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EPISODE
12

Brian Kurtz

Show Notes at: <http://www.aesnation.com/12>



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Best of success,



John Bowen
Co-founder, AES Nation

John Bowen: As entrepreneurs, I got to ask a very serious question. Have you ever been frustrated with your marketing? Have you been frustrated even more when you hired an agency that was going to help you get this endless stream of clients and customers coming to you? This is one of the biggest challenges in the world for most people and unfortunately, we tend to go to school too many of us too quickly. And I have a guest today that is going to change your whole mindset. More importantly, he's going to share with you the secrets that he's learned as the Number One direct response marketer in the world, Brian Kurtz. Stay tuned! You do not want to miss this.

Brian, thank you for joining us for the magic of Skype. I really appreciate it. You have been one of my secret weapons. I don't know if you know this but you've been a tremendous mentor. I'm one of those guys learning, kind of moving from the old school to the new school, leveraging direct response and it's been a wow for me. So thank you for joining us.

Brian Kurtz: Oh well thank you and actually you telling me that I'm a mentor to you is quite an honor. So thank you John.

John: Well we've had a lot of fun together. Well we met at Joe Polish's Mastermind Group and we got a whole bunch of mutual friends. It's just been great and Brian has so much knowledge I wanted to share with the audience whether you're on the video podcast or you're on the audio podcast what Brian's been doing... a little bit of how you build up all this expertise but then more importantly how your fellow entrepreneurs can go out and execute. So Brian, share with us a little bit about how did you get this messy office that you're in? I mean will all that stuff all over the voice?

Brian: Yeah. It's a little messy but I know where everything is I guarantee you. But I see myself as what I call a serial direct marketer. And maybe there are people even in this call, maybe they don't know the difference between marketing and direct marketing, where advertising and marketing and direct marketing. But I got here because I think I'm needy person, I think this is how I got here. And I say that in a really positive way. What I mean by that is that as I started realizing when I got into business and I got into the marketing field, I realized that I was very needy as far as knowing how I was doing. I didn't want to sit there and throw out an ad whether it's on TV or in the mail or on radio or whatever it might be and not get a result that I could measure. And that's what direct marketing is.

So you know the definition of direct marketing being measurable and accountable advertising I think ties in to my neediness to get feedback on everything I'm doing and to know that all the effort that I put in to the marketing that I do and all the things that I've learned and how I applied them in terms of selling products and services over my whole career. It's really

important to have those metrics that tell you exactly how you did, what you spent, and how much you made based on what you spend. And to pay really close attention to all of that.

So as a marketer, that was my whole life. When I look at entrepreneurs who have businesses who may be outsourcing some of their marketing efforts where they're not paying a lot of attention to it, it seems to me that the demand that everybody should be on accountable advertising, I use the word accountable advertising, or measurable advertising, is a universal for me. So that's how I kind of got here after 33 years of doing this but it's really about selling stuff.

John: Brian, let me jump in because I think this is so important because I grew up in the financial services side and it's a huge business and when I look back, particularly what I've learned over the last 5,6 years from yourself and other peers, it's just been amazing because so much of marketing, like you lick your finger, put it up and test the wind. And the margins were so high in the financial services industry that we could get away with that. And then I look at the margins, lifetime value of clients is oftentimes \$100,000 where... and you're selling books.

Brian: Right. \$39-books, \$39-books.

John: Yeah and this for all of us as entrepreneurs, I think this is so important and this is why I wanted to have Brian on with us is that, sometimes we get lazy we're doing million dollar engagements, we're doing widgets, whatever you're doing, the ability... and this is the point that I really want to zero in on is the ability to get feedback from the market place. We all know the value of that but all of a sudden now with today's technology in the knowledge that the direct response people have put together, I mean it's amazing Brian. Help us understand because there are very few... you guys have Boardroom, you've built up a huge business on probably one of the hardest areas in the world, selling books and newsletters. And in a very scientific approach.

Brian: Yeah, I mean it happened because we came out of direct mail business and I wrote an article recently that said how paying postage made me a better marketer and the concept behind that is that the thought and care that had to go in to every message that I send out in order to get an appropriate return on my advertising investment, that the creative had to be right. We had to have the right copywriters. We had to mail to the right list. We had to make sure that we got the best cost on our printing. And if you have all of those cost and making sure that you're going to not just cover your cost, but make a profit, you better think that through carefully because the cost is way too high.

And what's interesting, and you mentioned before about this whole lifetime value calculation. Just because you have a product or service that's very high-priced, it's actually more of a

reason to spend more money as opposed to "Well, this is so easy I only need a couple of sales or a couple of clients so therefore I don't have to think that much about my marketing." But imagine if you did. And the quality of the clients that you could get.

One other point as I talk about email. I think this Internet thing is going to catch on by the way. So you've heard it here first. And I've done offline, I've done online marketing. And the thing about email which I think is a great illustrative point of what you were saying before. Just because email is cheap to send out? Doesn't mean that you shouldn't put the same care and concern into all of your marketing efforts on email as you would in direct mail.

And that's why my email correspondence today in marketing is so much better than the average bear because I think about it in the same way that I thought about it when I had to spend a lot more money in direct mail. I say, direct mail would cost on the average of \$500-\$600 per thousand pieces' mail, whereas email cost you about a dollar for a thousand. Maybe less. So I always say, a dollar for a thousand marketing deserves \$500 per thousand thinking. And so that concept of thinking through everything that you do, it's your brand. It's your product. It's your... in a lot of the cases with your clients, I know it's their personal brand. It's like their whole personality is based on what they're selling and what they're doing. Why wouldn't you want those messages and why don't you want everything that you do to be so pristine and perfect and consistent with the brand and at the same time, make sure that what you're doing is effective.

And therefore, you can measure it and make sure that everything you do can pay out. And in direct marketing, whether it's online or offline, everything is measurable. Everything you do will get the measurement.

I think there's a lot of things that I just threw out there but I think there's a major concept there, is the care and concern that you want to take with your marketing. And anybody who shuffles off the marketing for someone else because as an entrepreneur, you might not be as interested in that or I think you opened this with something about, you know if you've ever been [distorted] agency, the agency thing.

John: Yeah well that's why I wanted to have you talk about just for a second Brian is that, I've been guilty of this. We get a great client experience. We're delivering a lot of value. We prove our concept there. We kind of nailed it, now we're going to scale it type thing. And see you hire an agency, and they're going to do PR. They're going to do print ads. They're going to do TV, radio...

Brian: I'm getting hives as you're talking right now.

John: And then they're doing maybe some direct marketing. But they do very little of that I found out and I now know why but tell as the contrast. Because as entrepreneurs, one of the things we really should be good at is delegating this stuff. And we got to realize our vision. We got to get a team together. How do we make that happen?

Brian: Yeah, I mean you got to ask a lot of questions. And you got to be involved. I will tell you this though. I don't want this to be like a bash of advertising agencies. That's not my purpose you know.

And there are some good ones and there are some direct response agencies. But let me give you...this would be an illustrative point. I work with the best copywriters in the world. I'm not bragging. I just happen to work with the best copywriters in the world and you could imagine selling \$39-product through direct mail, I better have good copywriters or I'm not going to sell anything. So I need the best copywriters. I would never go to a copywriter who works at an agency. Why is that? Because if they're the nest copywriter, I know for a fact that any copywriter who's on straight salary? Is not the best copywriter? Because the best copywriter is going to get a piece of the action on the quality of what they sell through their copy.

So I think that's the one of the illustrative points to show you why one-stop shopping as I call it is so dangerous. I like price fixed dinners too right I mean they're simple. They're easier to eat. The chef takes care of it for you. I go the other way in marketing. Marketing is an a la carte business. You know, you want the expert in copy. Then you want the expert in media. Then you want the expert in production. And yes you do need to assemble the team as an entrepreneur. I know it's hard because you don't want to get into those granular details sometimes.

Although I know some of the entrepreneurs who actually love the marketing side. You're one of them. And you dig in right. I'm not saying everyone has to dig in to that degree. But I think that it's really important to understand that it's not as simple as hiring one place to do all of your advertising. And all of those media that you talked about, whether it's direct mail, online, TV, radio, any one of those with the right expert and asking the right questions about measurability and return on return on investment of the media, everything can be a direct marketing medium. But if you allow your agency or someone to take you down the road, I mean I get hives when you say things like PR, image advertising, public relations, as a serial direct marketer, I literally get hives. I mean I started like itching when you started saying that.

John: I actually had a negative reaction even saying it too. Because I've hired all those here.

Brian: They're not bad things. I mean they have their purpose. McDonald's needs that. But I think that there are things that you can still do direct marketing within that. There's something that I call Direct Response Public Relations. So it sounds like a misnomer. But what that would

mean would be, let's say you have a company, that you have a spokesperson for your company that gets on *Good Morning America* for an interview. And during the interview, that's public relations right? That's brand over you. Now, whoever, on *Today's* show, Matt Lauer's interviewing your CEO on whatever you're doing. At the end of that interview, make sure that there's an opportunity to connect with that audience in a way that you can follow up them. That's direct marketing. Now you've just taken public relations, an interview, in media, and say "You know what, at the end of this interview, Matt's going to tell you about a free downloadable report (I'm making this up) that you can get. All you have to do is send your email address to whatever." And sometimes the shows will let you do that but I'm giving you an example of how you're going to apply direct marketing to a medium that had no response mechanism and you have to figure out how to get those responses back. I don't want to get too granular here.

John: Well I want to just play on this because you and I have friends who have gotten on Oprah and they were high five-ing and it's fantastic. But then they had no call to action. They didn't use any direct response and it was a disaster. We all have bestselling author friends who have made no money. By creating this kind of direct response client path, no matter what your product or solution is, it's huge.

Life intrudes. None of us get out unscarred. And you've had such a great career. What have been some of the hard lessons learned? What was a down period for you and your team?

Brian: You know it's interesting I think sometimes, for me personally, my biggest success then led to some of my biggest failures. And it's not because I was getting beers crawling as they call it in college. I was getting like a little overconfident. But we were in the infomercial business for about four years where we did about \$300 million and we were able to bring together TV and all this different media. And I confused success with that it will be easy next time. And I think that as entrepreneurs, your audience needs to understand that you need to look ahead but you just can't repeat the success by just imitating it over and over again.

Now this was an extreme example because direct response television, the infomercial business is a really tough business. People say that 2 out of 20 infomercials actually work. We got four out of our first five to work, which was actually a curse. Yes, we made \$300 million right? But after those five, I started thinking I could do infomercials of all kinds and all ways and I got really, really sloppy. So again, that's one. Getting a little bit too big for your britches and not thinking through the same way that you got to the first one that the 8th one's got to be filled up through the same way.

John: Why don't you share with our audience, what you're really working on now and why it's important to them?

Brian: Yeah, I've been doing this for 33 years. I know I look a lot younger than that. Hopefully that the screen has stayed a little fuzzy so that people will really think I'm really...

John: We have a nice soft focus Skype...

Brian: Yeah it's a nice soft focus, it says Oh he can't be that old. So I am a serial direct marketer. My work is my play. So everything I do I think in terms of not just making money but making a difference. And so my whole life has been all about contribution and connection. I hate the word networking by the way. I think that's one of the most overused words. But I'm so passionate about contributing to people of what I know, just like what you are. I mean I think that's why you and I are kindred spirits you know. You've learned so much in your life and you're such a lifelong learner therefore you become the best teacher possible.

So I think I'm also incredibly well-suited to be one of those very few people I think who can be the bridge between the eternal truths of direct response marketing and I was a very little boy in the 1960's but I've studied the direct marketing of the 1960's and the 1970's and I got into the business in the 1980's and so I know the eternal truths of direct marketing. I've read all of the great marketing books. I do have most of the great copywriters on speed dial. Not bragging, just saying. And then to be able then look at the online world today. What's happening in marketing today? And I can be the bridge. I know I can be the bridge.

And so I am so passionate about being kind of the ultimate educator of the eternal truths of direct response marketing then and now. Not to sit there and talk about the past and tell you about the good old days when I could nail 20 million pieces of direct mail and I still tell those stories. But now I tell them in the context of, what we did to do that and how it might apply to today's marketing environment, which is a lot different.

And you know you have email, going back to cheap versus expensive, I'm so passionate about not beating the crap out of your list everyday, not beating the crap out of your customers everyday, not being annoying in your marketing, but you could be so much more beneficial in your marketing because email is so cheap, that we couldn't do in direct mail. So I feel like I've got all of this stuff coming out in me for the next 33-year career. And I'm so excited about it because I know I have a lot to offer.

John: Well, and I want to share too because I mean the bridge, I call it facilitation. It's curation. I mean one of the things that is so impressive with Brian, not only is he a humble guy for all that he has accomplished, but Brian has more connections than anyone in direct marketing. And for those of you who are watching this on video, you can see the program that's Brian's working on now and if you can't you can just Google, Titans of Direct Response and I'm just going to leaf through this Brian. The guys, Dan, Gary, Greg, Jay, I mean there isn't a name

here that I don't recognize as a player and to be able to bring this kind of group together... an amazing event and what are you looking to accomplish? What is it? It's in September I think?

Brian: Yeah, so just a quick background. The founder of the company that I've been with my, almost my entire career of Boardroom was founded by a guy by the name of Marty Edelston. Marty Edelston is an entrepreneur's entrepreneur. No one wanted to support him in this little newsletter business that he had. He's a great story. He died last October. My ultimate mentor, my business partner, really great friend. He and I always thought we should be educating the world in direct marketing because we were so good at it. And again we're not bragging. We got good at it because we worked hard at it. And then it's like how do we share that with the world?

John: And you saw the need too. I mean...

Brian: Totally. You know I did a lot of like one-day events. And we've done a lot of stuff over the years together and after he died, I found myself not thinking about doing an event but I remember my eulogy for him kind of talked about what made this man so extraordinary because he always said he was this ordinary guy from Newark, New Jersey. The whole thing kind of steam rolled into the marketing community of... Marty Edelston was a legend in direct marketing and people said, you know Brian there's a lot to be taught here and I started thinking about... if I could bring together what I call the Titans of Direct Response, people who I've worked with personally, with Marty, some not with Marty, but most of them with Marty, people that could share their wisdom.

I mean some of the people that are speaking, like Joe Sugarman invented luBlocker sunglasses. He invented a catalog back I think in the 1970's that preceded the sharper image catalog that was a high tech product catalog. I mean Joe Sugarman, we're talking about pioneers here.

Jay Abraham is a marketing guru. Dan Kennedy is a marketing guru. And they all wanted to come out and speak at this event. And Gary Bencivenga who's the world's greatest living copywriter is speaking at the event, as our Boardroom's best copywriters, and a host of other people.

And so, having all these people assemble to do the same thing that I'm passionate about which is share the wisdom, bring it forward, don't just tell old boy network stories, but talk about the things that we learned as entrepreneurs and as marketers and how that all applies to businesses today is really the ultimate... that's really what we want to accomplish at this event.

We're going to give away samples of the best marketing programs that have ever been out there. I mean I even got on radio and TV, I got Greg Renker to speak who's Guthy-Renker. Guthy-Renker's the largest infomercial company in the world and Greg Renker wanted to come out and talk about direct response as it pertains to direct response television. Fred Catona is the number one guy in radio, direct response radio.

So this whole idea... it's the education of that whole industry but it's also this whole idea that everything is multi-channel. That we are not talking about existing only in one channel. And today, because email is cheap, people will gravitate to that first and foremost and maybe not go elsewhere. And I think it's really, to do that is to do that at your risk.

And so to your entrepreneurs, I think what I'm saying to you is that thinking multi-channel even if you're not going to do the marketing work yourself, force the people that you work with and who you assign this task and be involved enough to know that, do you ever want to put your eggs in one basket? I mean any entrepreneur knows that. And the same is true when you're picking media for your marketing in different ways to channel that. So that's kind what tightens a direct response is all about. I think it's a onetime legacy event. I may spin off some workshops from it down the road or all that.

But right now, it's really this incredible bringing together and I'm going to honor Marty in a big way because I know he's smiling down at me right now saying, "I can't believe you put this thing together." Actually he's probably pissed off because we haven't put this all together while he's alive. But you know sometimes it takes the event and then I call it the perfect storm of things to bring it all together and the stars are aligned for I think what will be a once in a lifetime event.

John: What are you recommending Brian for your fellow entrepreneurs?

Brian: I recommend open table but they're all eating well already. So we're not going to do that one. You know I'm a disciple of Dan Sullivan's as you are. We're good friends. And I'm a Dan Sullivan groupie to the max. His app WinStreak which I'm sure he might have mentioned, I use everyday. And I want to give an angle on it that he might not have. What WinStreak is basically is at the end of everyday you have to put down your three wins of the day. And it doesn't matter what kind of day you had. You're going to have three wins. And I think about the key about the WinStreak app and making sure that you do this everyday. There's no room in that app to talk about what went wrong. There's no room in that app to say, "Well, I have these three things but this one kind of screwed up and I did this badly and my wife yelled at me and I didn't push my chair and..." whatever. So it's no opportunity for the negative and I think that's why the app is so good. I'll give you a quick... aside from that too, I was at a Mastermind meeting and I had posted in a Google group to this Mastermind the day my father-in-law passed away. I was sitting in the hospital as I was watching him pass away right in

front of me and I remember posting in that Google group what my three wins of the day were. And I did it intentionally because obviously that's a crappy day. I was very close with my father-in-law. I lost a mentor that day. And to be able to put down three wins while sitting in hospital as I was watching my father-in-law pass away, tells you the power of this... it's not just the app. The app does it for you. That you set it at 8 o'clock every night. It pops up on my iPhone. What were your three wins today? And no matter how bad a day I had, I had three wins. There's like no way I didn't have three wins.

John: I and everyday doing this as well. Nobody gets through life unscarred. Everyday, we all have challenges. But if we focus really on the positive and really appreciate how fortunate we are, it's amazing.

Let's go to the Book of the Day here.

Brian: So you know I'm going to go back to a book that we did in 1966 and the beauty of this book is that was written in 1966, went out of print. So then we reprinted it. We didn't change a word. This was like in the 1980's, from 1966. And then it went out of print again because we only printed 250 copies. And then I saw a live bid for the original version of the book on eBay for \$950. That was this lost classic that everybody had to get their hands on. So then we reprinted it in a big way. And the book is called *Breakthrough Advertising*. It was written by Gene Schwartz... Eugene Schwartz. He was probably one of the best copywriters who's ever lived.

And if you think this book is about advertising or direct marketing or creative, you have the wrong book. While it's been billed as that, it's been billed as Breakthrough Advertising and the ultimate book written by the best copywriter, it's about human behavior and human nature. And the fact that the version that we published today, not one word has been changed from the 1966 edition and there are pictures of ads from the 1960's and 50's in it. And yet the whole thing is a hundred percent relevant, tells you how important this book is to me and to hundreds and hundreds and thousands, I mean thousands of people in the marketing world.

John: I love it. Joe Polish, our mutual friend shared it with me. I think he did make me pay the hundred bucks but it's a phenomenal book and it puts in the perspective, so often we think everything has changed? People haven't changed. And those insights are so valuable. But I'm going to put you on the spot for a second here.

What's the one insight, that entrepreneurial insight of the day that you want to share Brian because I mean you've got so many and I'd love that we could just keep on doing this all day, but what's the one?

Brian: Oh God. That's hard to do. But you know what I think it's that, I'm going to rally just gear right through the entrepreneurs now... that to really understand your customers at the deepest level, I don't care... look I have a 9-million name database that pay \$39 per product. You might have a hundred clients who pay a hundred thousand dollars each. It doesn't matter. They're the same. And when I say they're the same, what I really mean is that understanding at the core, what their wants are, what their desires are. Don't treat everybody the same. Don't treat everybody who's a customer, a prospect, or suspect the same way. Everybody deserves to be treated at the level that they are part of your business, part of your life. I said this to Dan Sullivan as a matter of fact. You know the people who join Strategic Coach at the highest level should be treated at a such a different way who's been kicking the tires for three years at Dan Sullivan workshops to try and never spent a dime with him. Very simplistic concept but it's earth-changing. It's like the world moves as you move with... and I know I talked about this in my presentation but the world will move the way you communicate with it.

And so not everybody needs to be communicated with the same. And I think when you look at your business, and you look at your customers, and you look at people that drive your business, make sure that nothing is one-size-fits-all. Now do the insight overall right we talked about the agency also. So maybe the insight is nothing is one-size-fits-all whether its your customer base, how you communicate with them, whether it's how you buy your marketing, whether it's how you hire, whatever. One-size-fits-all is such a ridiculous concept and you must get off of that to really make huge breakthroughs in your business.

John: Let me play back now my key takeaways. Number one thing is measuring response. Don't do the... put your finger up in the air and test the wind. Measure, measure, measure. Split test. Brian, you've helped me in a lot of this. We get into great debates in our organization about "Well, what do you think? Will this work or that?" And everybody is confident they're idea is the best and it's like, oh yeah let's test it.

Brian: Yeah, this split testing is like something in direct marketing that's been around forever...

John: Yeah, and I'm not going to tell you when I started doing it but it's less than forever. And the second point is really what you were talking about your entrepreneurial insight for both clients and for the talent that you're working with. And I used to hire agencies, agency to do everything. And oftentimes they are good at one thing, but not everything. And really the real talent, they understand being entrepreneur and they go out and do it. And the ability to bring that together and this is one of the reasons why we started Accelerating Entrepreneurial Success is to create that network or connections so that you can really have that relationships and we'll talk about resources for that.

And the last one, I'm going to call it the anti-overconfidence. This is lifelong learning. I mean you and I know each other so well because we're in a number of Masterminds together. We're out there. We're... supposedly some of the most, more successful guys out there and what's happening is the situation is one where we are making a difference.

Now what I want to do is put up Brian your website, BrianKurtz.me

Describe what's on the website if people want to reach out and connect with you.

Brian: Basically, the main squeeze, that's what we call squeeze page so you would opt-in and get an interview downloaded to you by going on my list and you would be double opted-in and all that. And that interview, I think that's the lead interview there. It's an interview that Joe Polish, our friend did with Marty Edelston and I about how we built this \$100-million business from about a \$3-million business in less than a decade. But it's a lot about other things. It's a lot about entrepreneurship. So I think that you would have folks opt in to would very relevant.

John: Very last segment is resources. Definitely sign up for Brian's newsletter or information and he's got the interview with Joe and it's just phenomenal.

Brian: And there's a lot of other interviews on the right side. They're all free. You can download any of those and then I also email weekly on different lessons that I've learned over the years.

John: And then also remember the Titans of Direct Response. If it fits your marketplace and it should for almost every entrepreneur. Go ahead and take a look at it and sign up for it if you can be there because there will probably never be another meeting like that. Also the app WinStreak, you can google that. We really love that. It's been a great tool. Also, as always you can go to AESNation.com, Accelerating Entrepreneurial Success. I'm a little worried that not everybody could spell "entrepreneurial" including me so we go AESNation. We're creating the community of connected entrepreneurs who really want to make a difference.

Brian, I want to thank you for spending the time today with us and being out there and making a difference.

Brian: Thank you. It's a pleasure and thank you for including me.

John: It's up to you to take the idea that Brian shared with us to go out and make a huge difference. The only way that happens? Is if you execute. Your clients, your customers, and all those future clients, they're counting on you. Don't let them down.

A Second Opinion on Your Finances

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Best of success,



John Bowen
Founder and CEO
Financial Advisor Select