BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES
PODCAST #103

Hello and thank you for joining us today. This is the Brand Secrets and Strategies Podcast #103

Welcome to the Brand Secrets and Strategies podcast where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.

I'm your host Dan Lohman. This weekly show is dedicated to getting your brand on the shelf and keeping it there.

Get ready to learn actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.

LETS ROLL UP OUR SLEEVES AND GET STARTED!

Dan: Welcome. I want to begin by saying Happy New Year. I hope that your last year was great, and I hope that you have even bigger plans for this year. The focus of this show is to help you get more product onto more retailer shelves and into the hands of more shoppers. That includes both online and traditional retail shoppers. I measure the success of this show by how well you're able to implement these strategies and make them your own.

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

Today's show is no exception. Today you're gonna learn the benefit and the power of having a solid online strategy to help fuel your growth, both online and in traditional retail. You need to have your products available where your consumers want to shop. And consumers have a variety of places to shop. So you can't just be in one location, one place, or one type of retail store. More importantly, you need to have a solid single unified message as you're communicating with all of the different customers that buy your products. Both online and in traditional retail.

Today's podcast helps you understand how to leverage your selling story to ensure that your consumers can find your products no matter where they shop. A big piece of that is inviting new shoppers to try your product. And that requires that you have a clear message so that they can clearly understand what it is about your product that differentiate you from the competition. And it all starts with a compelling selling story that helps them understand why you. Why your product over the competition. Why should they try you? Why should they give you an opportunity? This begins with your ability to communicate clearly everything about your product in a voice that resonates with the shopper that wants to find your product.

When you do this effectively, it helps every retailer sell your product on your behalf. While today's stories focus primarily on online selling, the strategies that you're gonna hear here today are also very useful, extremely useful, in traditional retail. This

includes the way you fill out your profile online so that consumers can learn everything that they need to know about your product. It includes how you fill out your profile. Or how you communicate the value approval on your website. Through every social channel. Anywhere where you're having a conversation with a customer or potential customer. This also includes how you communicate the value of your package on the shelf at a traditional retail store. This all matters.

I met today's guest at NatchCom a few months ago. We were both speaking there. Jeff was one of the most articulate people I've ever listen to give a talk. He had some great information and he's here to share it with you today. Here's Jeff Cohen with Seller Labs.

Thank you, Jeff, for making time for me today. Could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself and your journey to Seller Labs?

Jeff: Great. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it. Happy to share with your audience, Dan. So a little bit about myself. Jeff Cohen, I've been in eCommerce since about 2007. Kind of stumbled into the eCommerce space in the textbook arena. My first eCommerce website was called textbooks.com. After that I ran a site called campusbooks.com. And I met a guy by the name of Brandon Checketts while running Campus Books. And Brandon and I worked together for a number of years before he went on to do some other ventures. He started selling on Amazon in like 2012. And shared with me what he was doing. I thought it was really

interesting. So I started buying some products and selling on Amazon back in 2012.

In 2013, we kind of turned what we were doing from selling products on Amazon to creating software for sellers on Amazon. And in 2013, pivoted the company to be a software business instead of a Amazon seller business.

Dan: Interesting.

Jeff: Basically for the last five years we've been servicing tens of thousands of Amazon sellers with reputation management, advertising, and advertising management. Listing optimization. I've had the privilege of speaking around the country and around the world on the topic of Amazon and sharing best practices for how to get your business going. How to get your brand off the ground. How to take your brand to the next level. And really, you know, what you need to do to win in the Amazon marketplace ecosystem.

Dan: Thank you for sharing that. And the reason, of course, that I wanted to reach out to you and met you is that I had the privilege of listening to you speak at Natchcom. And I spoke there, too. And it was a great event. It was a great opportunity to help brands connect with traditional retail, traditional brick and mortar, and online. And I was really impressed by the way that you framed the whole conversation around how a brand needs to go to market or on Amazon and the platform in terms of the tools they need to use. The watchouts. The pitfalls. All the things that

brands need to know about. And you also had a lot of great antidotes about some of the things that brands are doing wrong and how you can save them a lot of headaches.

And so, can you tell a little bit about ... Can you back up and talk about your experiences in terms of selling on Amazon? And then how did that helps support what you're doing with Seller Labs?

Jeff: It's a great question. A very loaded one. I'm glad you narrowed it in there at the end. We can get to a lot of that stuff. But, you know, they say that the best software are software ... Is software that solves a problem. And so the mere fact that we were trying to solve our own problem when we created our software really led us to an ability to create software that was really driving solutions to our personal problems. And the Amazon Marketplace has changed significantly in the last five years. Five years ago it was really a reseller marketplace. So one of the concepts we talked about at the conference was established brands versus digitally native brands, right?

So if you're an established brand ... Let's just use Kellogg's as an example ... Five years ago, you were competing on the Amazon Marketplace with people who were going to grocery stores, buying your product, and reselling it online. Today, it's moved from a reseller marketplace to a digitally native branded marketplace. And the competitors that you're seeing now are digitally native brands. And so you're seeing these brands like Bai energy drink, RXBAR, Bobo's, right? These are the new brands that are coming up through the digitally native world. It's easier.

BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

It's faster. You can test the market to see what's working and what's not if you go digital before you go into physical stores.

And so what was really interesting at this conference was there was two totally different sides of the equation. There was the how do I launch with a digital strategy, how do I launch with a store strategy, and then ultimately as a business, when one do I want to select? Do I want to focus on one or the other? Do I want to try and build both at the same time? And, you know, if you don't have all of the connections to get a store ... To get store placement, if you don't want to start with calling on your local store and then moving to your regional store and then going to the regional distributors, you can actually go online and you could win in the digital marketplace. And you can sell your products directly to the consumers who are looking for products like yours.

And, you know, that was really kind of what we were discussing. And the change of that marketplace of what's happened over the last five years since I got into it has been from me learning to sell on my own ... I've developed some of my own brands. I've also had the honor and privilege of working with some of the biggest brands that have come out of the Amazon digitally native ecosystem and seen how they've done it as well and what they've been able to do to be successful.

Dan: I appreciate that. And I've been a huge proponent for years now of brands needing to have more than just a single one-off strategy, meaning focusing on a traditionally brick and mortar. And what I loved about what you were talking about is that you

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

were talking about that intersection. And it's not from my perspective not a one or the other solution. But yet brands need to have both solutions. Use both channels in terms of their distribution strategy, their sales strategy.

Can you talk about some of the benefits? You mentioned a couple. One, being able to test products. One, being able to reach other clients, other customers that you wouldn't be able to reach in retail. Can you share some other stories and some other things that brands should be thinking about as they go down that journey?

Jeff: Yeah. So if you're coming from the digitally native side, if you're trying to launch using the platform of the internet as your launching platform, I think one of the pitfalls is that you kind of have this, "Oh, I'll put it on Amazon and people will start buying it." But the truth of the matter is that they don't just start buying what you have. What they want to do is they want to ... They need to find you, right?

Dan: Right.

Jeff: So you have to be optimized. And you'll want to build external audiences to push traffic to be looking for you. And so that's what the best and the biggest brands are doing. And a lot of times we want to look at the big ones and we want to look at the best and we want to try and figure out what they're doing and then work our way backwards. And so today I can talk to you about a brand like Death Wish Coffee and I can talk about how they're doing

multiples of millions of dollars on Amazon and they've got an Instagram group with several hundred thousand followers and several hundred thousand followers on Facebook. And you look at them and you go, "Okay, but I'm not Death Wish Coffee." But what's critical to remember is that three years ago, Death Wish Coffee wasn't Death Wish Coffee.

And so when you look at these brands that are successful like an RXBAR, a SkinnyPop, a Bai energy drink like we were talking about earlier, you can't just look at them and say, "Well, they're Bai. So of course they're doing well." You have to look at what they did to become that company. To get that multiplier that they got. And what they did was they bought ... They built really products, right? So I always say like your product can't suck.

Dan: True

Jeff: Really simple. Your product can't suck. You have to know who your product is made for. Who's your persona? Then, where does your persona shop? So if your persona is shopping on Amazon, that's where you should be. If your persona of your customer is not shopping Amazon, it's not where you should be. And so it's really easy for people to come onto a podcast and be like, "Amazon, Amazon, Amazon! Everyone needs to be on Amazon!" But the truth of the matter is, is that it goes back to the way marketing was taught 20 years ago before the internet. Location, location, location. And if your consumers aren't ... If the people who consumer your products aren't shopping for your products online, then going online doesn't make sense.

Dan: Absolutely.

Jeff: And if they can't find your products online, then being online doesn't make sense. So if you're a totally new category, right? A lot of people are trying to ... If you asked them like, "Well, what are you?" They're like, "Well, I'm a mixture of a energy drink that is connected to a coconut and is also, you know, fuel for your body", or something like that, and you're like, "Okay. I don't know what that is." It's hard for somebody to search for that online.

So SkinnyPop would have had a hard time being a digitally native brand, because people weren't looking for low-calorie popcorn when they first came out. So they had to start and build up momentum and teach people about what it was. Today, they've created a category of low-calorie snacks, right? Think about all the different now that have hundred calorie snack bags because you can eat the whole bag of popcorn. Unless you buy it from Costco, then you can't 'cause that's like too many calories.

Dan: True, true.

Jeff: And so when you're answering that question, it seems like it's a really simple answer. But it's not a really simple answer. So you have to know your persona. Then if your persona's shopping online, you put that product out there and make it available to them. And you gotta make it available to them in quantities and packaging that makes sense. And this is where you package for the internet different than you would package for the store.

https://www.brandsecretsandstrategies.com

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

Because in a store you can do a one-off sale of a product and then they can upgrade to a case. But on the internet, you can't sell a one-off version of the product.

So what I tell people is is if you have different flavors, you might want to consider a variety pack. 'Cause I'm gonna buy your six-pack that's six different flavors, take it home, try it all. Figure out which flavor I like the best. And then that's the one I'm gonna start to reorder.

Dan: That makes all ... So much sense. And I see the similarities between the two different channels. One being traditional retail and then, of course, online. That's why your story resonated so much with me. And that's why I loved it. Because I teach the exact same strategies for brands in traditional retail. But at the same time, tell them that they need to have an online strategy. So where I'm going with it, Jeff, is that this is a problem that every brand faces. And kind of going back to what you said initially, just because your Mom likes it doesn't mean everyone else will.

And one of the challenges that I find is a lot of brands don't really think about who their core customer is. Who ... What is their persona? And how to develop that persona and then really understand it from the consumer's perspective. That's why I developed my free Turnkey Sales Stories Strategies Course, which is designed to teach brands exactly this.

So once a brand has their persona, and once your brand starts developing that community around their brand, how do you suggest that they go forward in terms of an online strategy? You mentioned that they gotta have ... They need to have the right kind of content on the platform. What does that look like? And what are some of the problems that brands face when they're trying to put something up there on the website? Or on Amazon?

Jeff: Yeah. So, let's just take ... Let's take this from the approach that nobody is currently selling your product online. So this is a little bit easier than trying to clean up a listing that's already there.

Dan: Makes sense.

Jeff: So you want to focus on your title, your bullets, and what are called your Backend Keywords on Amazon. That's really what's going to drive the Amazon search. Once you kind of get that down ... And what I tell people is really focus on like two or three high-volume keywords that you think are gonna really drive sales for your product. So this isn't like old school Google keyword stuffing. You want to really focus it in on which keywords you think will really make a difference. And people are looking for your products.

          And one of the best examples I give is a product ... When you talk to the marketing team, they said, "Well, we're a clean product." And I go, "What does that mean? What is a clean product? Do you wash your Gummi Bears? What do you do?" And they're like, "Well, no. That means we're gluten free. We're high

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

fructose corn syrup free." And was like, "Awesome, great. Then say what you are. Don't talk in your marketing speak that somebody may not know what that means." Once you get your bullets and your keywords and your titles done, the next most important thing is your images. So give me images that really show your product. And then give me the value proposition of your product. And we use infographics for those.

And then finally, give me some lifestyles. Show me what it looks like to engage with your product and the type of life. So if your product is a product that you would take hiking with you, then show me a picture of a guy hiking up a mountain with his hand going into the back of his backpack pulling your bar out of his backpack, right? So bring it to life to where I look at that and go, "Huh, that's me. I'm a 43-year-old male who likes to hike and spend time in the outdoors. That's the product that I want."

And so that's what you're trying to do. That's the storytelling you're trying to do with your photos. And then you let your bullet points, your titles, and your keywords really drive the Amazon search algorithm to determine, you know, what keywords you're gonna show up for.

Dan: I really appreciate the fact that you showed as an example an idea of what an image should look like and the way most people do it. And you had an image of someone wearing a costume ... And it was a goofy costume ... But the point was that it didn't really show up. It didn't resonate. It didn't draw me in. And then you showed an example of how if you put that picture out there

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

differently ... A very similar picture ... How that really stands out. It makes your ad stand out so much more. Your product.

So along those lines ... And then, by the way, the lifestyle images, I love that, too. So since we're so digitally ... Since we're so visually visual in terms of the way we look at products, the way we think about products, what could brands or what should brands do differently to try to get their products seen and noticed by more people?

Jeff: Yeah. I think that the first thing you need to do is you gotta build your own audience. So whether you're doing this in the store or whether you're doing this online, you've gotta build an audience of raging fans who want to speak to the success of your brand. And this is one of those hybrids from a store to an online market. Because today's world, right? We're in a brandless society. Everybody wants what's next, what's new. Everybody wants to be on the latest, greatest version of everything. And they look to their friends to figure out what that latest and greatest and next thing is.

And so if you can build that audience of those passionate fans who love your product, that's where this grows from. And you want to take that and you want to build into that passion their desire to want to share it with their audience. And so go back to my example of the hiker. If I have a energy bar and I'm targeting, you know, men 35 to 55 who like outdoors and like hiking, I don't want to market my product as an energy bar. I want to build a community around 35- to 55-year-old men who

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

like to do outdoor activity and are more fit and like, you know, hikes of 10 miles or greater.

And if I can build that community of those people, then the odds of those people then liking my product and having like interests become much greater. And what a lot of us were kind of trained to do with kind of we'll call it traditional marketing, what we were trained to do is we were trained to start out by getting everybody to like our product and like our brand. And one of the big things that I think has shifted is that we need to put our product and our brand around the community in which it's being used by.

And so you see that with, you know, big brands. Patagonia and North Face. Even like smaller brands like Death Wish Coffee, they're building a passionate following around the persona of the user of their product. And then next likely scenario is for that to connect to the product and purchasing it.

Dan: And that is the most important thing I really wanted to focus on. So thank you for sharing. That story is the glue that brings your community together. And what I love about the idea behind the community ... And again, we talk about this in traditional world as well ... Is if I go in to buy a product, you have no line of sight to me and what I look like and how I use your product. But if you can build a community around your brand and then own that community on your website or however you do it ... Through social, et cetera ... Then that's going to leverage yourselves in both online and in traditional retail.

BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

So the idea of being able to pull an energy bar out of a backpack and then be able to show how people are using it, that helps the consumer understand why this product makes sense and how it fits into their lifestyle. What I'm getting at, Jeff, is that the journey has changed today, the way consumers buy products. And so consumers don't just walk up to the shelf and pick up a box. If it's a red box or a blue box. They look beyond the four corners of their package.

And this is one of the things that you talked about at Natchcom is your ability to have information that a consumer, prospective consumer can be able to research and use to really understand more about the product. How your product's different. How your product is unique compared to your competition. And then the messaging around that.

So as you're building your story on Amazon, or on any platform really, what recommendations do you have in terms of really developing a story that connects and resonates with your core consumer?

Jeff: Well, listen, I think this starts with the whole idea of knowing who that core consumer is. And then sticking to that core consumer when you write that story. So I'm a marketing guy. And when we do storytelling within marketing, everything in our office is tied to what we call a persona. And we talked a little bit about personas earlier in the podcast. And if you've nailed your persona and your persona is actually who's buying your product ... And that's another problem, right? Is that we have a persona, but the

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

person who buys our product is not really within our persona, then I can tell that story to that person. When I'm trying to tell the story to everybody, then I start to fail because I'm telling that story to nobody.

And what I tell people is, you know, think really hard to the best companies and the best marketing and the best taglines, and that's probably because you fit into their persona and they were targeting you. And it's one of those things like ... We as Americans, as humans, we like to be targeted. Although when we feel like we're being targeted, it kind of scares us, right? So retargeting's a great example of that. We love that when we go to shop on a particular website, we see the ads over and over again after we shop on that site. They've targeted us. That's the same reason why if my friends shop on a website, I can possibly start seeing those ads because they know my friend and I have like interests. And they're gonna start targeting me with those ads.

And so that's really what you want to do to nail that messaging down to the right consumer is really hone in on, who is your audience? And how do you need to speak to them? What type of images do they want to see? What type of language do they want to hear? Now, if you don't know that answer ... And a lot of times we don't know that answer ... We have to do market research. Now, I just scared the crap out of everybody 'cause I just said the hundred thousand dollar word, market research. But I'm gonna teach you how to do market research without spending a hundred

K. And when I save you money, you can just send me a check for 10% of that, okay?

Dan: That works.

Jeff: No big deal. So what you do is go to Amazon. Type in your product. Underneath your listing you're gonna have product reviews and you're gonna have Q&A. The Q&A are questions that your audience is asking about your product. They might ask, how many units come in a container? What's the size of the bar? What's the number of calories? How much liquid is it? Can it be stored in heat? Can it be in the cold? Right? They're asking all of these questions that as consumers they want to know the answer to.

Your job as the manufacturer is to answer those questions. So take your top questions ... And the top ones are voted up and down by the consumers ... Take your top questions, add them to infographics. The next thing you want to do is start reading your reviews. Your reviews are gonna give you some of of the most rich information abour your audience and how they want to be talked to that you'll ever find.

So I was doing work with a company. They're called Aiwa. So if you're old like me, you probably had an Aiwa stereo stack in the 1980s or 90s. Aiwa reinvented themselves as a Bluetooth company. And they sell on Amazon. Well, Aiwa was ... Had a really bad listing. And I worked with their team to rewrite their listing. And if you went and you read the reviews, they were like,

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

"Super awesome bass. Amazing sound. And a stylish volume knob." Like, people really liked the volume knob so much that they talked about how stylish the volume knob was. "I set this speaker up during a baseball game. It was playing being home plate and I could hear it in centerfield." That's the language your customers want you to be using. They're actually writing the content for you.

Now, let's answer the objection. I don't have any reviews. I don't have any Q&A. Great, your competitors probably do. So take the product that you think is the closest to you as a competitor and read their Q&A. Read their product descriptions. Read their reviews. Because if your persona, if your target audience is the same as your competitors, you most likely can get the same type of information from it and be able to use that information to better your listing.

Dan: Those are some great tips. I want to go one step further and say this is also a great platform or great strategy that you can use to develop new innovation. By being able to understand what consumers are asking for, what they want in other products, not just yours, but in other categories ... That helps you identify or ... That helps you build the products that they want that they're gonna be able to buy. That they're going to want to buy. So my point being is that ... If ... Yeah. If you go one step further and leverage those strategies against the products that you're coming out in the future and how you're communicating with that consumer base.

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

One of the things that I wanted to really hone in on is, like you said, when you're talking about community, you're also talking about building passionate consumers around that. And that's how you build loyalty. And if you can leverage your community to help with product innovation and help with getting your product on the shelf and then help you design the products that retailers are gonna want to sell, that your consumers are gonna want to buy, that's going to help fuel your sales both online and in traditional retail as well.

So the Aiwa story, I'm old enough where I remember the brand very, very well. And while I haven't looked at any of their comments on Amazon, I like the way that you framed that. Can you give some other examples about things that a brand can do to be able to identify what other products are coming in the market? Or what the innovation is? Or what consumers are looking for? And then, more importantly, Jeff, how does a brand or how would you recommend a brand leverage that within their community off of Amazon and off of traditional retail so that they can help build that loyal following?

Jeff: Yeah. So ... Wow, you like to ask loaded questions.

Dan: I do.

Jeff: So again, I think this depends on what type of product that you have, right? So if you've got a health and natural food product, you're not gonna be able to use a site like Indiegogo or Kickstarter to kind of look and see what's going on. But like, let's

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

say you're a luggage company, right? If I'm a luggage company, I'm trying to give different examples in each of these so you guys can kind of see how they play out ... But if I'm a luggage company, I want to be following Indiegogo, Kickstarter, you know, all these types of sites. Because I follow a lot of those sites and a lot of travel type products.

A lot of electronic type products come out into that site. And I can actually follow from Indiegogo or Kickstarter how many people like this new luggage because it has a built-in scale or it has a built-in recharger. And, you know, things that are pretty much commonplace today, but a year ago they weren't. And I can actually let my competitors do my research for me.

And I can follow that and I can read the comments of people saying like, "I've been looking for a bag that has a built-in scale. Thanks for solving my problem." And so that's what I'm looking for. It does become more challenging, like I said earlier, it becomes more challenging when you try to bring innovative products into Amazon to expect the Amazon ecosystem to just drive the sale of that product.

So I have a friend who has a product. It's called Dynasty Toys. I've talked about it on stage, so I know I can share it. And he really brought to life this whole new version of a Laser Tag gun. So prior to him bringing his product to market, Laser Tag guns were these systems that you had to have like a full vest that like, you know, got you tagged. And then you had a gun. Well, he came to market with a gun that has a tag built into the gun. So

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

all you needed was this gun and you could play Laser Tag with your friends. And they're super fun. I've got like 14 of them at my house, and we have some crazy games in the backyard.

And so what he found was that as he tried to launch this product, it wasn't what people were used to. So what he did was he had to use external resources ... Facebook, Instagram, social channels like that ... To build awareness of his product. Today if you look online ... Actually, today if you look in the store, that is now how Nerf is selling their Laser Tag guns. Nerf actually started creating this gun because him ... Because he created such a market for these types of products that the big boys started paying attention to it.

But what he's done ... Which is kind of amazing ... Is what he's done is that every year he's reinvented his product. So he hasn't rested on it and said, "Oh, I'm gonna sell Laser Tag guns and I'll keep selling Laser Tag guns." The next year he said, "Well, my Laser Tag gun is only fun if I have some friends over. So I really need to make like a pet for my Laser Tag gun." So he created like this spider. And this spider jumps and rolls and things like that. So the Version Two of his gun came out with a gun and a spider. By the way, they were all compatible. So if you had had the first version, you could still use the second version. Now, I'm ... My kid's alone at home and he wants to play Laser Tag, he can turn his spider on and he can do that.

The next version of that that he came out with was a Capture the Flag version of it. So he created little cubes and you could put the

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

cube in your base and you would shoot the cube, which would show that you've been there, right? So you didn't actually have to steal the cube. And now all of a sudden, I'm not just playing Laser Tag, I'm playing Capture the Flag.

Dan: Gotcha.

Jeff: And so he was taking the product that became an innovation in the market, and hew was using the feedback of people that were coming back and were saying, "But I want ... But what happens when I want to play by myself?" And, "What happens when I have a big group of people? How can I play this as a game?" And he expanded his product to be so much more than what it was. And he's got a whole new product that's coming out for Black Friday that fits along this same line.

And so the people who are now competing against him are still two or three years behind. And, you know, this is their opportunity. They're just trying to compete in the old world, not even in the new world. So he doesn't even care, because now he's selling a hundred dollar product versus a 50 dollar product because he's built a brand. He's built a reputation. He's built innovative products. And he's moved ahead of what he was doing.

Dan: And by doing that, now you've got an opportunity to try new innovation and launch it online where it's a lot cheaper and a lot quicker to get it to market than it is if you're doing it traditional store. If you launch a product in a traditional store, it might four

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

or five, six months before you get it on the shelf. Then after you pay for the slotting and the packaging and everything else, that's a lot of money. Whereas ... And one of the things you shared ... And I appreciate you doing that ... In this example as well is that you can innovate, pivot, and bring things to market really quick. Test it. And be able to get real life feedback that you can use across other channels as well.

Jeff: Exactly. Exactly. And I think it goes back to this idea that you just can't rest on your laurels. You have to just kind of keep pushing and pushing things forward.

Dan: I appreciate that. And, you know, that's so important. Because so many brands get complacent. Even the big guys. Especially the big guys. You know, they think that all they need to do is deliver the product to the back of the store and the selling's over. And I keep telling people, "No. The selling never stops. It extends well beyond the cash register. Well beyond when that consumer takes it home and shares it with their friends." It's that story, that community that you want to always be focused on building.

So when you were talking at Natchcom, you were talking a lot about the community and how you develop the community and how you grow your community. Can you share some thoughts or some ideas around, how do you grow that community? How do you build a community with an online presence that helps fuel your traditional retail presence?

BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

Jeff: Yeah. So I think we touched on a few of these points along the way. But we can kind of consolidate them together, specifically to that answer. One, you gotta have a good product. Two, you build that community around the persona of the product user, not the product itself. So gone are the days of, you know, my community being about my actual product. And hello are the days around the activities that my users want to use. Then once I have that ... Think about that.

Like, think about ... Let's say that I'm a gamer. Now, so these guys are crazy, right? They make like a million dollars playing video games all day. Let's say I'm a gamer. If I am a gamer manufacturer. I make controllers or I make something that gamers use. VR headsets or something. If I can build a community around gaming and I can get a hundred, 200, a quarter of a million people into that community ... Even if I can just get 5,000 or 10,000 people into that community, think about the power that I have as a brand.

So it's not about my brand. It's not about me taking my brand and saying, "Buy my product, buy my product, buy my product." And that's the way we think. But think about this. If I can get those guys and gals to talk gaming on a regular basis, I can drop my product in in different and unique ways. I can test new product ideas. And I can bring new products to market with my own audience. And I'm not dependent on anybody else.

So if I'm a natural food company, I don't want my Facebook Group to be about just natural foods. I want my Facebook Group

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

to be about keto dieting or high protein, low fat. Or something like that. Something that connects to what I own as a product brand. Because then I can use that audience to do whatever I want them to do. I become the puppet master that can pull the strings.

Dan: Really like that. I appreciate your saying that. That's a great example. And then one of the other things, kind of going back a little bit to one of the things you said earlier, another point is that a lot of times as you're developing your persona, a lot of brands struggle with trying to figure out who their persona is. And so by being able to leverage these strategies that you're sharing with us today, and thank you for doing that, now they're able to really define their persona and build a community around them rather than the tried and true, you know, whip out your checkbook and where do I sign type strategies that are used in traditional retail.

And that's one of the reasons, again, why I'm so fascinated by what a brand can do online. Because a little brand ... As you've given several examples, and thank you for that ... Can compete head to head, toe to toe with the big guys. Because they have the ability to talk with someone. Have a conversation with their customers if they're smart. Whereas the big brands tend to have ... Like you said, tell us what they think about us. "Hey, buy us. We're big. We're great. We're wonderful." But yet, developing that community around them and then leveraging that community to help drive sales and innovation and, again, sales other places.

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

One of the things that I would love to explore ... And I know that there are a lot of synergies ... Is that with the ability to target a consumer online, I know that you can leverage that in a traditional retail store. And I wanted to ask you, have you seen any work around that area? And what I'm getting at is, if I know that if I've got a particular consumer ... I know where my consumer lives, I know what they look like, I know how they buy their products, I know how they use their product ... And then design a promotion that targets that consumer within a specific zip code, where that consumer lives ... And then set up a traditional retail brick and mortar promotion at the same time, that's going to amplify my sales both online and offline. Have you ever done anything like that

Jeff: Yeah. So I have not worked with any people who have done an online and offline promotion. But obviously, that makes a lot of sense. I've definitely seen promotions where the promotion is to the website or to Amazon. And the coupon is kind of the same so they can use it in whichever channel they feel like digesting it in. But yeah, I mean, what we see today is that consumers are shopping online and in store. It's a hybrid model. They're sitting at the grocery store, they're sitting at the sporting good store, they're sitting at the electronics store, and they're pulling up their phone and they're looking online to see what else they can find. At the same point ... And again, the higher price of your product, the more important that becomes.

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

So when I'm at Target doing some grocery shopping, I might look up my ZBars to see how much they cost on Amazon. 'Cause in the future I don't want to have to run all the way to Target to get those. But if I'm at Dick's Sporting Goods looking for a ping pong table ... Which I'm looking for one if anybody wants to direct me in the right direction ... If I'm looking for a ping pong table, I'm looking online. I'm looking in store. 'Cause I want to kind of kick this thing a little bit and see how sturdy it is before I buy it. I want to read some reviews to find out how hard it is to set up. So I'm not just making a decision on the whim of the first thing that I want to buy. I'm working myself through the buying process.

And so in that situation, having the coupon that's available in store or online is gonna work best for me. I mean, you know, I won't be doing any Black Friday shopping in a store. But I will be doing Black Friday shopping on my mobile device and on my computer. This'll probably broadcast after Black Friday, but you know what I'm trying to explain here, right?

Dan: Sure.

Jeff: And so as consumers, we're changing the way that we purchase. The way that we, you know, interact with brands. And as a brand, we have to build models that work with the way our consumers want to be engaged. And so again, this goes back to knowing your persona. So if your persona is, you know, a 33 year old, you sure as heck better have an online version and strategy. If yours is 85 years old, then your online strategy doesn't matter. So you gotta know your persona. You gotta know who you're targeting.

You gotta know how they digest their information and what they're looking for.

Dan: A good friend of mine coined the frame ... Bill Bishop coined the frame personal supply chain. And the whole idea behind it is that if you can't find your product in one store, you're gonna go someplace else. And there's so many different choices. And to your point, I have the ability to buy something online or traditional retail or at different retailers, it doesn't matter. And yet, if a brand can develop the right persona, the right story behind their brand, they can use that to leverage sales in traditional retail and online as well.

So as you're developing your strategies around this, one of the things that I was impressed by looking through your website and listening to your talk at Natchcom is that you have the ability to help brands analyze and identify what works with some of the different tools back to your software that you guys have created. And what I'm getting at is that data is expensive, especially when you're trying to buy syndicated data to look at what's going on in a traditional retailer. It's hard to find data, good data, for what's being done online. And yet you have developed tools that provide some tremendous insight for brands trying to understand what the opportunities are. And then more importantly, what are the missing gaps that they need to fill or close to help drive sales?

Can you talk a little bit about that, Jeff?

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

Jeff: Yeah. So I think you're talking about our tool Scope. Our tool Scope is a Chrome extension that takes you through the Amazon ... Takes you through while you're on Amazon and allows you to look at your listing, your competitor's listing, and get an understanding of kind of what keywords people are looking for for that versus what keywords people are looking for for yours. And I think that ultimately what we're looking for when we're looking at that data is, again, that little bit of information that's saying, "Oh, I didn't realize that I called it a baking pan, but everybody else calls it a casserole dish."

And so there's a lot that can be learned when you're able to dive into the data and look to see who's consuming your product, your competitor's product, and things like that. And, you know, our other tool is called Feedback Genius, and it does reputation management. So it's soliciting reviews from people who have brought your product. Obviously, once you get a review, you get a ton of information. We kind of covered that earlier.

And then finally, our product is our advertising product called Ignite, which assists you at Amazon Advertising. And there is a significant trove of data that sits within the Amazon Advertising ecosystem. Everything that you do on advertising is called a keyword. That is the word that you believe that people are using to look for your product. And you get back what's called a search term. And a search term is the term that is actually being used to find your product.

And so as you start to look at keywords, search terms, product reviews, that gives you ... And your competitive data ... That gives you all the data that you need to be able to make better decisions about your products and what you're trying to accomplish.

Dan: Love that. And it's so very important. And again, to reiterate, this isn't something that is only useful in the online world of Amazon. It's information that you could use anywhere. So thank you for sharing that. What other things should we cover that we haven't brought up, that we haven't talked about yet that you'd like to share?

Jeff: Probably ... Let's just kind of cover some common mistakes. And we can wrap on that. You know, people like to learn from other people's failures.

Dan: Sounds good. I appreciate ... In fact, you had some great antidotes when you spoke at Natchcom. Please, share with us.

Jeff: Yeah. So I think one common mistake is that when go to sell online, that you can just list your product and sales will come. And, you know, Amazon is a gigantic ecosystem. There's lots of buyers on the platform. But you have to target into those buyers in the correct manner. FBA, Fulfillment By Amazon. You know, if your product is not at Amazon, if it's not available via Prime, it's a lot harder to get sales on the Amazon ecosystem, right? We covered a lot of the other things, so I don't want to kind of dig back into it, but, you know, look at, are you putting your product

BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

to where your product needs to be? And are you positioning it in a way for people to be able to find it? Because a lot of times that's what people do wrong.

The second is that they start to attack the problem without knowing what the problem is. And we see this a lot of times. People come to us and go, "I need to do more advertising on Amazon." And what we come to find is that their page conversion is really bad. We come to find that their photos are really bad. We come to find that they're not targeting the right keywords. They didn't set up their campaigns correctly. And so we build a whole managed service around running ads for people, because they don't know how to run ads themselves. And they don't want to learn. They just want someone to do it for them. But what we always say is that software can't solve your problem if you don't know what your problem is.

And so that's really what becomes the crux of the challenge for anybody when they're entering the system is to develop what we call an ASIN By ASIN Strategy. So if you're not familiar, an ASIN is like a UPC code on Amazon. And you really need a strategy that is specific to every ASIN in your catalog. You can't just say, "Oh, Jeff said add new photos. I'm gonna add photos. Jeff said do advertising. I'm gonna do advertising." It doesn't work that way. You have to come back and say, "What are the products that drive my sales?" Pareto Principle, 80-20 rule. We could do another whole podcast just on that topic.

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

Now, I know what products drive my sales ... Or maybe even better, they drive my profit ... Now, with each of these ASINS, what's working and what's not? And I can start to look at my data on Amazon. It's in your business reports, on your own website. It's probably somewhere else. But you gotta know what problem you're trying to attack before you go to attack that problem. And if you're just working on a strategy and you're not looking at the data to tell you, how do you get in there and how do you measure whether you're successful to get out? Then you're probably wasting your time and your energy.

Dan: And the same trues online. I mean, on traditional retail. So thank you for sharing that. I'm not a fan of what I would call push button category management or push button analytics. Kind of the same thing. But what's interesting ... And I'm so glad you shared this ... Is that trade marketing ... The money that you're putting to promote your product, to put your product in the hands of a consumer ... It's one of the biggest black holes for every brand. I've seen studies that say that between 70 and 90% of all trade dollars are wasted. Because they don't effectively communicate or effectively get your product into the hands of the consumer.

Jeff, thank you so much for sharing that. I really appreciate it. Thank you again for making time for us today. And thank you for coming on. Any parting thoughts? Anything else you wanted to share?

BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

Jeff: I just ... Last thought is that, you know, selling online, selling on Amazon is not easy. The people that try to make it seem like it's really easy just probably want to get your money, right?

Dan: Yeah.

Jeff: I like to say it's really, really hard. And if you want me to help you, we're here to help you. We just happen to be good at it. We've been around. We've been doing it a while. But it's not easy. It does require a strategy. I think that right now it's a super hot thing, so there's a lot of people in the space who are air quote "experts" who aren't really any better than anybody else. So, you know, be cautious of who you're taking your information from and what their intent is. And, you know, is it matching the goals of what you're trying to accomplish? And if you meet somebody who knows what they're talking about and is aligned with your goals and is looking to better you while bettering themselves, then you're probably in a good point for moving forward.

Dan: And on that note, can you tell us a little bit about Seller Labs? And how would someone connect with you and your team?

Jeff: Yeah. So the best way to connect with me is to do it on LinkedIn. If you don't want to do it on LinkedIn, then you can do it on our website, sellerlabs.com/contact. As I said, we're a software company around reputation management, advertising management, and listing optimization. We do have a managed service around all of those, so you can either use our software and do it yourself, or you can have us do it for you. And we'd love

BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES
Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

to talk Amazon and see if we can help you out. If that's something that you're looking for.

Dan: And again, I cannot thank you enough for coming on. What you shared at Natchcom and what you've shared today, all of the things brands need to be looking out for, I was thoroughly impressed. And the fact that even Jabari from Amazon was leveraging your expertise to help answer the questions that he was answering. So again, thank you for sharing that.

Jeff: Yeah. A lot of times that's because there's only so much that Amazon can say. And so they're a little bit ... You know, they can talk about what is the right thing to do and the wrong thing to do, but they can't give the examples. And so that's where Jabari and I have known each other for a little while. We respect each other in the space. And, you know, he knows that Seller Labs takes it very serious when we're able to share information with other people.

And so we're very careful to not send people down the wrong direction. And that becomes really kind of critical for us and to us. And, you know, has allowed us to build a good reputation in the space and become a very strong thought leader in being able to share that information. So, thanks. Appreciate that feedback.

Dan: Well, and the honesty and the authenticity between what you're sharing now and what you shared that day at Natchcom, that again is why ... Where it resonated with me. And that's why I wanted to have you on. So thank you so much for time today.

Empowering Brands | Raising The Bar

Jeff: Thank you. I appreciate you having me on.

Dan: I'd like to thank Jeff for coming on today. If you ever get a chance to listen to him or listen to any of his talks, it's well worth your time. He's so articulate and he has so much great information to share. I'll be certain to put a link to Seller Labs in the show notes and on the podcast webpage.

          This week's download is my free Turnkey Sales Story Strategies Course. We talked about the importance of having a compelling selling story, both online and in traditional retailer. A selling story that resonates with the consumers who buy your product or who want to buy your product. This is what that course is about. This is what it teaches you. It teaches you to understand, really understand and really get to know who your core consumer is. Who the ideal consumer is to buy your product. And then to be able to leverage that within your selling story.

          I've worked with a lot of brands and honestly, very few brands do this well, if at all. This is an opportunity for you to level the playing field between the big brands and the small brands. Don't take this for granted. You can get the course and learn more about Sellers Labs and get the podcast show notes on brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session103.

          Thank you again for listening. And I look forward to seeing you in the next show.

Seller Labs https://www.sellerlabs.com

Thanks again for joining us today. Make sure to stop over at brandsecretsandstrategies.com for the show notes along with more great brand building articles and resources. Check out my free course Turnkey Sales Story Strategies, your roadmap to success. You can find that on my website or at TurnkeySalesStoryStrategies.com/growsales. Please subscribe to the podcast, leave a review, and recommend it to your friends and colleagues.
Sign up today on my website so you don't miss out on actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.

I appreciate all the positive feedback. Keep your suggestions coming.

Until next time, this is Dan Lohman with Brand Secrets and Strategies where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.