

Episode 21

How we rocked MWC

Released July 13, 2021

Danielle Royston 00:00:00 I am Danielle Royston and this is telco in 20

MWC21 is in the books. And boy, did telcoDR show up to play. We totally owned MWC this year. CLOUD CITY was the destination at MWC. We killed ourselves to pull this off, working days and nights nonstop to take over Ericsson's ginormous 6,000 square meters.. or for you Americans, 65,000 square feet of space. So much happened this week. First, I launched Totogi, a webscale charging startup that's built on the public cloud. On Tuesday, I delivered my keynote on the huge GSMA stage. Did you see me riding the dragon?

We created an entire live TV show called CLOUD CITY Live with over 50 speakers and is now available on demand. And oh yeah, no big deal, we threw a Jon Bon Jovi concert where he played this iconic song, Living on a Prayer acoustically, which is so great to hear after being in lockdown without live music for over a year. It was epic.

A seismic shift happened this week in the telco industry with the public cloud. And it happened because of CLOUD CITY. Back in March, when this crazy idea first popped into my head, I had my friend David Haselwood on the podcast and he asked me how in the hell I was going to pull this off. And so I wanted to bring him back on the podcast to talk about how much we kicked ass. So I'm aboard our yacht in Barcelona, and I've dialed up David on Google Meet to give him a little FOMO and to talk about how we just rocked MWC. So... let's take 20.

Danielle Royston 00:01:58 MWC is over and it's just so crazy incredible.

David Haselwood 00:02:04 Yeah, I have one question for you because you were absolutely everywhere for all of MWC. And I have to admit even the old school media outlets who were not as quick to pick up on this CLOUD CITY story came around and said that you were the Queen of MWC. I have one question for you. Did you ever sleep?

Danielle Royston 00:02:21 I have not slept in 105 days. Seriously. We had to create time, right? We had a hundred days, and booths of this size are usually planned in nine months. How do you bend time? We did it. And the way we did it was by not sleeping. We worked weekends. We work seven days a week. I would go to bed at two o'clock in the morning. I'd wake up at six. I've been doing that since March. I've been doing that all through MWC. I'm exhausted. I'm 50 years old. I was like, yeah, no big deal, I'll just pull some all-nighters. I used to do that all the time at Stanford. I used to do that all the time when I was a junior worker, like 'I'm going to show them by working hard.' It hurts a lot when you're 50, so I do not recommend it, but we pulled it off! Pulled it off.

David Haselwood 00:03:11 Let's talk about that. So when we talked back in March, it was this huge white space opportunity. A huge booth. I mean, literally, it was like 60,000 square feet or something like that. And it was a huge investment. I mean, numbers have been thrown around, it's in the millions, the investment that you made. I know you said something about

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some key metrics, some ROIs. I mean, I think the bottom line that everyone wants to know is: Are you happy with it? Did you hit what you wanted?

Danielle Royston 00:03:34 You know, I was talking to one of my friends last night about what I could have done better. There's not one thing I can think of that I could have done better. MWC is about deals and about meetings. I haven't read all the press. I've been super busy, but we knew the attendance was going to be down. It was down. What we did see were that the senior execs came. I mean, the CEOs of major groups, their leadership team. You weren't seeing delegations of 200 people. If you were seeing entourages, I guess it's like a smaller thing than a delegation, an entourage of about 15-20 people - but we got all the meetings we could get. And so that metric, which is, I think the metric of MWC, right, the whole purpose is to fill your funnel. Did we fill our funnel? I mean, our cup overfloweth. It's awesome.

David Haselwood 00:04:28 From what we can tell, you know, and the details are still coming in. You guys absolutely owned the show. I mean, that's what everyone was saying. Even the old school thinks that you owned the show. You got to give a keynote speech, even had Bon Jovi play live in your booth, which I think has to be some kind of first, and then parties on the yacht and stuff. But that's all the flashy stuff. Like someone like me that didn't get a chance to go thanks to the passport issues.. what'll be something there that we might've missed where you dominated, but it wasn't as obvious as some of these really flashy things that you guys do.

Danielle Royston 00:04:59 I think we really changed the conversation. I think that's like the end all be all baseline here. It's really hard to change the conversation at MWC. They have their themes. The themes are decided in advance. They're decided by the big-time players and the old school telcos. And it's really hard to sort of like, "Hey, I'm a little person. I would like to discuss public cloud." They're not going to listen to me. And so I think what I really was able to do was to show GSMA, MWC, the industry, that there's a lot of momentum around the topic of public cloud. We created CLOUD CITY out of nothing. A hundred and five days ago, this did not exist. It wasn't even in my head and to be able to have this seismic shift.. I think everyone heard the crack. It's just been awesome.

David Haselwood 00:05:48 Speaking of the old guard, what made this happen was the gift that Ericsson laid in your lap by bailing. They bailed early and they bailed in a really obvious way. Have they reached out to you? Do they want their booth space back?

Danielle Royston 00:06:00 I heard they already reached out to a GSMA and said that they want their booth back and they're coming back for 22. And I guess yeah, taking off three years from MWC... now they're ready to announce something new, I guess? But yeah, those guys are not reaching out to me. I mean, I'm pretty much sure they hate me. It was kind of funny. 'Cause last night, Jon Bon Jovi, he played a great acoustic set. He played Living on a Prayer acoustic with like a slightly different tempo. I mean, it was epic. And then, you know, it was kind of wrapping up and saying, you know, this is my drummer and kind of doing a little bit of a curtain

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call. And I was like, he hasn't played Wanted Dead or Alive and you know, who's Wanted Dead or Alive right now? And that was his encore song. He played Wanted Dead or Alive. It was perfect. It was awesome.

David Haselwood 00:06:51 Well, here's an idea. Maybe you can reach out to the GSMA guys and tell them that you should take over whatever booth of one of these incumbents to snap them back into shape and get them to do something different. And when they get their booth back after you've taken over for a year, then they have to do something different, bolder. They just can't keep putting up the same garbage over and over again. So you're kind of like just the disruptor in many ways. So who do you think might be in line next for these old guard incumbents that didn't show this year? Whose booth might you take over next?

Danielle Royston 00:07:18 I think they'll never bail again. I mean, I really showed them, right? I mean, I feel their pain. I mean, some of them aren't reaching out to me, but some of them are attacking me on LinkedIn. Multi-billion dollar companies are like, calling me out or whatever. And I'm like, yeah, you realize that I just launched a company. We have zero revenue at the moment. And I love that you were threatened by me. I think you're validating, you're validating the super strong message and that you're scared of me. And I'm like, thank you. Let's retweet that. Right? "Everyone, look at what's going on here." And so I have pushed hard on the old guard. I am shaking up telco and I'm going right to the front door and I'm not backing down. And it's awesome.

David Haselwood 00:08:03 So let's talk about that. The old guard, you actually had a lot of the new guard in your booth. If I'm not mistaken, you had maybe dozens of other companies that were public cloud-focused in your booth and you provided them with space. What went behind that? It's a really interesting decision where you basically said, I got this whole CLOUD CITY thing going on. Why don't you come join me? And these are companies that, I don't know, who down the road, they may even compete with you, but you gave them some space. How did that work out? And what was kind of your long-term thinking on that decision to really be sort of the epicenter of the public cloud?

Danielle Royston 00:08:36 Well, I think you gave me that idea when we did our first podcast and you're like, uh, who's TelcoDR?

David Haselwood 00:08:44 This is true. The consultancy. Yes. Yeah, definitely.

Danielle Royston 00:08:48 "I did a LinkedIn search, and there's like four people that associate with you. How are you going to fill the booth?" Right? And it was so funny and I laughed so hard. I was like, oh my God, he's totally right. How are we going to fill a football pitch (we're in Europe right now, so we'll say football) - But we'll say American football field and a half of space. And I reached out to a bunch of different vendors and I was like, "Hey, I already paid for it. I'll do the full turnkey experience. Yes. You might compete with me. We might compete later.

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But as long as you're doing something in the public cloud, let's create this little CLOUD CITY Army." And we've done that. You know, what was going on in that booth was so organically awesome. We grouped them by Cloud-Native Software. So like, the software guys and the northbound guys, the BSS people. Then we grouped the southbound guys, the network people, kind of, together. We had IT transformation people, focused on migration and cloud savings and getting your data off of being on-premise. And they would sit there and the aisles and you would just see them connecting and talking. And then a telco would come in to talk to them. And they'd pull in their new buddy, it was just a little club. And it's like a little army. I think that the sum of the parts can be greater than the whole. And I think that's what I'm creating. And it's awesome.

David Haselwood 00:10:12 So You basically reinforced the message, right? Everyone who showed up to the booth, I mean, it said CLOUD CITY right on the front. Right. So people know what they were getting into. And so once they cross that threshold, they knew everything in there was aligned with that. So by getting somebody in the door that would be a big win. There's nothing else in there, except things that are aligned with your message. I'm assuming that you were able to bring in all the big people from the tier ones, tier twos, tier threes. Did you feel like you got all the people that you wanted? You said you got a lot of leads. Did you get everyone through that you wanted to get through?

Danielle Royston 00:10:39 David, to describe this booth ... It was stunning. There's no one at MWC that didn't come through our doors. I like to make this comparison, which is, there's the Golden Nugget, you and I have been to Vegas two times. There's the Golden Nugget - it's very glitzy, very flashy, and the flashing lights brings people in - and that's a whole strategy in Vegas. It's just like, you know, come in, free buffet! And then there's Bellagio, which is like this understated elegance with this conservatory of peace. And right when you walk through our booth, there's real plants, there's this huge planter with real plants and real trees. There's this beautiful setting of Japanese silk that's flowing, that looks like a cloud, that has colors and a little bit of wind. And it's just this sense of calm and peace.

And then you look at the facade of the CLOUD CITY building, which has been shot a bajillion times. I mean, I saw people taking selfies, putting it on Instagram, putting it on Twitter. Every person that wanted to do an interview, wanted a shot of the facade. This is real glass. It was super hard to source. We had a ceiling in the building. Everyone was like, the quality of this booth has set a new standard. So, yeah, I got everyone in my booth. Like I want to go see with this is, it's like a whole new thing. So it was amazing. We got everyone we wanted in there. I was talking to a vendor who said we did in three days, from Monday through Wednesday, we did in three days what normally would take three years to do.

David Haselwood 00:12:10 As far as meetings go? In terms of getting the messaging out there.

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Danielle Royston 00:12:15 The leads, the meetings, the sales development of a lead. I mean, awesome.

David Haselwood 00:12:22 There's one final question, I think that everyone has on their mind. So you did this, you took you a hundred and five days. You pulled it off masterfully. You became the Queen bee, the fairy godmother if you will, of MWC. I think everyone wants to know is CLOUD CITY going to be making a comeback in February/March when MWC comes back around again? So you've got, you don't have a lot of time. Is CLOUD CITY going to get to make a comeback?

Danielle Royston 00:12:46 Yeah. You were sleeping when I delivered my keynote and there's this moment in my keynote where I call myself the Queen of the public cloud. Right. And I do this like great Queen sign. And it was like this crown that appears, I then put myself with a picture with the crown on top of a dragon. And then the dragon flies off the screen. Now, you gotta understand my keynote, it's like 72 feet by 20 high. You know I'm a super short person. Right? When I stand next to you, it's ridiculous. You're more than a foot taller than me, it's a joke. Is CLOUD CITY coming back and am I a one-hit wonder? With my podcast, my newsletter, and my blog, right? And oh, this random Totogi thing. Yeah. I'm the Elon Musk of telco. And I know how much you love that guy.

David Haselwood 00:13:38 The answer is clear. CLOUD CITY's coming back in February. That's when we're gonna see you next.

Danielle Royston 00:13:41 Right. And we're going to be stronger than ever. And you know what? We got to start planning tomorrow. I'm still in Barcelona. It's seven months away. We need to start planning. It's February 28th. And so - Hey, CLOUD CITY, army. You want in? Shoot me an email. You came to CLOUD CITY? Awesome. Tell me what worked, what didn't. Let's make it even better. We are amassing, the players, and we're going to go up against the big guys. Their time is over. They love the status quo. They love it the way it is. They're winning. They're fat. They're comfortable. They don't want to change. We want change. And so we've got to start pushing super hard. I would like to sleep for a week, but...

David Haselwood 00:14:21 I was going to ask, that was my final question. What are you going to do? When are you gonna to take some time off? Are you gonna go into like one of those decompression pods and float for a couple of days? What are you going to do? Are you going to go to Hawaii? What's your plan?

Danielle Royston 00:14:32 We've rounded out to the top of our conversation, with the passports, and just Americans who are just traveling like crazy. I want to go to Hawaii. My family wants to go to Hawaii. I mean, for the hundred days, my family was like, why do you have to work so hard? And I'm like, when you have an opportunity like this, sometimes you just got to do it. And it was a huge opportunity. And my team, the people that I work with, the vendors

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that we hired, killed themselves for this and for this moment, and everyone needs to sleep. Everyone needs to chill. 'Cause we've got to come back to work and work on 2022. It's in five minutes! Right? Your passport should be back from Ted Cruz.

David Haselwood 00:15:13 It should be back here. I'm like "Ted Cruz, if you're listening, please make sure it's ready." Well, DR I think I speak for your teams. I think I speak for your vendors. I think I speak for the people that collaborate with you. I also think I speak for your competitors as well. When I say absolutely phenomenal job, well done. And I think that nobody could believe what you pulled off. And so I hope you do get that rest, and you do get a chance to go to Hawaii because you deserve it. Because what you pulled off was absolutely incredible. Congratulations.

Danielle Royston 00:15:43 Stick around, because we're ending each podcast with a telco in 20 takeaway, I have 20 seconds to tell you something you need to know:

CLOUD CITY was a total success anyway you slice the data. People ask me all the time. What is the ROI on the event? The ROI is huge. And it was huge from the beginning. I think at the onset of taking over the Ericsson booth, maybe a few hundred people knew about TelcoDR and the public cloud. Now, the public cloud is part of the mainstream conversation in the telco industry while MWC had fewer attendees, about 20,000, according to the GSMA, the key people in the industry were there. And without their huge delegations and entourages with them, the CLOUD CITY Army had unfettered access to all of the senior leaders. With Ericsson, Amdocs, and Nokia missing the show, CLOUD CITY got all the meetings they wanted.

Everybody knows at MWC is the best way to build your sales pipeline. And 2021 was no different. We had 7,500 people through the booth. The demonstrations were constantly busy and Totogi alone is sorting through close to 500 leads. And deals got done in the booth too! One of our vendors closed an \$80 million software deal at the show. Wow. So anyone out there wondering, "Hey DR, was it worth it?" My answer is heck yeah, it was totally worth it. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. The CLOUD CITY Army is driving change in this industry that always talks about how slow they move. If you're a telco exec out there that's sick of the slow ass pace and want to revitalize their telco, shoot me a WhatsApp at (+1) 925-TelcoDR. Let's connect on LinkedIn and on Twitter @TelcoDR, and please sign up for awesome email newsletter on TelcoDR.com. Thanks again to my friend, David Haselwood for breaking it all down with me. Hasta luego, nerds!