

# The Startup Survival Podcast by Peter Harrington

## Series 2 Getting Better, Going Further

### Transcript: Episode 5 – Create, develop and manage a high performing website



March 2021

Speaker 1 ([00:11](#)):

Greetings and welcome back to the Startup Survival Podcast with me, Peter Harrington. This episode is all about building websites your visitors love to use. And my special guest, Chris Titley whose website is central to the success of his media business, has both inspirational startup web stats and top tips to share.

Speaker 1 ([00:35](#)):

Hopefully, you enjoyed episode four. Lisa Comfort's, raw roller coaster of a life meets business ride up to and through this pandemic. As part of that episode's feedback, my daughter, Megan suggested I listen to Elizabeth Day's podcast entitled 'How to Fail. So I did. How to Fail is a series of illuminating interviews where Elizabeth talks with fascinating people to highlight the value and lessons from failure. If you thought this series' previous podcast with Lisa Comfort was raw, Elizabeth's most recent interview with Emma Barnett is uncooked. Emma talks intimately about her life challenges and what failure has taught her. Like Lisa Comfort and Diana Kander, Emma shares her vulnerability with open bravery. Unlike arrogance and pomposity we are drawn quite naturally it seems to people who impart their authentic vulnerability and imperfections. For me, influential leaders have twigged that being open about failure is one of the keys to success. Definitely a subject to revisit and review in more detail in future.

Speaker 1 ([01:47](#)):

As you may well know by now, this second series is all about getting better and going further. I want you to develop critical business and entrepreneurship skills so that any venture with which you are involved has greater chance of surviving and preferably thriving. Having covered the subjects of knowing your entrepreneurial self, creativity and idea generation, as well as research that turns ideas into great products and services, we now turn to the practical task of creating websites that people love to visit and use. And to help me through this digital maze is an entrepreneur and journalist who set out on his own startup highway nine years ago. And within a decade, his website is boasting jaw dropping visitor's statistics. Before becoming his own boss, Chris Titley's early career involved typewriters and Bander printers. As a young journalist he trained as a reporter on the daily paper in Bath before moving to the Yorkshire Evening Press

where he rose to Features Editor. Following some freelancing with publications, including The Guardian and Times Educational Supplement, Chris took the plunge of utter uncertainty and co-founded York Mix Media, a digital content agency, specializing in words, pictures, and video. Thanks to the delights of the digital airwaves, Chris is here with me now. Chris, Titley welcome to the Startup Survival Podcast.

Speaker 2 ([03:15](#)):

Thanks very much, Peter. I'm very honored to be here because you have some really top guests. I feel very humbled to be in their company.

Speaker 1 ([03:22](#)):

Chris, who are way too modest. Now, your business, your website, it boasts amazing numbers. Can you share some headline figures?

Speaker 2 ([03:33](#)):

Well, we get a million hits per month at least now and we had at 1.4 million hits last month and 360,000 individual users a month. And that's come from starting with absolutely nothing.

Speaker 1 ([03:50](#)):

And you started your business nine years ago?

Speaker 2 ([03:53](#)):

That's right. Yes. Nine years ago in January.

Speaker 1 ([03:56](#)):

And can you share more about York Mix Media?

Speaker 2 ([04:00](#)):

Well, it's it's an editorial content digital media company. And the, the website we're talking about specifically is Yorkmix.com. And that's a news and entertainment website for the city of York in the UK. And it's very much focused on that city, although in the last couple of months we have widened out to North Yorkshire County. So it's really all about what's happening in and around York.

Speaker 1 ([04:28](#)):

From nothing you've become the go-to website for a whole city and the surrounding region?

Speaker 2 ([04:35](#)):

Yeah. Sometimes we have to sort of pinch ourselves about the sort of numbers of people we're getting. I mean, I'm from a print background and, you know, the newspapers we sold at the height of my sort of print days we would never come close to the sort of figures we're getting now. And obviously that's very much focused on York. But also there are people from all over the world who know about the city and want to know more or who are experts, who are reading it. And it's sometimes feels quite extraordinary that just a very small team can get so many people engaged. And coming back.

Speaker 1 ([05:09](#)):

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Before I ask you to share the formula for success, let's discuss your data in, in, in more detail. We both know to manage anything, you have to be able to measure it. So, so how do you go about getting your website's stats? And, and can you share any top tips?

Speaker 2 ([05:25](#)):

Well, we're very much wedded to Google analytics, which is the, the sort of go-to for the industry. Everyone's heard of Google analytics. It's not the most user friendly way to find out your figures, but it is the most accurate. It's the one that everyone understands. And when you're talking to say advertisers or anything like that, that's what they want to know is that if the Google analytics hits and it isn't an easy thing to get to grips with, but it's easy to set up. I mean, our websites, all our websites are based on Wordpress, which is an open source and very, very good content management system, which everybody from parts of the BBC to, you know, major motor manufacturers and all sorts of people use. Some of the Murdoch companies in Australia use WordPress. So that's a very good thing to start with.

Speaker 2 ([06:16](#)):

And you can easily add your Google analytics and measurement tools onto that. Your web designer adding it to the header of the site or by using a plugin, which will put it in there automatically. But the key thing with Google analytics is to keep going back and learning from it with regular consultations and drilling down into the different figures so that if you start looking for it carefully I would say the thing that you need to do is have a regular say monthly review, and then go through however many stories. It might be, I mean, with us, it might be our top 200 stories of the month. Because we, we were quite prolific posters on, on yorkmix.com, but it might be smaller for, for a different sort of website and then see which of the best performing ones compare them to the same time last year, to see how your audience is changing.

Speaker 2 ([07:09](#)):

Look into how they're coming to your website. Is it organic? Is it via the different social media platforms, which devices are they using that will give you a lot of clear indications of what sort of design you should be going for? About 75 to 80% of our traffic is mobile. So we made the switch and we've always, we were one of the first websites in this area to be fully responsive as in the same content resizing for every screen. But more recently in the last couple of years, we designed mobile first and then the desktop is a secondary consideration. So that all came from Google analytics. Timing is absolutely crucial what time of day, where where's your audience at what time of day on which days of the week. So the windows to the best performing posts are very clearly marked out there.

Speaker 2 ([08:07](#)):

And that too can be measured in patterns over time. And then you can learn from, because what you do find is sometimes you think this post is going to do brilliantly and it flops like mad. And it may just be because you've not quite worded the headline, right. Or you're not quite got the main image, right. And if you can see a similar post that did really well on a post that failed, you know, what to do, you just repeat the lessons of the, of the one that did so well. And then you start to build more and more successful posts. And that's all really via, via Google analytics. And on the detail you get.

Speaker 1 ([08:47](#)):

Learning clearly takes time, Chris, and clearly you have mastered a huge amount of understanding through the use of Google analytics. But many listeners may be at the start of their enterprise journey. What key principles and planning advice can you share for people who are new to this world?

Speaker 1 ([09:06](#)):

First and foremost is who is your audience and everything we've ever done has always been outward looking. We say this to interns who come and talk to us and they say, I want to write about this. And I say to them, I don't really care what you want to write about. I want you to write what our readers want to read about. So what is it your audience wants to know? And that is the, before you even start to think about how your website is going to look or any of the sort of technical details of it, just research the heck out of your audience, find out what they're looking for and not getting, and then give it to them.

Speaker 1 ([09:47](#)):

Can you give me an example of how you have applied this thinking at York Mix?

Speaker 2 ([09:52](#)):

We're always putting together guides for what's out there in York. And a very good example of this recently is when we came out of the last lockdown, there was the availability of food and drink outside that didn't exist on the web. So we made it exist. We put Rachel, our 'What's on' on editor on it. She spent at least a day researching every single place in the city that was providing food and drink outside. We put it together in a way that worked geographically. So these areas so the nearest places to you, you could find it very quickly. We put links through to any website or Facebook. And we had done it very carefully. So it would have been a headline written in such a way that people would find it when they were just Googling for it.

Speaker 2 ([10:45](#)):

And I think within a couple of days, we'd have 70,000 hits for that story. That took a lot of work. But that's because it was original content that people were looking for. Sometimes we have students in and they say. I asked them to do a guide and thing and they say, I can't find anything on the internet about it. And I say, I know that's what we're going to do. There's nothing on the internet about it. We're going to create that content that's not there. So for any business looking for a sort of digital platform, what are people looking for? What, when are they looking for it? The timing is very important. And giving the information to them in a way they'll understand and within a sort of conversational way that the web does so well and with good photography and multimedia content. If you do that, you will get an audience. And and you'll get a reputation for being a credible source, which will mean people come back to you.

Speaker 1 ([11:54](#)):

Chris Provides gems of wisdom and excellent advice, but you may be wondering how do you apply the principles Chris talks about to your own site? For example, how do you know where to start when writing a new website page? How do you know whether your words will resonate with the reader? How do you structure your text so people stay on your site and how do you convey information so people love to recommend and refer you? The good news is that I can share the secrets of answering all these questions. More importantly, I can give you the skills and confidence. so you will know what you should and should not be saying. To be straight with you the keys to writing a highly effective website are provided in Donald Miller's brilliant book called building a StoryBrand, whilst you should buy and read this masterpiece, I'll be sharing some of his straightforward and easy to digest advice in this podcast.

Speaker 1 ([12:49](#)):

And the first piece of advice is this: Many businesses go wrong because they position themselves as the heroes of the piece. Business owners, wrongly believe their product or service is saving the customer. But in reality, your customer needs to be positioned as your hero and whatever you supply is simply helping or rather guiding your customer to achieve what they need to do. And when you have a hero, you can also create a story. That's making it so much easier for customers to understand what you do and how they play their role. I did say in episode four, that this story theme would continue to reinforce the point about story and heroes. Donald Miller demonstrates how the age, old story structure of all good films can be adopted by businesses. This simple seven point framework, which I'll share in a moment allows you to recognize your own story and therefore understand how to share it effectively with your customers.

Speaker 1 ([13:53](#)):

So here is the seven point, simple story structure. A character, your customer has a problem, and they meet a guide, your business, who gives them a plan and calls them to action that ends in success, or helps them to avoid failure. Miller demonstrates early in his book that this seven point simple structure underpins so many great films, like Hunger Games, Star Wars, and all things, James Bond. I could go on, but best you get the book. The important learning point here is that when sharing your story, you must position your customer as the hero and your business as the guide that helps the hero. I could say more, but best get the book for now. You have the fundamental building blocks to communicate with your audience. I'll share more about Donald Miller's thinking later, but let's get back to Chris because there's a website, smoke and mirrors subject that I want him to guide us through. Namely search engine optimization or SEO for short, if you are not aware, SEO is the practice of increasing the quantity and quality of visitors to your website, through organic search engine results, the better your SEO, the more highly or website or page ranks and the easier it is for people to find your site. So, Chris, how important is SEO and what tips can you offer?

Speaker 2 ([15:31](#)):

SEO is the hardest thing to get your head around in terms of websites. I will be honest. I still haven't got my head fully around it. It changes regularly. It's very much in the hands of the people at Google and the algorithms they use. So one thing would always be to keep up on your reading with SEO. There's also a lot of people out there who will say, we can get you on the front page of Google. If you pay us a lot of money. They can't. They will never get you on the front page of Google. Google has umpteen billion pages, only the biggest paying most traffic websites will ever get anywhere near the front page of Google, unless it's a very, very niche search that we're looking for. So don't expect miracles. That'd be one thing I'd say,

Speaker 1 ([16:16](#)):

Are there work-arounds or shortcuts to high SEO rankings?

Speaker 3 ([16:21](#)):

First thing I'd say about SEO is don't worry too much about the science of it. What Google likes, most of all is content original content. Well-Written well presented original content updated regularly. Google will start to like you that is absolutely key learning. So it used to be that if you packed the back of your website with keywords that would get you to the ranking that's long, long gone now, because everyone's done it too much. And Google is just if you over pack with keywords, now Google will penalize you for it. So if you go into one of these websites that say it's all about fish fingers and say we're the fish fingers kings, fish fingers are our greatest thing. If you want about, know about fish fingers, where the, you know, you get that sort of thing, it doesn't work.

Speaker 2 ([17:16](#)):

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Don't do that. What you can do though, is you can use Google's own tools. So if you look for if you Google, Google keywords, there are tools on the web, which you'll let you look, which what, what, what precisely people are looking for when they're looking for your business. And a very good example from our point of view was one section of the site which is all about what's on in York. So it's events, you know, theatre, comedy, gigs. So we put together an events calendar. We wanted to let people know on any given day what they could go and see in any different category. And so we started building the, we started building the 'What's On Guide'. And so naturally enough, we did sort of 'What's on York', Your What's on, those are the sorts of words we're using.

Speaker 2 ([18:09](#)):

And we carried that on for quite a while. And we weren't getting very far with it. And then we did our research using the Google keyword research tool and found people don't search for what's on York, or your what's on. They search for things to do in York. So after that, we changed completely. And we called a section of the website, 'Things to do in York'. And then just the regular posts we used to do. We'd call them six things to do in York this weekend. So it's still a very conversational thing, but it's what people are looking for.

Speaker 1 ([18:47](#)):

So the way you label your page or site, isn't how people search.

Speaker 3 ([18:52](#)):

Yes. So you often think, Oh, these are thoughts. I mean, you'll see it quite often on our, on on newsroom websites. And you'll suddenly see a sitting on the Telegraph or the Independent, and it'll say, well, when is the Manchester United game on tonight? They won't say Manchester United plays so-and-so because the reason they're doing that is because that is what people will type into their search engine. When is the Man United, and then and so it's changed the whole way you present information. So always you've got to be looking for what are people actually searching for? If you look for the the Google keyword tool, there are other websites out there that will help you with this as well. It'll give you a very good insight into what people are searching for. And also, if you look at going back to Google analytics, there are, there are sections of the website there, which will show you the most searched terms that have brought them to your website.

Speaker 1 ([19:52](#)):

Chris's advice reflects what he said earlier and reinforces the messages from Alastair Fee, Diana Kander and Lisa Comfort in previous episodes. Look at your business through the eyes of your customer. And when you do this, you become better equipped to share a meaningful story and become the guy that knows how to bring people into your business. But attracting people to your website is one thing, keeping them and providing content so they want to tell others, and return is quite another. Episode three in series, one, focused on the issue of building trust. And this is a key subject. I wanted to quiz Chris about. How has he managed to build levels of trust that meant hundreds of thousands of people were visiting his website each month?

Speaker 2 ([20:41](#)):

I think really just by, well, first of all, just by keeping going and we were quite early on in our journey. We came across a theory, which we've we've loved, right? Since we came across it called the Helsinki bus station theory. And I don't know if you you've mentioned this before, but it's, it's one, that's absolutely key

to us. So apparently anyway, according to the theory, I don't know, I've never been to Helsinki. There's a sort of orbital bus station, a circular bus station where they go out like spokes on a wheel. They go out on the different roads to their different destinations. And so you'd get on your bus and say, you're, you decided you wanted to be a, a great photographer. So you get on the bus destined for photography and you get along. And then you realize that on the road ahead of you, there are people selling far more photographs than you far more social media followers.

Speaker 2 ([21:35](#)):

You've got all the, all the gigs going and you think, Oh, no, I never, I'm not going to make it as a photographer. So you take the bus back to the bus station. Think I'll tell you what, I'll be a graphic designer. I would call it like the sort of skills. So you get on the bus to graphic design, and then you look at it and you say, say ahead of you, there's people graphic design awards. And there are people with the huge accounts, the graphic design, and you're not really getting very far and say, Oh no, this isn't working. I'll go back to the station and basically to sum it all up - stay on the effing bus. Yeah. So when we decided, we looked out that we, we felt that we felt that there wasn't even though income from the, the main newspaper in New York, it's been cut back and, and it's, it's run by an international conglomerate in the United States, which doesn't really care for your people.

Speaker 2 ([22:27](#)):

We felt that wasn't a media in the city that was catering for those people. We started out, we kept doing this content. We got very little back because no one knew we were here, you know? But gradually and slowly, people did start to know we're here. We learned what we were doing wrong. As we went, we analyzed which pieces didn't work at, which did work. We made big mistakes when we started, because we try to basically try to put a print newspaper on the web. And of course that doesn't work. But then what you do is you look at the really successful web media groups, the digital first ones like buzzfeed, you know, the ones who actually haven't, hadn't been used to the print background. So then what we did was he took credibility from the print background, which is all about storytelling.

Speaker 2 ([23:18](#)):

Well accuracy, legally safe reporting fair reporting, all that site side of things from the classical journalism side, then we allied it to this new multimedia web side of things started to learn about, about SEO, started to get some feedback worked on the feedback, but we stayed on the bus and we learned as we went and eventually we started overtaking other people and we got to the stage we are now. So I think there will be times when you are so absolutely fed up to the back teeth of it. It's exhausting, it's relentless to do it well, you need to keep it up every day, if possible. But there are other rewards and they're all, all the time. Now we've got this big audience. We've got a business model it's starting to pay off. And so I suppose that it would be our fundamental learning. Stay on the bus,

Speaker 1 ([24:24](#)):

Stay on the bus. Indeed. That's a great story, Chris. I couldn't agree with you more consistency, hard work, customer focus, competitor analysis. And of course always learning these fundamental principles, hold again and again. But there's another principle I want your opinion on Chris. I cringe at the number of times over the last 30 years, I've had my backside kick because I've got this wrong. Chris, when building websites, why is it so important to keep things simple?

Speaker 2 ([24:57](#)):

Well, this is a lesson we've learned the hard way. I think, I think a lot of passionate entrepreneurs about whatever area they're interested in are slightly on the control freak side of things. I know that's, that's certainly the case with myself on the Mix team. And you can get to the point where you're trying to, that's not quite the perfect sentence. That's not quite the, the pixels aren't quite in the right place that don't line up. Maybe we should change the font. We could, that would look, the point is good quality content that tells the story in a way that ordinary people can understand, gives them information that they need is the most important thing. And getting that style out regularly and credibly is the most important thing. So in a sense the design is important.

Speaker 2 ([25:55](#)):

Of course it is the, the load speed and things like that. Yes, they are definitely important. But the simple truth is if you're answering the questions that people want answered, if you're giving them information that they can't get anywhere else, if you are offering them something that will either entertain them or inform them and you're doing so in an engaging way, but as the most important thing, and another lesson, I suppose we've had, which feeds into this same area is fail quickly. We failed very slowly, often at the start. We'd keep watching. I was, Oh, this doesn't seem to be working. Maybe if you just, just adjust it a little bit and try again. Now, maybe if you throw more resources, that's easy to look. No didn't work. Maybe if we give it another month, another six weeks, maybe if we bring in another person and pay them to do no, it didn't work.

Speaker 2 ([26:51](#)):

And when you realize actually we've wasted half a year, when we could have made that lesson could have understood that lesson and moved on in two weeks. I mean, it's not always the case, but if, if you suddenly realize you're banging your head against a brick wall, the point is move away from the brick wall. And the quicker you do that, the more time you can do something constructive with your time. So yes, simplicity, and actually the web is all about simplicity. It's about finding stuff quickly, delivering it quickly. People are very, very quick to move on if they don't get what they want. But they're also quite loyal if you do give them what they want.

Speaker 1 ([27:31](#)):

So what common website mistakes do people make, especially those who may be new to business.

Speaker 2 ([27:38](#)):

People go wrong in several ways when they come to web design and web building. And to be honest, we've gone wrong in several ways. And that's how we've got to the stage where we're going, right I suppose? I've already referred to the fact that you can be too controlling of the website. You can spend too much time doing stuff that isn't really important, but they're also basic sort of principles, which are, you must have a website that is easy to access on every, every sort of device you go for. So it's got to load quickly. It's got to be attractive and it's got to have the navigation or get users to the bit they want to get to, as soon as they can. I remember once talking to a local counsellor about their website. And he was very proudly saying that when people came onto the local council website, they would click through seven or eight pages.

Speaker 2 ([28:44](#)):

And they said, he thought that meant the website was brilliant because people were so excited about being on the council website. They wanted to read more. Now unless there was some sort of weird local government nerd, that is not why you go to a council website. You go to a council website because you



want to know what day does my bin get collected? And if you're clicking six or seven times to get to that page, you are having a bad experience of that website. So obviously people get very worried and hung up about the bounce rate. And the bounce rate is a term for people coming onto your website and then going straight off it again. Don't get too hung up on things like that straight away. The key thing is to get people in there. And I wouldn't worry too much about the bounce rate straight away, because it's maybe unlikely that you have a lot of content that they'd want to then get click through to I'd look more about the dwell time.

Speaker 2 ([29:36](#)):

So if they've bounced onto your website and gone again, after three seconds, you failed. But if they've gone there for even like 30 seconds, 45 seconds is good for, for a web web page. If they're there for a minute and a half, you are a winner. They have stayed there, basically read your content. So don't worry. Don't get too keyed up about giving them too much, give them what they want straight away. Then they'll start to bookmark you. Then the way algorithms will work is that Google will say, Oh, we know you like this guy's content. So we'll put that up higher up in your feed when you're searching for something. So in terms of simplicity, keep the design simple, keep the navigation simple. And then when they get there, give them enough to keep them dwelling that on the website for, for a good long time.

Speaker 1 ([30:31](#)):

Whilst you reflect on what Chris has just said, let me get back to Donald Miller's StoryBrand book for a moment. If you turn to page five, you'll see the sub-headline. Why so many businesses fail. I'm paraphrasing here, but pages five to 12 reveal two key mistakes many businesses make with their marketing collateral. And I very much include websites here when I say marketing collateral. Firstly, way too many businesses throw shed loads of information at customers in the hope that some of it will stick Miller calls, this kind of information 'noise', and in a world where people are increasingly impatient noise gets in the way of what your heroes need to find to survive or succeed. Impatient heroes, unable to find what they want from you, go elsewhere for a guide. And secondly, when information is structured in such a way that our heroes brains have to burn too many calories to understand what they are reading, they switch off and go elsewhere.

Speaker 1 ([31:29](#)):

So to keep people on our websites, we need to share simple information with them that flows into their minds easily. And the way to do this is to storify the message. Quoting directly from page nine of the book. Miller says, imagine every time we talk about our products to potential customers, they have to start running on a treadmill. How long do you think they're going to pay attention? Not long. When we start our elevator pitch or keynote address, or when somebody visits our website, they're burning calories to process the information we're sharing. And if we don't say something and say something quickly, they can use to survive or thrive, they will tune out. Whilst I was fairly certain as to what Chris would say. I also wanted to get his take on the issue of noise and how and why simple structures always win out.

Speaker 2 ([32:29](#)):

Yeah. Noise is a very very common mistake. You're trying to throw everything out to it. And you see home pages or websites and you're thinking, what is this website actually about? I've been on that case obviously as a journalist, I'm often going to websites of all sorts of different companies and organizations trying to basically trying to give some information about them on my website, which would be a very good thing for a lot of people. But if I'm really struggling to find how do I describe what you do, if that is not very, very clear on the front page. And then if I go into your 'About' section and your about section is, is some sort of I

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don't know, literary treatise on your life so far or something like that, but doesn't actually say we do this, this is how we do it, this is the team, people will not like your, what you're doing. Web navigation is boringly templated. And when you start, you want to play and mess around with things and stuff, or should we animate this until we do? No. You want the key things you want on the homepage on the about page or the people page. You want the blog on news page. You want sections of the website, which tell you very specifically about a service or a thing that you do. You want if you've got galleries of photographs or videos, get people to those very quickly as well. So don't get too hung up on I don't know, sort of esoteric mood atmosphere weird soundtracks, things like that.

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Speaker 2 ([34:17](#)):

Don't do things that really annoy everybody, which is putting on too many pop-ups. So as soon as you get that, you can't see anything or load your website in such a way that you land on it start reading the first sentence and then it, it jerks upwards and you, you lose your place. Look at it. Look at other websites that you hate. That's something we did a really good way of designing a good website is to start with the websites that really drive you mad and do exactly the opposite. And that may be from a content or a, a rival in your sphere point of view, or it might just be just from the user experience. So if you go to a website and you think this is, there were one or two websites that we look at and we call them digital migraines, because there's so much going on there's adverts and there's self playing video.

Speaker 2 ([35:05](#)):

And then there's some sort of soundtrack here, that awful thing where you're on the web and suddenly some audio comes on and you don't know where it's come from. And some sodding website is suddenly started a video, which you didn't want, all that sort of thing. People hate. And actually, if people hate that sort of stuff, funnily enough, it will hit your ranking because Google is clever enough to pick up the fact that people are not staying on your website. It's not loading properly. It's doing all of the worst possible things that our clickbait website does. So yeah, I mean, learn from the best and learn from the worst,

Speaker 1 ([35:41](#)):

Chris, this is all brilliant. Now this episode would not be complete if we didn't talk about the importance of social media and how active social media supports website ranking and visibility. To what extent does active use of social media help your online presence?

Speaker 2 ([36:01](#)):

Social media is critical in building and sustaining an audience online. I'm afraid there's no real way of getting around that unless you're the BBC or something of that sort of stature. But the good thing about that is everyone can master social media to an extent that it'll make a big difference. For the first thing I think about when you're coming to social media, to driving traffic, which is what, the way we approach social media is to understand where again, where your audience is, which social media do they use or we made the mistake quite early on, I was always a big, big Twitter fan. I quite an early Twitter adopter. I love Twitter. So we, we concentrated early on, on, on doing lots of tweets about stuff I wasn't much of a Facebook user. But, actually for the audience we wanted and the sort of way our content could be shared around, Facebook was the ultimate tool for us. And like I made that mistake and it cost us in our early years. Now, Facebook is our number one social media in terms of sharing the information we do online.

Speaker 1 ([37:19](#)):

So the message is to know your audience and know their social media channel preferences?

Speaker 3 ([37:25](#)):

Yes, exactly that. And I think for a lot of e-commerce sites, Instagram is very key now. And it's also got a younger demographics. So if that's the age group you're going for Facebook is very, very good for mainstream stuff. Like the stuff that we do. It's an older demographic. Yes. But it also, the other, the other way of looking at it is to use what's out there. So there is a Facebook group for every single area of the country for every single niche. And so use those groups get into those groups, don't be a, a spammer. So if you get into a group, a Facebook group where you think your information might be useful, don't just go in

there and say, look at my website, it's got this, engage with people on that Facebook group. Build trust, and that sort of thing.

Speaker 2 ([38:19](#)):

The other thing you can do which we've done quite successfully on is to create your own Facebook group. So we have a things to do in York Facebook group, which has grown to about thousands of people now, and we let anybody posts anything about the things have in York. We keep, we moderate it very carefully. So we'd get rid of the spam that does come onto the site. But every so often we will put something on our, from our side, but it'd be about things to do in York. So it fit the group. But the, but because we're the administrators, our posts get a lot more visibility than other posts. But at the same time we learn what's going on in the city from what other people are posting on things to do, and we get stories and content from it that way. So, so there are different ways you can use social media. You don't have to just be out there saying, here's my link, here's my link. Here's my product.

Speaker 1 ([39:11](#)):

And finally, Chris, let's move on to the subject of sustainability. Once a website has been created and has developed a following, how do you ensure visitors keep coming back?

Speaker 2 ([39:22](#)):

I think to sustain a successful website takes a lot of time and to the point where you, if you're not careful, you can get exhausted by it. And the way around that is with a small business like ours, and with limited resources is to form partnerships. That would be, I think, the really key thing. So obviously the, a lot of the core elements of that website and the posts and the articles you put up there will be from yourselves. But there are other people who would benefit from being on your website. And you would benefit from them writing or providing content for your website. So start forming partnerships in your sector, in your area. And then the wonderful thing is if you, if you give them some content from their website, or if you have an audience they want to get to, and you give them a back link, a lot of people will provide good, usable, interesting content that you can have for free.

Speaker 2 ([40:22](#)):

So I think that's, that's really key. I think a lot of it's also about teamwork, and I'll tell you, one thing that we've learned very clearly as well is you can only do so much. So you can get into the pattern where you think, Oh, I missed that. I should have an opportunity. It's gone, that's it. If you missed an opportunity, it's gone, there'll be another one coming along. Don't feel that you have to be doing it 24 seven, because actually what you'll find, I think certainly what we find is a smaller amount of better content always does better than a larger amount of slightly poorer content. And there are different sorts of content that will work as well. There'll be stuff that will work instantly that'll work for today and this week. And we'll get you a good boost of hits and interest and all the SEO benefits you get from that.

Speaker 3 ([41:20](#)):

But also think about your longer tail, your longer term. I mean, we talked earlier about the guides we do to York. So I would expect a good guide to something in York. We just don't want on pizzas, the best pizzas. We went out to our Facebook and our users in York. What are the best pizzas in your, based on that information put together a great guide from every source, from vegan pizzas, to, you know, the mud pieces to wood, fire pit, you know, everything you could want in a sort of 20 point post, but that will now sit on the site quite happily now for a year, if anybody closes that pizza thing down, we can take that off. But so

pizza, the Best, the guide to where to get your best pizzas in York, 2021. And then we'll look in 2022 to renew that post and that old stay for a year and they'll bring in hits for another year.

Speaker 2 ([42:08](#)):

And then you build up, you could do one of those every week, every month, and you've got the whole of your covered. And so every time anyone is looking for anything, they, they, they find York Mix and assertion, and anyone can do that as well. So you can think about content that all they'll keep performing for months on end. And then you can think about stuff that will work very well on the instant. Get a good team around you who have different qualities and, and have different levels of expertise. We have with someone, someone in a business is a very good photographer, very good at that sort of thing. I've learned to do a lot with video now. But also we have some younger members of the team who know what the younger audience want. And then as I say, work with other partners So the small businesses other organizations, and suddenly you've built up an, a network, which is stronger than just yourselves on your own.

Speaker 1 ([43:01](#)):

Chris, I completely endorse and understand your point about partnerships over the years, and from a distance I've witnessed, how you have not only persuaded a community to visit and use your website in huge numbers, but you've also generated a colossal community of loyal volunteer journalists who report on and share a vast range of subjects. How have you done this?

Speaker 2 ([43:26](#)):

We know the, the audience quite well. We live, we are, we are kind of our, our own readers. You, we all live in York, we all have families in York. We have children at schools in York. We use the shops, we use the transport, we have the same frustrations of our readers. So I think that comes through as a sort of, there's an authenticity about our voice and a genuine local feel to what we do. So people trust us from that point of view. They always used to say that, you know, journalism and journalists would, were trusted about as much as the estate agents and we're the least trusted people in the community almost. But actually, if you, again, if you drill down in the sort of good old days of, of local print journalism, local journalists always, actually quite highly trusted and valued.

Speaker 2 ([44:16](#)):

And so the fact that we had come from that sort of background and have that authenticity, I think is key. And then we don't play fast and loose. We ask people, would you do this for us? Can we use as a great photograph? Can we use it if we credit you and link back to your own social media. Can we stop and actually talk to you about what you've seen and what you've done and what you've achieved? So it's that two way conversation having a bit of time being just basics, like having good manners and being polite and then actually presenting it in such a way that they're dead chuffed and they want to share it with all their friends. And so it's a real win-win cause they they're really happy with it. They feel they've got a glow of, of seeing some, something that they've done going out on a, on a reputable news website, but also we get the good feedback from this being shared all throughout their networks and wider and beyond.

Speaker 2 ([45:13](#)):

And I think that sense of that sense of trust and listening and correcting your mistakes. That's another thing we do as soon as we do, sometimes we've made mistakes and I will say, I am really, sorry. This is a mistake. And you will get hammered on social media, but actually once you do that and say, I'm really sorry, that

was a mistake. I was, I didn't think it through, I've changed it. We've taken the post down. We've altered the headline. I'm really sorry if it's caused you any upset. Is there anything more we can do. Because you don't get that a lot on online. People don't say, Oh, I, I really I've really done something wrong here. I'm sorry. Very often. I don't want to do it cause I want to get everything right. But you're bound to get stuff wrong in this sort of situation and to get it, to admit to it and correct it and say, sorry, you can actually turn your most vociferously angry critic into a loyal friend who will tell their friends about you because of the way. And, and actually, I suppose that's a lesson for any business, isn't it? That sort of you can turn a negative into a positive if you, if you do the right thing.

Speaker 1 (46:24):

Well, Chris, it's clear to me, this interview has been the right thing to do, and it has been a pleasure being able to listen to you as well as recognize and share your achievements. Thank you, Chris. May your pioneering work continue.

Speaker 2 (46:41):

Thank you, Peter. I've really enjoyed it. I love listening to the podcast. We've learned a lot from that. I hope at least one or two of my rambling reminiscences will have helped one or two people

Speaker 1 (46:57):

Humble to the last,

Speaker 1 (46:58):

If you are designing or now plan to redesign your website. I really hope Chris Tittle is experienced advice, tips and takeaways prove their worth. And I can't stress the value of the StoryBrand book principles enough. Loyal listeners will know this is the point where I recommend a read and the easy get-out here would be to recommend the StoryBrand book. But you know, I don't like lazy. Anyhow, there is another treasure I must share. A few weeks ago a 55th candle appeared on my birthday cake and with it, a gift from my daughter, Megan, who I mentioned at the start of this show. To my delight, Meg bought me a copy of 'Dishoom from Bombay with love'. This beautifully presented hardback shares the entrepreneurial story of the start and growth of an exquisite Indian restaurant. And as a wonderful bonus, the book also includes all recipes from their kitchen with origins in Mumbai. Dishoom's entrepreneurial story is an inspirational delight and door into a completely new world. And their cuisine is to die for. I've already made 10 dishes, including the mouthwatering Chicken Ruby page 209. And when Meg is home, we will doubtless spend hours cooking in the kitchen together. And you never know. So popular has Dishoom become, we may meet one another in one of their now famous restaurant queues when lockdown ends.

Speaker 2 (48:32):

Well that's just about enough spice for one episode. But before we close, let's hear it for my fabulous guest. Chris Tittle. Chris thank you so much for your clarity of message, as well as all tips and sound advice. And I must recognize my producer Duncan Bennetts, researcher, Chris Jackson, and the music sponsors Seajam Moths. Thank you is not enough. And by way of gratitude, thank you once again to LSC Generate within the London School of Economics, as well as the SimVenture team who allow me time out to do this. In the next episode, which will be published on Thursday, the 25th of March, I'll be exploring the subject of finding and working with investors. Olga, my special guest is both an experienced investor and entrepreneur. Meanwhile, your podcast feedback is not just welcomed. It's needed, share what you really like and let me know the truth about what needs to be improved. And of course, whatever you're listening channel of

preference, don't forget to rate, review and subscribe. Until next time. My name's Peter Harrington and this has been your Startup Survival Podcast.

Speaker 1 ([49:46](#)):

Go well, stay safe. And thank you.

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