

The Business Spotlight - FastSigns

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SPEAKERS

Karrie Brock, Halie Morris

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Halie Morris 00:34

Hello, everyone, and welcome to Double A Solutions' Business Spotlight. Today I have with me Karrie Brock. Karrie is from FastSigns and so we're gonna start off by letting Karrie talk more about what she does and what FastSigns is. So if you don't mind...

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Karrie Brock 00:50

Thank you for having me. We at FastSigns are a brand specialist. So we focus on commercial signage, anything that you would put your brand or your mark on, we can help you with that interior or exterior and web solutions. We've actually worked with you quite a bit. So you've created all of the really cool signs that we have up around the office. And I love them. I love it gives us a little bit of a facelift here and there. So how long's FastSigns been around? So FastSigns itself has been around since 1985. We are a franchise, and we bought into the franchise in 2010. However, we've been in business since 1997. So I started the business 23 years ago.

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Halie Morris 01:34

Wow, that's awesome. Just about my age

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Karrie Brock 01:37

I was 23 when I started it.

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Halie Morris 01:39

so you were about my age when you started it. So that's awesome. All right. So what was the decision to go into business with FastSigns to do the type of work that you do now?

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Karrie Brock 01:51

Sure. So we had always kind of been just like a FastSigns. Nothing really changed about that. But FastSigns brought to the table, a huge step up for us for support, for marketing support. And also for resources, anything from Tech to web to just helping us with vendors and sourcing our products. So it was a great investment for us. Because we felt like as a mom and pop shop we had to do a lot of footwork on our own. And with them and having their resources we didn't feel like we were all by ourselves anymore.

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Halie Morris 02:25

You probably focused a little more on that customer relationship, I'm sure

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Karrie Brock 02:27

yes, we can focus on what we do best. And then we have tools and tips and tricks and resources to go to if we're having issues or problems to kind of figure out a solution best to fit us or our client's needs.

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Halie Morris 02:40

That's awesome. So I'm curious, I love artsy things I love to draw and create. I've also been asked to make flyers and stuff for people. It's not my expertise. But when somebody approaches you, and they want some type of signage or something like that, how does that process go?

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Karrie Brock 02:58

Sure, we typically try to start with what the purpose of the sign is. So what message do you need to be conveyed or how are you conveying that message? Is it going to be inside or exterior, and then we start with a budget too, because everyone does have a budget, believe it or not. And from there, we take your branding, if you have it, or we can help you create your branding. And then we build a package that will suit all of your needs, get

your message across be effective for whatever audience you're trying to reach, and stay within your budget.

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Halie Morris 03:31

That's awesome. So I was gonna ask, what kind of customers do you work with? Do you work with small mom and pa? Do you work with bigger businesses?

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Karrie Brock 03:41

Yeah, so we work with any business, whether it's a one person business all the way up to a large corporation, the uniqueness about our setup is that we can help you on the small projects, and we can help you on the large projects and anything in between. So there are competitors out there that will only focus on the big projects or only focus on the small projects, we can do 85% of our products are actually produced in house. So we produce it right in our facility. We actually have an install team and crew, we handle permitting if it's exterior, and then obviously we have the design team as well so we can get you from front and back and complete project.

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Halie Morris 04:20

That sounds amazing. Some of that stuff is a pain in the butt.

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Karrie Brock 04:23

Yes, exactly. And a lot of people don't want to deal with it. And sometimes you know, a company can do great work and they can give you a great exterior sign. But then if you try to go back and get something little done or you need a banner or yard signs, or other marketing materials, that's not their area of expertise where we have crews that do everything.

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Halie Morris 04:43

That's nice because then it really ties everything you started with into this the new stuff to

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Karrie Brock 04:47

exactly we really like to be your brand solution. So if you need anything to put your brand on we can help.

H Halie Morris 04:55
That's super cool. What kind of curiosity what's the most unique thing you've done for somebody?

K Karrie Brock 05:01
we've done several projects. But the biggest one in particular that we are most proud of is our City Egg project. So the Scramblers brand restaurants wanted to get into the fast casual market. And so they actually asked us to create their whole entire concept from name to logo, to interior signage, exteriors signage, we help with anything that their mark is on from the website to the even their ordering kiosk.

H Halie Morris 05:27
So that you you gave them their look,

K Karrie Brock 05:29
we gave them everything, even their name,

H Halie Morris 05:32
That's awesome!

K Karrie Brock 05:33
it was fine. It was something that we could be creative with. And you know, then we can play on it ourselves and and kind of add those elements. The nice thing is, is that it is a local restaurant concept. And it's local to wherever it is. So if it's in Columbus, everything ties around the 614. If it's Toledo, it's 419. So we really want it to bring in whatever city that restaurant is in,

H Halie Morris 05:57
to connect versus sometimes with restaurants and stuff like that, that are franchised, it can feel very impersonal.

K Karrie Brock 06:05

Yes,

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Halie Morris 06:06

I think we're starting to see, like some of the bigger franchises starting to adopt that concept that you started with that concept.

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Karrie Brock 06:12

It's important because if you think about it, even that franchise, in that franchise owner, just like us, we're local. So I locally own the business, we have one in Toledo and one in Miami, and your orders and sales, and everything that we do with you goes to help my family just as much as it does, you know, everyone that works for me. So bringing that back home sometimes is important too, because people don't always understand what a franchise is. So helping City Egg be more local, even though they may end up being all throughout the country, it just ties that back in to engage that customer clientele

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Halie Morris 06:48

Yeah, and I think part of that comes from some of the big franchises we know, like the big fast food franchises get this almost negative connotation to it. Whereas if you start with I was local first, and I utilize this partnership to, like, empower and raise up my customer experience,

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Karrie Brock 07:08

because people think that big box stores are bad. And they can be as long as you know, it is somebody that's running it that doesn't care and doesn't isn't involved in the community. And I think that's one thing, too, that we have appreciated, especially with our connection with Double A Solutions is the tie back to our community. You know, we're working with a local company on some of our big items, like our phones, and you know, some of our tech support where we didn't, you know, you can't always get that from some of the big box stores. But you still want to make sure that you know, you find a big enough company that can help you with all your needs.

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Halie Morris 07:44

That's super cool. And that kind of ties into my next thought, which is what kind of technology are you using to support these operations?

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Karrie Brock 07:52

So first and foremost, which saved us so much during COVID was the Aline phone systems. You know, we have had wonderful success with having a VOIP system through you guys where I could be at home, but I can answer my phone, I can also call out and no one knows it's my cell phone, they think it's actually the office, which is fantastic. And then just being able to utilize even the multi lines. And since we do have two centers, it's nice, because we can transfer back and forth from each center, the client doesn't know the difference, they don't have to hang up and dial a number, we just transfer transfer to an extension. We also utilize now voicemail for multiple people, which we didn't have that opportunity before. And then we have Music on Hold and things like that. So all of that has made us even better and look even bigger and more professional. You know, just to give that forward front and then be easier to communicate with our clients.

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Halie Morris 08:52

It makes things smooth from your side, easier to handle you know, because we use it, we don't just sell it, but we use Aline in in our own operations too. And so I got rid of my desk phone when I moved positions. I'm just gonna use my cell phone, of course, now my cell phones, like, you know, the ear speaker, we're not gonna completely work. So besides the fact that I may need a new phone. I like it because I can take it whether I'm in the studio or at my desk or things like it makes a huge difference. But like you said, the customer experience is very professional and polished. So they're getting that local feel from their actual interactions with you that you pride so much. But the smooth transition of getting there is as easy and convenient as somebody who has more time and resources to invest and something like that

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Karrie Brock 09:44

Exactly. Other things that we utilize too, not necessarily through Double A but we do have an online cloud based point of sale. So all of our estimates and invoices run smoothly through there along with our CRM. And then we now have a texting service. So the shops can actually text clients, whether it's an estimate, approve your orders ready, however, we need to communicate with them all from the desktop. So they don't again, we don't have to use personal cell phones, we don't have to worry about that. And we don't have to give out personal cell phones to clients, but they still have a way to communicate with us.

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Halie Morris 10:17

Texting is so important these days. I know, what's the latest one is the I forget the in

community or whatever. I don't know why you would app or whatever. But you sign up for when somebody is like a celebrity or a big political figure. So I've seen a supernatural actor Misha Collins does it, President Obama does it, and then you sign up for and then it feels like you're getting a personal message from that person, they can text hundreds of thousands of people at once. And it reaches sometimes they can do it by state, or they can do stuff like this. And people love it. It feels personal like, they don't have to ignore the phone call for it to go to voicemail to see if it's important.

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Karrie Brock 11:03
right.

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Halie Morris 11:06

It's just people like chats, they like whether it's an Instagram, it's on Snapchat, it's Facebook, or whatever. Or if it's their actual messages, they like that versus once they find it's worth the time, then they might call you or they might take your call, but not before

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Karrie Brock 11:22

Right and it's that instant gratification. Right? No one wants to wait anymore, or even checking email, you know, it takes two seconds to go through, but they just are impatient. If it's a text, they got it, it's in their hands, they're ready to go.

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Halie Morris 11:34

And it takes away that barrier of time inconvenience. So it's not always a good time to call somebody, especially if it's at a random hour. So now it's just they'll get to the message when they get to the message. So no, that's kind of cool. It's good to hear. And so how does your sales system work with that? I know you mentioned like a CRM, and it's cloud based and things like that. So how does that work? Because that's a big part of it.

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Karrie Brock 11:58

right. So everything's online, and we enter in all of our customer data and information in there. So we can keep track of it. We enter all of our estimates into that system as well. So we can follow up and make sure that we are, you know, keeping current with the estimate, is it good? Is it bad? Or do they need changes, and then that converts right into an order when they're ready. It has an online payment system. So we basically when we send out the estimate, you can actually convert it on an online portal, pay for it and get it moving

right away. So and then once it's done, and it is an order, we actually can move it through our system to get back to production, and our install team. So they all kind of know what's happening as they go.

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Halie Morris 12:39

It helps bridge that it's again, it's like the phone system does it smooths out communication.

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Karrie Brock 12:44

And then we have auto responder settings. So like clients get notifications when their order is complete, or when it's ready for proofing and things like that. So that they kind of know exactly where their order is in the process. And they don't have to guess, although they can always call and email as well. But it's one more step of if they wanted to find out they could in an instant.

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Halie Morris 13:04

It makes it smoother. I think I've seen a lot of whether it's t shirts or stickers or whatever you see at different places more places are moving towards that, because it replicates that consumer shopping experience.

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Karrie Brock 13:18

For sure. Well, communication is key nowadays. And everyone you know, even though sometimes it can be a little overwhelming. People want that communication they want to know and it is that instant gratification. Where is my order? How's how's it being processed? Is it ready? yet? When's it going to be ready yet. And having that at their fingertips makes it easier.

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Halie Morris 13:37

And it keeps things from dropping through the cracks? I'm sure, takes out some of the human error. a fun little tidbit. I have a friend who she works an odd shift from her boyfriend. They just moved in together. And I love her to death. But she's terrible at communicating. It's like you said it's so important today, like people expect it. So they created a Google calendar to put on their schedule.

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Karrie Brock 14:02

Yes, oh, we love G Suite. We use G Suite all the time. It's a great thing for us to use the drive. So like all of our art files, proofing and everything. So it's accessible anywhere from any computer that we need to get to. So if I'm at home, I can use my laptop and I'm not down and can't service a client from there. So

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Halie Morris 14:23

and it's livee like if you're editing someone else's, it's actually showing what they're typing when they're typing. Like, there's no delay. So how does that technology, it does all these cool things. And we talked about the communication but how does that actually enable you to do what you're in business to do?

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Karrie Brock 14:39

So I think technology has always been an important part of signage. Except for back when that was paintings. We use technology all day long from you know, computer cut graphics to computer printed graphics, routing of shapes, building of things. Everything's a tech drawing, it's somehow engineered or designed on a computer to begin with, so if we didn't have a computer to work with, it would be a much longer process.

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Halie Morris 15:08

You go back to the time of the WordPress

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Karrie Brock 15:11

yes, even worse.

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Halie Morris 15:14

But aside from that, besides the obvious technology, you're obviously saying obvious far too often. But you're using stuff that isn't the most obvious choice. Like you're not just using what is needed to create the signs, and actually go through production for you. But you're using things internally for your processes that might not be what somebody thinks of first one creating a business. So how does that add that extra layer for your company?

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Karrie Brock 15:42

I think efficiency is very important, at least for us, given the size that we are now. And the fact that we are spread over two different centers, and we're not located in the same building. So it goes back to communication, we use an inner office messengers system called Slack so that we can talk back and forth. We don't have to be on the phone, we can be on the computer, but like our outside sales manager, and myself, we can be out doing sales calls and still be communicating back and forth. Not necessarily on our cell phone getting a text message, but someone in the office can message us and we can still receive it. So it's still all about that keeping communication stream flowing and keeping our workflow going as well as being efficient. Because our name is FastSigns, sometimes that gets a little bit of a, you know, tongue in cheek, but we do need to be quick and efficient. And that's, that's ultimately what that does, keeps everyone in check, make sure that everyone knows what's supposed to happen, what's expected of them. And everything's accessible. And accessibility is huge right now too.

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Halie Morris 16:49

That's awesome, it's good to hear that you actually are making that effort to live up to your name.

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Karrie Brock 16:54

For sure.

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Halie Morris 16:56

That's super cool to hear, I guess, then kind of as we start to wrap into the last bit, tell me a bit more about why your customers come to you versus someone else.

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Karrie Brock 17:08

I think, first and foremost, our responsiveness. I mean, how efficient we are and how we work through a project with them. We're not just order takers, you know, I will gladly take any order that is fine. If there are some people that don't necessarily want to communicate that much. Here's my file print it be done that that's okay, too. But we really enjoy working with those clients that have problems or challenges, and we need to figure out a solution. That is what we're there for. And we are the experts in that to kind of create something for them that represents who they are. And I think that that's first and foremost, why people come to us. They also come to us too, because they know what they're going to get. We don't hide anything here's what's expected. Here's what we will present to you. And here's how we're going to produce it. So we're very upfront, try to be

as honest as we possibly can with every little detail. And, you know, make sure that everyone has what they need to make their business move forward.

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Halie Morris 18:10

That's awesome. And then, I guess, a curiosity, something we haven't touched on in this conversation, but I think I was on a lot of people's minds. How do you maintain that type of business, when you get hit with something like COVID?

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Karrie Brock 18:25

So it was I'm not gonna lie, it was a challenge. We kind of had already been talking about it in the office and prepped for it for about two weeks. Not over dwelling on anything, but just kind of this is kind of what we're hearing, this is what's coming down the pike. And we did have to end up laying off the majority of our staff for about a month and a half. And that was hard, you know, they're our family. And you know, you never want to disappoint them or, you know, let them down. But it was necessary in order to keep the business moving. And in that time frame, my husband and I worked one in the shop and one at home, homeschooling two kids and you know, keeping everything going. But with the voice system, and with our cloud based point of sale, and with our files being cloud based, we were able, I was able to do sales and design and then send him everything and he would do all the production while I stayed home and he stayed there. And then we sit we put together contactless pickup, so it was pretty seamless. And we were able to keep things moving. The business did shift though. And I think that that's where we were pivotable. you know what I'm saying? Where you're kind of asking me what makes us different than our competition. So some of the larger sign companies had to shut down because they weren't going to be able to do installs. No one was going to let them in the building or let them out and about. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know Could they be next to each other? Could they you know, stand in a bucket truck and help you know, install? But we actually were able to then go back to business to consumer sales. So the birthday signs and the graduation signs and anything to help make people feel better and give them a boost of positivity during all of this, we were able to support them through that. So while we didn't have the same business sales, we had sales, which was good. And then as things started to shift and change in the middle of May, we actually started getting back to our normal routine of business as usual, all of our team had been backed by them by the first of May. And we were able to move forward. And we have actually seen, which is interesting to me, a shift kind of like what we saw in 2008-2009, when the you know, the recession hit, and everyone was displaced, they all said, I'll just start my own business. And we're seeing the same thing. Now I feel like people are displaced, they have a little extra cash, and they're like, you know what, I'm gonna do this

on my own, we are seeing more and more new businesses pop up. So that's very encouraging, and exciting for us, because we like to help you know, with those solutions, as well, so and it's fun watching someone start their business, and they're so excited. And, you know, they see their name up there Finally, and it's real and official,

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Halie Morris 21:16

That's exciting. The Toledo area, for sure, knowing we've grown, I feel like, at least from my side, it seems like the Toledo area has really come back in the last couple years, like three or four years. When I started college, like nobody went downtown didn't go downtown and now it's like, oh, if you actually have the money, then you go downtown. So

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Karrie Brock 21:39

But there's so much to do down there. And they're constantly adding and right now they're working on summit Street, but like Imagination Stations getting overhauled, and everything is starting to really come around

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Halie Morris 21:50

They're doing that park too, the Glass City Park. I keep seeing signs everywhere. Because every kid's on the playground until it's too cold. Yeah.

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Karrie Brock 21:59

But it's fun. You know, even last year with the Christmas tree up and the lights all the way down the street was it was just, it's fun to go down there. It's fun to know that we are in a big, small town, you know, like Toledo is still a medium sized city. And we have a lot of the benefits that I think a lot of the larger cities have. But with that hometown feel, which is great.

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Halie Morris 22:20

Yeah. And I feel like we've seen like, I know, my perception of downtown used to be like just the manufacturing and stuff. But now we're seeing so many arts and creativity, which I'm sure you appreciate from the creative sign side. But like I like I like I told you earlier, I like fashion. I like drawing I like stuff like that. So it's colorful, and it's bright, and it's vibrant. And it's fun to go downtown now.

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Karrie Brock 22:41

I don't think people realize whether you are creative yourself or not. how that affects, you know, how you feel and what you think you know, the space around you is important. And you know, making it unique and beautiful and creative and vibrant. It's all a part of what makes you feel about that space when you're in it. So I think it's important whether or not you're creative or not So, but when you are you appreciate it a little bit more sometimes.

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Halie Morris 23:07

Yeah, well, and I think to what you do coming back, like a lot of our signs here have been from you guys. And so we've seen us do more with our office in the last year. And just watching it come alive. And it looks so professional and clean. It's really fun to not only bring people in so they can feel the atmosphere. But see what we've done and see, you know us up on the walls and in our environment is really cool.

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Karrie Brock 23:33

For sure. And I think that's that's important. It has to be who you are and Archie and Kym are great. And, you know, giving us some blank canvases, but also giving us the inspiration. You know, this is who we are. And this is what we're about and make it look like us. And so I think that that's exciting.

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Halie Morris 23:50

Yeah, no, I've got a cool CEO. Yes, yeah. But no. So I think that's great. Would you have any advice for anybody who is considering kind of upping their look a little bit with signage on any side? Do you have any advice for somebody who might come to you?

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Karrie Brock 24:10

Sure. I mean, first and foremost, make sure your brand is solid, you know, you might have a logo already created, or you may already have a look and feel. But really make sure to do a brand evaluation first make sure it actually speaks to who you are, what your message is and who you're talking to. And you know, sometimes it just needs a fine tune here or there just to make it that much more impactful. And then be open to that and then let the creatives do their work and get your message out.

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Halie Morris 24:38

I love that. All right. Well, thank you for coming on Karrie.



Karrie Brock 24:41

Thank you for having me.



Halie Morris 24:43

Thank you everybody for tuning in. I hope you enjoyed learning about Karrie's business at FastSigns