

RYAN DEISS

Andy: How long into doing your business did it take you to realize that controlling traffic to your sites was going to be the biggest game changer and have the most impact?

Ryan: For me, when I got started, and this may be the same for you guys, there was free traffic, but it was difficult. Google was kind of new. We were joking about it earlier... I remember when getting ranked on AltaVista was a big deal. I kind of did it backwards. I actually got started with paid traffic; it was the first thing I ever did because it was one of the first ways to ever get traffic. I bought it and thank God some people clicked my link and bought my stuff.

I got lured into the siren song that was free traffic. So, for a few years, all my traffic was free. I thought, "This is it. I have reached the pinnacle of existence. I don't have to pay for traffic and money falls from the sky." Then it all went away. In about 2006, I was used to receiving really huge checks and not having to pay for traffic, and that it all went away; it went away literally overnight. That's not an exaggeration: it was here and then it was gone the very next day. So that day I said, "If I don't control my traffic source, then I'm dead...I'm not going to have a business." At that moment I didn't have a business. Well, I had products and ideas but I didn't have any customers coming in my door anymore. So we had to figure it out really quickly. So that's when it was; I remember it very distinctly. It was the summer of 2006 after getting my brains beat in. I said, "This is it, I have to be able to control my customer flow and my source of traffic or I'm not going to be around for very long."

Andy: So this was a necessity for you. Learning how to effectively buy traffic was a do or die situation.

Ryan: Yeah, because one day I was getting traffic and the next day I wasn't. So it was either learning how to get traffic or go get a job. That was the choice I was left with. I've been always okay with writing small checks to get bigger checks, which is how I got my start. I remember the first ad I ever bought was when I was in college and I used my dad's emergency credit card to buy a \$250 ad in a newsletter in somebody's eZine. And

people signed up. People clicked on it and signed up, and fortunately, off of that, I made \$300 and was able to pay off my dad's credit card. And that was the start of the business. So, it was going back to what I think I already knew and realizing if it's free, it's probably not going to be around that long. That's the one thing that I learned in business: if it's free, it's probably not going to be around very long.

Andy: Would you agree that you can't build something sustainable and reliable when you can't control it with money?

Ryan: Yes, I would absolutely agree that you can't build something sustainable and reliable if you can't control it. Markets are inherently efficient. If you aren't able to give some entity a fair amount of money in exchange for traffic, for eyeballs, for attention, whatever it is...and you're just generating it out of thin air, you've got to know that somebody is going to come along and figure out how to do what it is that you are doing. That's going to be the first time that it goes away: when somebody is able to come along, figure out what you are doing, and pour more resources into it and do it better than you. You have to hope that, whatever it is that you're doing, you have to be the best in world and stay the best at it.

But, worse than that, other people are going to figure out how to do it and other people are going to create software and bots and all this other stuff to do it and they're going to completely decimate it and whatever the source of that free traffic is that is currently not making any money off of it, they're going to figure out how to kill it and stop it because their business is dependent upon killing it and stopping it. There is not a single media source in the world, which, let's be honest, let's wrap all the traffic sources in the world, whether it's Google, Facebook, blogs, newsletters...they're all media. There is not a single media source in the world that can exist with giving their attention away for free.

Andy: Talk about some of the mistakes you made when you first started out and were buying your traffic...when you were finally in control and you got some products and you're trying some things out, tell us about those doozy bombs that you still remember.

Ryan: The first one was assuming just because something worked in one traffic source that it would work the same in a different one. This can be as simple as, "I bought an ad on this website. Is it going to work as well on another website?" Often times it doesn't.

The importance of being able to track your different traffic sources separately... Facebook is going to perform very differently if you're buying traffic from them versus Google, versus Twitter, versus if you're buying display advertising on a blog. They all perform a bit little differently and so you have to track them all differently.

They also don't last forever. Thinking, "This can't lose because this is working great." then dumping more money into it thinking it will last forever...no, you have to change it up and mix it up. This can be as simple as, on an ad, changing the background color that can be enough to reset a particular campaign. Sometimes the ad performs so well that everyone's seen it and everyone has clicked on it and you gotta move on and do something else and that's okay. I think scaling without realizing that every ad, just like everything in business, is going to have a life cycle was the biggest one, but not understanding the different values across different traffic sources and just throwing money...that's when I really got hurt.

Andy: So this is a little bit off the beaten path. How much of your business, how many resources of your business, or what percentage of your business, or even your mindshare, is spent on thinking about how to acquire traffic and advertising?

Ryan: For me personally, as the business owner, 90% of my time and my attention is spent on customer acquisition and paid traffic methods. We've got people on the team who are responsible for content and responsible for putting out free information and stuff like that, but even if I think about how I spend my time, and if I think about how my employees are broken down, it's almost exclusively paid traffic. Even things that a lot of people may look at and say, "That's free traffic" like SEO and content marketing, that's a joke. SEO is not free, not if you are doing it right. It's a joke. You're paying money for it. I've got people on are team, that are very well paid people, that are responsible for getting us the rankings that we get and guess what? They're not working for free. If you're going to hire an SEO agency, they're not going to do it for free. Whatever it is that you're out there doing, if you think you're going to acquire some traffic for free, you better forget about it. It just doesn't exist. There is no such thing a free traffic. Even when it's "free," it's not really free.

Andy: What do you think really helped dial in your traffic buying success? And what were some big changes that you finally got it and it started to work and consistently.

Ryan: The biggest change for us that really made it work we started buying traffic effectively was when we started to deploy low dollar offers, not just bringing them and trying to sell the most expensive thing we really wanted them to buy. We tried that in the beginning and, for some really target sources of traffic, it worked. But when we were going after people who had no idea who we were, and that's where the big gains and wins come from, that's where the big opportunities come from, that was the equivalent of going up to a girl at the bar and saying, "Hey, nice to meet you. Do you want to get married?" We had to realize that the biggest change we had to make was on the offer side. The tactical aspects of, "How do I go about setting up a campaign on Facebook or on Google or any of these other methods?" There are definitely things that you can learn there and definitely ways to do things that are better than other ways, but for us, it was on the offer creation side where all the breakthroughs came.

Andy: What do you think are the biggest tips for someone new to buying traffic?

Ryan: The biggest tip I could give to somebody brand new who just started buying traffic would be to go for buyers. When you're going out there buying media, drive them to a low dollar offer where someone will give you some money. That's the true test. Optins are great, but drive them to an offer where they are giving you some money. I don't care if it's \$1. We've got lots of offers where we're asking people for \$2.95. Then, we move them through a conversion funnel and they're giving us more. But that's where this works the best. It will hone in on your offer creation because you just won't be lazy and say, "Oh, I want to get an optin." It will force you to say, "What do these people really want?" People only really show you what they want in two ways: Their calendar and their wallet. So if you tell them, "I've got this thing. Do you want it?" And they get out their credit card and enter it into your website, that's how you know you're doing something. And that's when the whole economics of traffic generation and media buying changes.