:** And what's next for Odyssey?

**Jordan Wollman [16:43]:** You know, we have a number of tv shows that we are actively in production. A number of tv shows that we have in development. We are looking for more destinations to bring the series Amplify to. We have a new show called Cheat Meal, which is absolutely-

**Mark Lapidus [16:58]:** Can I say something about that?

**Jordan Wollman [16:59]:** Absolutely.

**Mark Lapidus [17:00]:** So one of the wonderful things about making a television show in a series that's already been made, is you have these great examples to show constituents. It's really hard when you're starting from scratch and you have to make a pilot. It's time consuming, it's expensive. It's often much easier to find a series that you already like and then make an episode of it.

**Jordan Wollman [17:18]:** Absolutely. And my job as Head of Development is to do exactly that: come up with new ideas, try and get them funded, and shoot those pilots. It is a difficult thing to do. At Odyssey Studios, we have a number of tv shows that are prepackaged. They're pre-developed. But we also work with our clients to develop content that is unique to their DNA, a series that would not work anywhere else. So we've got a lot on the books, and we'd love to have more.

**Mark Lapidus [17:42]:** Stuart, you told us that you're going to be doing another series of Chef Swap. Anything else in the hopper?

**Stuart Butler [17:47]:** I want to follow up on that last comment. I think one of the mistakes we make as destinations is we think that the stories are ours to tell. We are the storyteller, but we're not the heroes of the story. We should be the guide that helps to manifest, or be the conduit through which the story is told. And so getting the voices of the people whose stories it is and capturing that in an authentic way, I

think is really the future. So we look at content as our strategic product. It's the thing we do, and media is where we're shifting more and more of our budget in terms of owned media, which leads to earn.

**Mark Lapidus [18:19]:** This is music to my ears.

**Stuart Butler [18:21]:** We leverage paid to try to amplify it and get distribution, but content is everything. And so we have invested heavily, both from resource and a financial perspective, to bring a lot of different projects to life. We've already birthed two podcasts; we got two tv shows in the works, a third is in pre-production. My favorite project in the pipeline, though, is - Myrtle Beach is known as an autism-friendly destination. We've done a lot of work over the last decade, really, to be more hospitable and welcoming to folks with sensory challenges. And so we really wanted to make sure the product was there before we started telling the story well, and we feel like it is now. We feel like a lot of people have come here and had positive experiences. And so we've just launched a children's book called Splish, Splash, Squawk, and that's available online. You can go buy it. It tells the story of children who are experiencing their first vacation and coming up against some challenges, and they have to kind of overcome traditional hero's journey kind of storytelling. But we're also, on the back of that, we just got picked up by a major streaming service in our first season of a show called Traveling The Spectrum, is going to launch in November.

**Mark Lapidus [19:24]:** Wonderful.

**Stuart Butler [19:25]:** Can't announce the streaming service yet, but we're probably going to announce that in the next couple of weeks. We already recorded it. It's already produced. We follow three families, each with a family member on the spectrum, as they took a vacation. Recorded the good, the bad, and the meltdowns, and we're gonna showcase that. It's a six-part mini series. We'll go to streaming services, and we're super excited. I've seen all six episodes, and it's the project I'm most proud of in my entire career. It's gonna change a lot of people's lives, and it's gonna change how people perceive autism and how people perceive Myrtle Beach.

**Mark Lapidus [19:56]:** Can't wait to see it. I hope we can get it on GoUSA TV.

**Stuart Butler [19:59]:** Yeah, that's the plan, right? We don't have an international distribution yet, so once we've streamed it and now territory locks are over, we definitely plan to bring that to GoUSA TV.

**Mark Lapidus [20:08]:** We could certainly go on about this for another 45 minutes, but I don't want to try our listeners' patience here. I do want to remind people listening that you can see all of these shows and so much more on GoUSA TV. And you can find it on Roku, Apple TV, Amazon, Fire in the United States, those are the easiest ways to see it. But if you're international, you can watch it on most Samsung TV units, and also in LG channels lots of other places. There's more information about it on our website [visittheusa.com](http://visittheusa.com). Thank you all so much for joining me today, really appreciate it. Congratulations on your awards.

**Jordan Wollman [20:40]:** Thank you.

**Stuart Butler [20:41]:** Thank you.

**Mark Lapidus [20:41]:** And that's it for Brand USA Talks Travel, live from Columbus, Ohio at ESTO. I'm Mark Lapidus, lots more episodes coming. Thanks for listening.

**Outro [20:50]:** If you enjoyed this Live From ESTO episode, please share it with your friends in the travel industry. Production and music by Asher Meerovich. Media producer, Nthanze Kariuki, with assistance from Casey D'Ambra. Engineering, Brian Watkins, Kat Pommer, and Antonio Tyler. Art by Mimi Jung. Special thanks to Alexis Adelson, Bill Dickieson, Peter Dodge, and Colleen Mangone. More Live From ESTO episodes coming soon. Safe travels!