

## **BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES PODCAST #131**

Hello and thank you for joining us today. This is the Brand Secrets and Strategies Podcast #131

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 really appreciate you for listening today. We spend a lot of time talking about how expensive retail is. It's pay to play. But there are better ways to get your product on more store shelves and into the hands of more shoppers. One of the best ways to do that is with a robust and solid business strategy that includes digital. Let me explain. With traditional strategies, you go out and you raise money. Then you raise more money. Then you raise more money, and then after you do that, you raise more money because you're taught that the only way that you can get your product on a retailer shelf is by spending a lot of

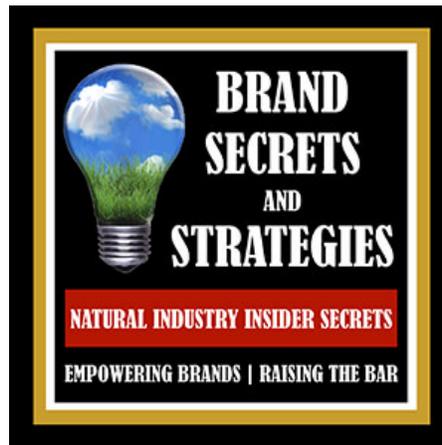


money to do it. You essentially pay to play, you pay to get your product on the store shelves.

Let's face it, this strategy is not sustainable especially for small brands. I believe that this is the primary reason why over 80% of natural brands fail within the first year. I'm committed to changing that, which is a big reason why this podcast exists. I have a firm belief that a CEO should not be a perpetual fundraiser. One of the best ways to avoid this and to develop a solid following for your product is with a solid digital strategy. Let me explain. It costs a lot less money for you to sell your products on your own website, or with an online provider like an Amazon, for example.

Now, while I'm a huge proponent for natural retailers, it's sometimes really difficult to get your products on their store shelves when you consider what it costs to get your products into a distributor and then go through a broker and then get it on a retailer shelf. This can be extremely expensive, and the inefficiencies in the supply chain can actually bankrupt many brands. For this reason, I frequently suggest that brands start with an online strategy, a digital strategy, a strategy to help get your products into the hands of more shoppers before you go the traditional route of brick and mortar.

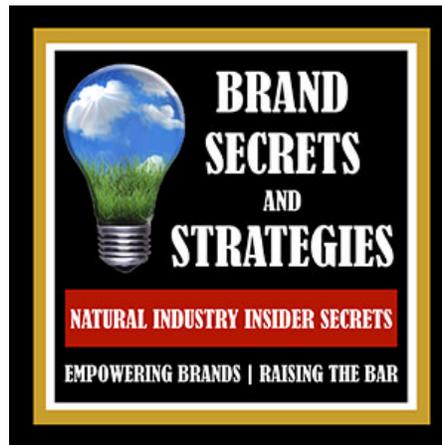
There are several key reasons why I love this strategy. One, you get to develop awareness about your brand, around your brand, so that you can actually leverage your community to help drive sales in a specific retailer. Additionally, the ability to develop a community, a strong loyal community around your brand is the best way to develop a solid marketing strategy, as well as a lot of other benefits that we talk about frequently on this podcast.



Now, the other reason why I think a strategy like this makes sense is because it allows brands to gain some runway and to gain some momentum so that when they do gain traction in traditional retail, they're in a better position to sell their product and to support it. That's what today's story is about. It's about a brand that was able to leverage a digital strategy to help gain momentum in traditional brick and mortar. This dual strategy is the secret sauce behind Wild Zora's success. In this podcast, you're going to learn what they did so that you can leverage those strategies to help grow your brand.

Before I go any further, I want to give a shout out to a listener who left a great review. This is the main reason that I put together this podcast. Remember, it's about you and it's for you. Kelly W. says, "Anyone in the emergence and brand space for natural organic should take the time to listen to Daniel's podcast and check out his courses. As a packaging professional trying to change your world myself, Daniel is giving brands an actual roadmap with the travel tools needed to take control of your relationship with your retailers and not with your checkbook." Thanks, Kelly. I appreciate the feedback.

If you'd like me to read your review on the podcast, then leave a review on iTunes, send me an email or a comment on any of my post. If you like the podcast, don't forget to share it with a friend, subscribe, and leave a review. I also want to remind you that at the end of every episode is one free downloadable guide. I always include one easy to download, quick to digest strategy that you can instantly adopt and make your own, one that you can use to grow sustainable sales and compete more effectively. Remember,

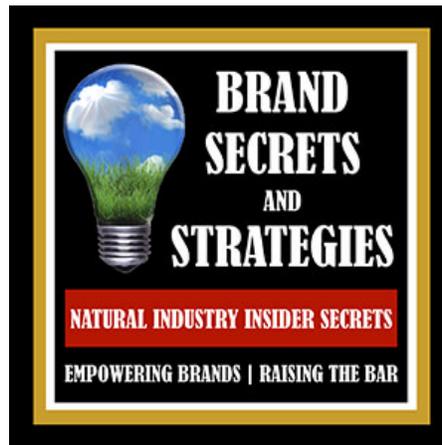


the goal here is to get your product in more retailer shelves and into the hands of more shoppers.

Now, here's Josh with Wild Zora. Josh, thank you for coming on today. Can you please start by telling us a little bit about yourself and your journey to Wild Zora?

Josh: Oh, hi Dan. My name is Josh Tabin. I am the co-founder and husband of Wild Zora, and Zora my wife for the last 20 years. We live here in Northern Colorado, and we run this little food business that's called Wild Zora. Actually, we started out making a dehydrated, I guess you'd call it for lack of a better word, an energy bar. My wife and I and our kids, when we moved to Colorado, we found ourselves spending more time out hiking and doing outdoor activities here in nature out around our house and we were eating things that we found in the grocery stores like walnut bars and Clif Bars. We just found that they have a lot of sugar, specifically grain, starch, and sugar and they taste good but it sort of spiked our blood sugar and very shortly after eating them, we found that we would lose a lot of our energy because our blood sugar would come crashing down. Even though we'd eaten a lot of calories, some of those bars might have as many as 300 calories, we just felt like we weren't getting sustained energy.

Zora just had this idea that she could solve that problem by having a dehydrated snack that we could carry with us that would be made out of the things more like what we would eat for lunch or dinner, so namely meat, grass-fed and free range animals, mixed with organic fruits and vegetables. She started to take those ingredients and dehydrate them into a bar shape and that's how the Wild Zora Meat and Veggie Bar was born, and that was



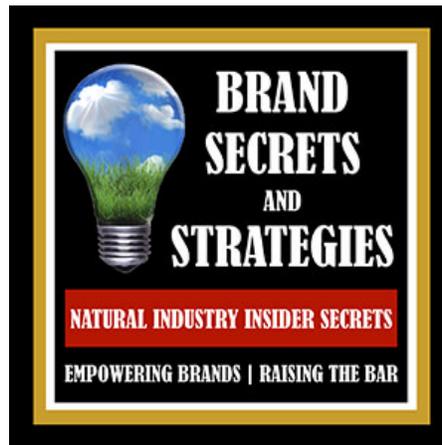
our first product. We started making it in our house and selling them at the Farmers' Market in Fort Collins, Colorado, and got some real world feedback from people out there that got a chance to try those early versions. Then that led to refining the product and the packaging and finally getting into our first stores.

The first stores were... There was a little co-op in downtown Fort Collins, and also a little grocery store called Beavers Market. Those were our first two stores and then we soon moved into Whole Foods and Natural Grocer here in the Rocky Mountain region. That was our launch. I think in our very first year, we got into about 50 stores, and that's how we kind of decided that we had something that was worthwhile and people seemed to like and they were buying and buying again. We joined, I think, in the middle of that year, a local food industry organization that happens to be the largest of its kind in the world, I think. It's called Naturally Boulder and we met a lot of other folks making food and starting food companies. I think, Dan, that's how we met.

Dan: Well, do you remember that exactly because I do?

Josh: Yeah. I'm not sure I remember the exact moment, but I know that shortly after that we had talked in more depth at the Pitch Slam's event. That was all the way back in 2015, wasn't it?

Dan: It was, but yeah. The first time I met you, you probably take it way back, I met you at the Naturally Boulder Spring Fling. Now, first of all, I got to tell you, when I first saw your car out front as I walked in, I thought, "How audacious?" Here's a guy with a no name product putting his car right in front where everyone needs to walk by it and thinking, "That's brilliant." That was really, really

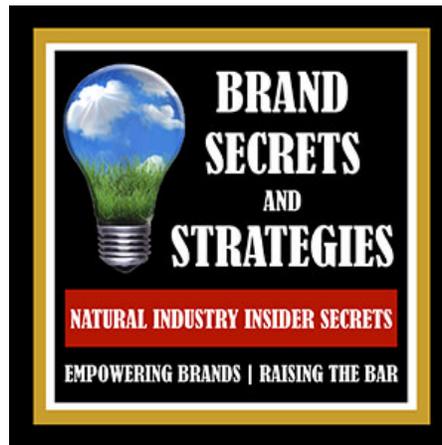


cool. Then you came and you found me and I don't remember exactly. I think you had read a couple of my articles or something like that, and it was almost like you were a drug dealer. I mean, you're like, "I've got something I want to show you, but I can't let anyone else see it," type of thing.

It was kind of funny. You dragged me over to where your lovely wife was and you're explaining this product to me, this concept, and you were asking, what do I think? I remember at the time, you were frustrated because you didn't know how to go to market and you didn't know what steps to take. Everyone had told you to go to Whole Foods and retail, and you were thinking about the online piece. I remember telling you, "Hey, you need to develop a strategy offline, away from traditional brick and mortar to build out your e-commerce business so that you've got more runway to be able to fuel your success later."

Now, like I said, that was the first time we talked. It was at a Naturally Boulder Spring Fling event, which is interesting because Spring Fling is this week again, coming up. But the point being is that I had an opportunity, had the privilege of meeting you guys back around one of your first iterations of your product. Your packaging was really basic and you were just trying to figure out, "Okay, do I really want to do this full time or not?" I remember one of the things I really fell in love with, what you guys were sharing with me, is that you had a sincere passion and desire to make a change that did make a difference. But yet, you really didn't have the confidence yet to say, "Yes, this is where we're going to plant our flag. This is what we're going to do."

Yeah, it's thrilling to see that you've actually grown and become a lot more. Thanks again for pulling me aside that day.



Josh: Yeah. Actually, now I remember that conversation. We were standing just outside in that sort of garden atrium area, right?

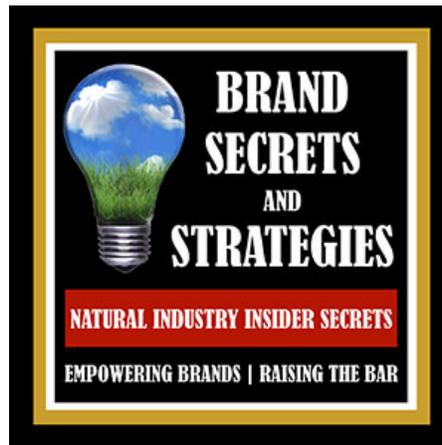
Dan: Yeah.

Josh: Yeah, we were really just getting off the ground. We had that first generation product and packaging. We hadn't yet gone into the Pitch Slam event which would be later that year. We probably weren't even in 50 stores yet. I know that by the end of that year, just after the Pitch Slam competition, we hit that 50 number. I remember that because when we won the Pitch Slam, we got introduced to some wonderful people who were just so helpful. Justin Gold from Justin's Nut Butters, Rick Sterling from Sterling-Rice Group, Steve Hughes from... I think just had wound up his work at Boulder Brands, now he's at Sunrise Ventures. We got access to these folks who just gave us so much information and introductions to other members of their teams.

It was from all of their help and encouragement that in the next year, we grew from 50 to over 800 stores. It was a huge jump for us in revenue in the retail chain or channel. Yeah. That led us all the way to the end of '16 and sort of a crisis that happened that year. Should I continue or just give you the whole-?

Dan: No. No, please do. But one of the things that I do want to come back around to is that you had no background in food at all. Your background is very eclectic and very different. Let's get to that later, but no, please continue.

Josh: Yeah. I did have entrepreneurial background, I had started technology companies and real estate companies. I did have, I guess, you could say was food. I was the co-founder of a



company that built coffee shops. We built over 300 coffee shops over a six-year period in former communist countries in Central Europe. Then it was rolled up into another larger business called AmRest in Poland. We were building restaurants, not food manufacturing, but it wasn't bad overall. I did have that experience. I've just had general business experience, so yeah, you're exactly right, getting a natural food CPG business off the ground here was something new to learn about.

Then as I was saying earlier, just the run up to getting into the first nearly a thousand stores was a big eye-opening experience for us because we realized just how capital-intensive it was. Getting into all those stores, we started to accumulate all these expenses, just the free fuel expense, the ongoing promotional expense, coupons, and demos, and of course, chargebacks, unfortunately. Just so many fees started coming at us that the cash just started to dwindle. We weren't cash flow positive, our business was not profitable even though it was more than 10 times bigger.

Yeah, it was really an urgent, as I said, sort of a crisis situation. Zora and I had some tough conversations and I told her that, "Hey, we're basically about six months away from OOC." In the VC world, that means out of cash. If we hit that point, I'd have to go get a job. That's one of the worst words in my book, worse than a four-letter word, it's a three-letter word. We wouldn't be able to keep working or I wouldn't be able to keep working on it full-time if I had to go out and just earn an income for the family. It was pretty urgent. This is after we had followed so many people's advice about getting in more distribution, and it was all true, it worked. But I also think that a lot of the companies that

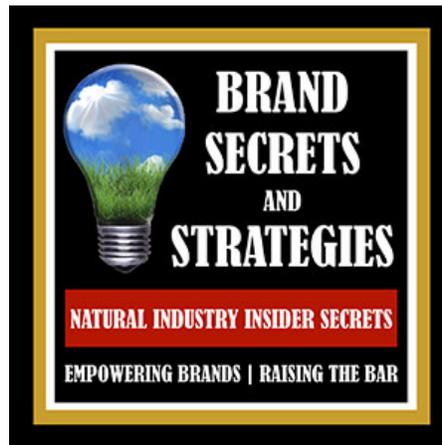


go down that path probably have funding partners or they're VC-backed.

In my business where I basically got to in my career was that I had had several big businesses and big exits, and as our family and been very successful. But then I had, just before coming back to America in 2012, we had a big disaster. I had a business that exploded, and it was a spectacular failure, and we lost lots of money. The family was... We were not in the same kind of situation. We didn't have a ton of money to invest. We had a little bit. We had a seed investment that we could make, but that was about it. By late 2016, it had been spent, so that was it. There was no more money to put in.

Zora and I had just gone through a rough experience with a VC-backed business where we lost control of the business and we ended up getting crammed down and shut out and we didn't get any return after that business had sold. We're very gun-shy, very skittish of going out to venture capital. Plus, I just really believed that the business was too small and it was too early. We didn't want to dilute ourselves to a minority share in such an early stage. I wanted to do it on our own power without investors, but we were just faced with a situation where we're burning cash and had a very limited runway.

What we did is I think you'd say we pivoted the business and we just shifted all of our emphasis over to online sales. I found a company, they call themselves a brand management company. They are sort of like a broker of brokers, like manage the brokers for us. We had a few different brokers that we were working with, and they just took over that for us, and relieved me of that duty so I was free to focus on figuring out this online thing.

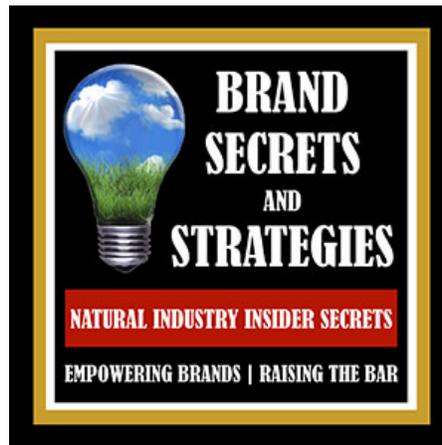


We focused on all the digital marketing activities that we heard about and that we could do. We did email marketing. We did content marketing and SEO, so both technical and content-based SEO. We did pay per click advertising, Google, and Bing, and then also on the social media channels, of course, we also did social media posts. We looked at how people were interacting with the site so that we could improve our conversion, conversion optimization. We reached out to bloggers and influencers to try to make partnerships and do giveaways and get reviews and just try to generate some outside traffic to our site from other people. We did all of these things. Instead of focusing on any one thing, we just kind of took this omni-channel marketing strategy and tried to do a little bit of everything, and lo and behold, it started to grow.

At the time, I remember our online sales were maybe just a hair under about \$10,000 a month. Within less than a year, maybe about nine months, we grew it all the way to about \$20,000 a month, so it was a nice big chunk-

Dan: Congratulations.

Josh: ... that really helped because it was a very profitable business as well, the direct web business, but all the marketing activities were pointed to bringing traffic to our website. But the really interesting thing that happened is in the middle of this, because we were by one guy who was working on marketing with me and because we were just thinking about digital marketing and online sales all the time, we decided to bring our Amazon business back in house. When we started, we had given our Amazon business to a management, Amazon management company, and they had grown almost zero Amazon business to about \$300 a month.



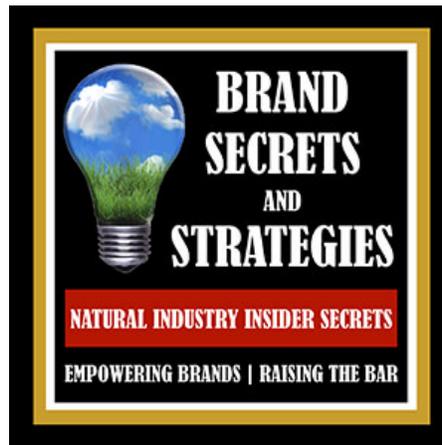
Oh, no. I'm sorry. I think I gave it to them at \$300 a month and they grew it to about \$3,000 a month, which still wasn't that meaningful. It didn't really move the needle. But in this whole nine-month period, while we were focused on all these other marketing activities, we could see their Amazon business grew tremendously. It grew from 3,000 a month to 3,000 a day. It just exploded. Again, it was such a surprising thing because we weren't really focused on it. It's almost like people would hear about us. They would learn about us. They would become aware of us with our marketing activities that brought them to our own website. Some of them would actually try us on our own website, but then they would come back and buy us on Amazon. In fact, we even verified that. We even looked at some of the names of the people that were buying from us before and then they didn't buy again and then we saw their names on Amazon, future Amazon orders, and we could just see that they had moved over to Amazon.

That was really interesting. I think that's really eye-opening, just how relevant Amazon is today. That maybe in the old days, people used to push their shopping cart down the grocery aisle and grab brands that they knew and recognized, I think today, the grocery aisle is on Amazon.

Dan: It is.

Josh: If they know who you are, that's where they buy you.

Dan: Before I hit the record button, you were talking about being where your customers are. That's so critically important, and this is one of the main reasons I wanted to get you on the podcast is because of this part of your story primarily. I mean, love your

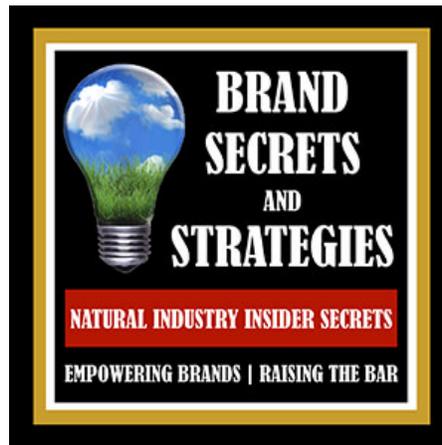


product, love what you guys are doing, but your ability to understand the intersection between traditional retail and online and then be able to take that and build a community around your product and leverage that to even grow sales even more. I had the privilege, Josh, to listen to you speak at NatchCom and one or two other events. One I think was at Naturally Boulder, and then I believe I saw you at Expo West. But I've heard you talk a couple different times on this topic, and it's so critically important. It's part of why you're a part of NatchCom. Let's back up-

Josh: If you've heard me that many times, hopefully, it wasn't boring to keep hearing the same story.

Dan: No, no. I like the different iterations, and this is inspiring. Okay. What I do, my mission, is to help you get your product on more store shelves and in the hands of more shoppers, and that includes online and to your point, let's back up a little bit, retail's pay to play. It is in some ways a blood sport and it is very expensive. If you follow traditional strategies that you're going to learn from all the "experts," and then some, and I don't mean that as a snide comment. I just mean the traditional strategies are that you raise money and then you raise more money and then you raise more money and then after that, you raise more money so that when you get in front of a retailer, like you said, it's, "Sit down, shut up, and get out your checkbook," instead of developing a relationship with that retailer to help the retailer drive sales.

The reason that I do what I do... I'm trying to change the conversation. I want to help you get more runway out of your available resources, one. I want to teach you how to partner with your retailers so that they don't view you as an ATM machine. I

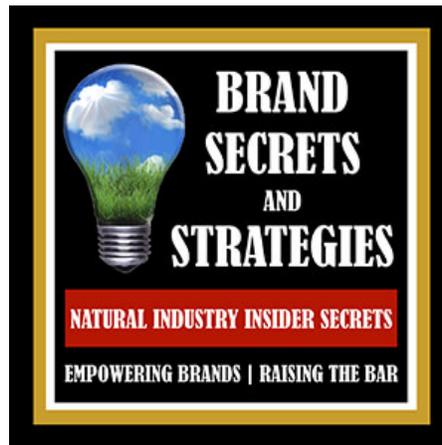


want to show you how to leverage that relationship you have outside of their store to drive traffic in their store so that when you're talking to the retailer, instead of saying, "How much do you need me to pay for a specific promotion that you know is not going to raise the needle?" Then instead, "How can I help you drive traffic in your store by leveraging the strength of the unique consumer that buys my product?" This is kind of where I'm going with this.

One of the things I love about your story, Josh, is that your ability to isolate and understand exactly who your core customer is. Most brands, I would say probably about 99% of brands out there truly don't know who their core customer is, or what their customer avatar looks like. Let's talk about that for a little bit. How did you identify what your customer looks like? Then how do you use that knowledge to help you build your brand around it?

Josh: Well, I'd say that we started out by thinking about the personas of people that like our products. We call them segments basically. It wasn't very scientific, we just kind of talked to people and thought about it and came up with some ideas of who we thought those people were. They were divided at that time. In the early time, I think it was people that were doing some sort of physical activity like maybe a workout or going to gym or yoga and then eating our product post-workout. There were folks who had a specific diet plan that they were following like primal, or paleo, or gluten-free, the Whole30, but not a specific allergy. Then the third group was people with food allergies. They're gluten-free not by choice but because they're celiac.

That's where we started with it. But then pretty shortly after that, we actually started doing surveys of customers, and we started



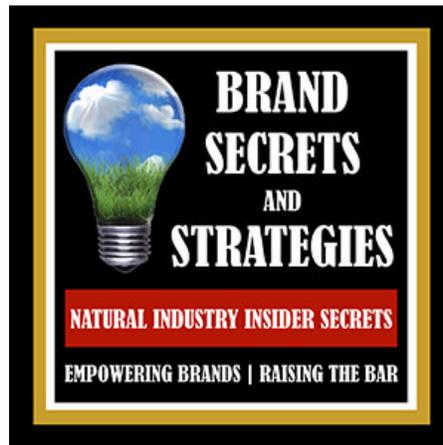
getting them to self-segment. What we found out, it was kind of funny, the biggest reason that people said that they actually bought our products was taste. Duh.

Dan: Good, good, good. That's encouraging.

Josh: That was pretty funny. Yeah. Then the second biggest reason was really interesting, it was that they wanted healthy food outside the home, period. They were just traveling, they were on the move. We hadn't really narrowed that down quite as specifically as that until we had done those surveys. Again, I think that you have to start somewhere. Even to write good survey questions, I think that you have to have some idea who your buyers are. But ultimately, the personas changed quite a bit based on real data that we got out there from talking to the people who were buying them.

Dan: It's so critically important because to your point, you didn't know as much as you know now. As a result, if you knew what you know now, what would you have done differently? My point is this. Knowing your true customer and understanding who your customer is, how they buy your product, why would they choose your product over your competition, etc.? Those are key things that every brand should know, and yet I think very few brands really do know very well. I applaud you for doing that.

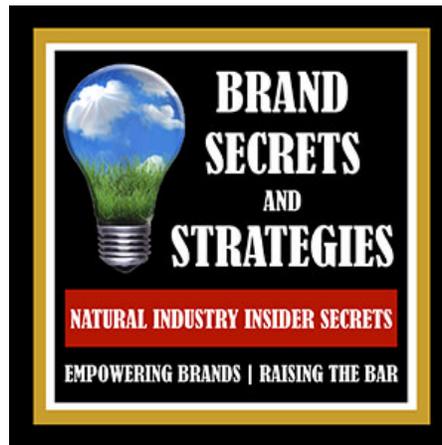
Throughout the survey process, and as you're continuing to iterate and understand your customer better, what does your customer look like today? How would you define that customer, that ideal customer?



Josh: Yeah. We've identified almost a hundred different segments and each segment can be basically a combination of attributes. We have people who are looking for a snack product on the go, but they're also paleo and they happen to be following AIP, an autoimmune protocol diet, right? I mean, that's really specific. If you start to combine those segments together, you can just come up with a giant list. It's interesting, but not quite as practical for real world marketing. What we've done now, just to have a practical-sized list of segments, is that we market to folks who want our products for whatever the reasons are, and people who need our products because they have a specific diet or allergy or food allergy. Those are really broad.

Then of course, there's another group that we don't know yet. That's where we start and we still do more targeted segmenting. For example, if we have an idea of a particular activity that someone does, if we know that they're into yoga, or if they're into backpacking, then we'll send them specific messaging. But overall, we try to keep it as broad as we can so that we don't have to write 10 different versions of an email when we do an email blast.

Dan: Which is a challenge, I get that, but one of the things that I'm seeing materialize here is that you have the unique ability to personalize your offering. Before I hit the record button, you were talking about the business becoming a little bit stagnant. I think this is your way forward. We'll talk about that more in a minute, but the cool thing is that you have the infrastructure. Let's back up and put more of a frame. Let's build out that, what you've built, what you've got in front of you. What I mean by that, Josh, is your Twitter, your Pinterest, and all the different things, the



Google Ads, and all the different things you have in place that allow you or help you build your community outside the retail.

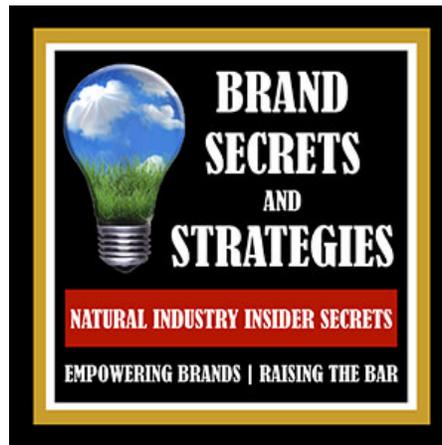
Where I'm going with this is that if I walk into a store and I buy your product, you have absolutely no idea who I am or how I use your product. Your ability to be able to identify who I am, how I use your product, and when I buy it, who do I share it with, how do I use it when I take it home, etc., is key, and that is uniquely different from majority of the brands that are out there, one. Two, then how do we build a unique selling story around that to help you personalize your messaging? Then three, how do we leverage that story to help you drive sales both in traditional retail and offline?

Can you please talk about, what does a unique customer look like? I mean, not necessarily what do they look like, but what strategies, what things do you have in place to understand what your community looks like and where they live and what's unique about them, etc.?

Josh: I'm not sure I know how to answer that question entirely. Maybe it would be helpful for me to just kind of continue on in the sort of the story of where I left off.

Dan: Please do.

Josh: At the end of '16, we had grown all the retail stores, and then basically all of 2017, we just had this massive growth in online and that is really what saved us and kept me out of a job or out of having to go find another job. We got it profitable, and with that profit, we were able to hire more staff in our marketing team. Our marketing team grew from one to two to three to four,

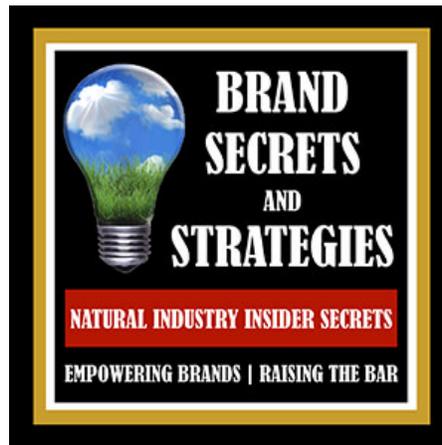


and I think now we're six on our marketing team internally. The business went along. I guess also just there was more awareness of us out there because I guess we were effective in getting the word out on the digital channels that we got some notice. Some retailers finally came back to us. I was pretty reticent to go back into retail, had sort of felt like I just escaped and we didn't lose any of our retail clients during this run up in online. We kept all the 800 stores.

But at that point going into 2018, we had an opportunity to go into a much bigger retailer. Now, that was Walmart, and I guess they convinced me that they weren't going to hammer us as hard as maybe their older previous generation's reputation would have said. They promised that we could sell direct so we didn't have to go through a distributor. They had given us a lot of promises, and so we decided to go down that path.

Now fast forward another year, and all the way into 2019, and we're in Walmart. We also expanded our relationship with REI stores nationwide now. We have a profitable retail channel business, which is kind of amazing because I didn't think it would be possible if you'd asked me back in 2016. But basically holding the reins very firmly on the distributors and getting as much direct retailer business as possible has allowed us to do that. Now, we had the shift in this last year of building up the online business and then going back to retail and building that up again, kind of another big leg-up.

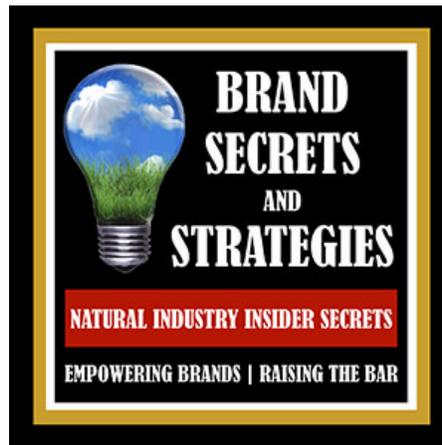
Our business right now, you wouldn't call it anything but segments. We've doubled already this year and we're halfway through 2019. But I think what you're referring to is that our online channel specifically has stopped its wonderful growth curve



that we've been enjoying. The stagnant part of business is online, which is unfortunate because I love that part of our business. We have a lot of control, we have very strong margins, and it was the thing that really got us out of trouble initially. I don't want to see it just stop growing, and so that's where my head scratching is right now. I feel like we got the first base with the first shift in emphasis toward online. Then we followed that up with a big strong push into retail and got our first retail accounts opened up and profitable and scalable. Now, I'm just kind of wondering, "Okay, what do we do from here? How do I get the growth engine turned back on with our online sales?"

But it hasn't been obvious. The same things that we did, and I rattled off those six or seven things that we were doing to get the online business started, just doing more of them doesn't seem to be moving the needle. Unfortunately, I can't give your listeners any great advice because I don't know the answer. We haven't figured it out yet.

Dan: I completely understand. I think I might have some help or might have some ideas for you. Backing up a little bit, push versus a pull strategy. Push strategy is what every brand does today. It's where you get out your checkbook, you pay for whatever. A pull strategy is where you have a community behind you and you generate an interest from the retailer. The retailer, like you said, calls you and says, "I want you in my store." The reason I went back to this and the reason I highlighted this is because you just demonstrated that because of that, you were able to negotiate some terms with Walmart, REI, and other retailers in terms of how you're going to distribute your product and some of the things you're going to do. The point being is this, you've been



able to effectively avoid a lot of those costs that other brands can't because you have a community, because you have a story outside of traditional retail.

Kudos to you, and that's why it's so critically important. Your digital strategy has helped you get to the point where you don't need to just continually pay to play all the time, and you're just constantly feeding the beast, so to speak. You're in a much better place than most brands, so that's exciting.

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that's true.

Dan: It is. Again, this is what I think is unique about what you guys are doing. Every time I heard you speak, this is the story that I was hearing you talk about even though that's not the way people think about in this industry. When you talk to the experts, etc., the venture capitalists, etc., it's all about raise money, raise money, raise money, and then go pay for whatever the retailer wants you to pay for, etc. That is not a sustainable strategy for, in my opinion, any brand.

Josh: Yeah, I agree.

Dan: Thank you. I think that we need to change the conversation. Let me digress a little bit. Instead of traditional retail is about, how do we lower the price? How do we get the product in the consumers' hands at the lowest absolute price? You should not apologize for the fact that you're using grass-fed or pasture-raised meats. You should not apologize for using organic, etc. What I mean by that, Josh, is you've got a premium product, you should be able to charge a premium price for it. If you think about it, people don't mind paying a premium for decadent

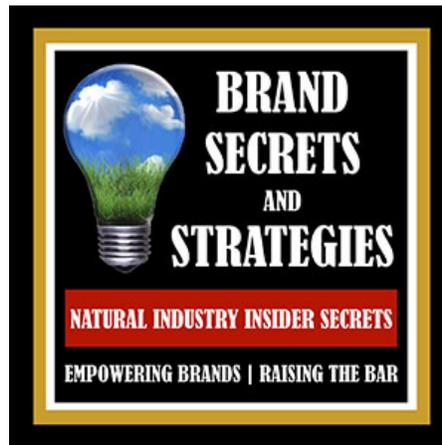


products: chocolates and alcohols and luxury items, etc. Why in the food business are we so worried about a customer complaining about the fact that we're a penny higher today than we were yesterday or something like that?

What I'm getting at is we need to change the conversation from this is a commodity, its price-driven, etc., to this is what your core customer really wants. Now that you know who your core customer is, even though you've got a really broad list, a hundred different segments of what your customer looks like, what I'm going to recommend to you and I talked to you about how I would help solve one of your bottlenecks at the end of the show, kind of getting to that right about now is that I would recommend to you that you think about ways to personalize your messaging the way you communicate to your audience.

Again, I mentioned a little bit ago that if I buy your product, you have no idea who I am if I go to a retail store, but if you can take me out of that retail store and build a community around me, and if you can, instead of promoting a product in a retail store, which is typically a black hole, about 70% to 90% of all trade dollars are wasted, and the reason for that is because of the inefficiencies, etc. If you can find a way to more effectively promote your products and get your community involved with... You reach out to me and say, "Dan, I'm thinking about creating a new product. What do you think about this?" And you leverage your relationship with your community through your website, etc., to help personalize your messaging. That's one.

Two, as you personalize your messaging, then you're able to leverage it back to retail or leverage that with Amazon or leverage that through your own store. As you're able to do that,

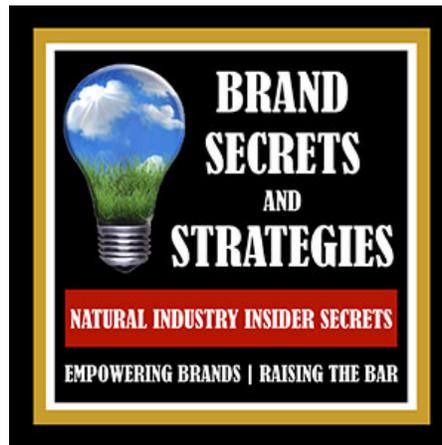


then you're better able to meet my needs. What I heard you say was that you develop this great understanding of what your customer looks like. I think now the opportunity is for you to personalize your marketing around those core customer attributes. If you took your list of a hundred, which things logically group together, and then what are the top things, the top personas, or top avatars that you think you need to focus on? Then build your marketing, your online email marketing, etc., around that so that you can nurture that group.

I think that's how you grow because where I'm going with this is that if I am part of your community, and if you make me feel like I'm important because of the nurturing effort and everything else, then I'm going to evangelize your products. Then I'm going to help you grow incrementally, and you're not going to be paying me to do this through influencer marketing, etc. But more importantly, it's by turning an occasional customer into a loyal evangelist. Does that make sense? What are your thoughts?

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I think that it does make sense and we have thought about it and we talk about it internally. An interesting place where we are with the business is that we've grown a nice chunk and we got ourselves to profitability just barely, and that allowed us to grow our team. There are a lot of tasks, frankly, that are required just to maintain the digital marketing program and again, that list that I rattled off, it takes labor. You could go to service companies and have an outside service company do these things for us, but I think we would probably have pay for their profitability too.

As I've analyzed it here, and there are a few exceptions, we have hired a service company successfully. A PR agency, for example,



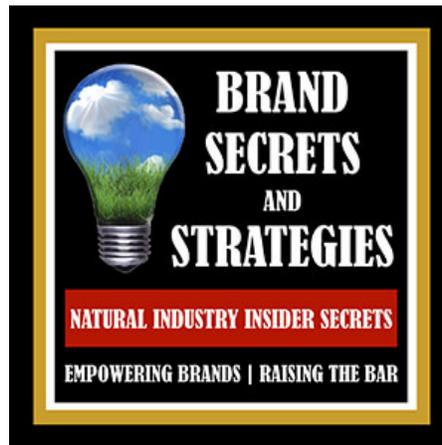
was very successful for us. But I still feel like the majority of the heavy lifting that we need to do we get done more efficiently with internal staff.

Dan: I would agree.

Josh: But because of the stage of our business, we haven't been able to hire really experienced people, right? I mean, that's really one of the biggest advantages in getting a service agency involved, is that you get their highest most expensive and experienced people involved to some degree on your account, and I'm really feeling that pain right now. I guess we're just trying to push through this difficult period and somehow grow just that next notch bigger so that we can afford to hire a real honest-to-goodness experienced marketing manager or a marketing director. That's the person who will have had experience developing the personas as you've just described because no one on our team right now has ever done it. While we all talk about it and we recognize the need, and we kind of have tried to do it, we've never done it before, so no one is ever going to do something perfectly the first time.

We're just kind of stuck at that point. We're not big enough yet to afford the person that we need to help us, but we are big enough to recognize that we have the need. We're just waiting. We're waiting till we can attract that person and/or afford that person who can help us get to the next step.

Dan: I feel your pain. One of the things I wanted to share with you while you were talking about that is that, unfortunately, Josh, a lot of the solution providers that are out there tend to commoditize the shopper. What I mean by that is that we're not all female-headed household 2.3 kids, etc. I joke about the fact



that a lot of solution providers identify the low house consumer as someone who eats a couple salads and goes for a walk. Whereas in our world, we know that that consumer will not settle. They are not price sensitive and they don't want packaging that is going to end up in the landfill and have got a lot of criteria that they're trying to meet, and it's about nutrition. If you are what you eat, what you eat matters, and where I'm going with that is that that specific consumer is our ideal consumer. That's the target consumer that every brand, especially in this industry, should be shooting for.

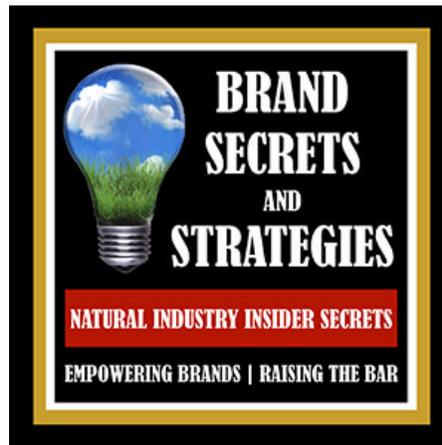
Yet, I find that most agencies don't really understand or appreciate what that consumer looks like. I'm going to ask you a couple questions. How much can you segment your list through your email marketing system?

Josh: I mean, theoretically, we've been segmenting into as many segments as you can think of. Practically speaking, it's difficult to write more than just a handful of versions of each marketing email blast. I think at the moment, we typically put out three or four for email blast, and that's been a practical size from the size of our team right now. There's no technical limit to it.

Dan: You have the ability to tag customers any way you want. What I mean by that is whether they're a vegan or a gluten-free or whatever, you can tag customers any way you want.

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Dan: Because my email marketing provider, I have that same ability, so that's tremendously helpful. I get what you're saying in terms of bandwidth and everything else. I really feel based upon what



you've shared with me, that the opportunity for you is to come up with buckets of people maybe on a whiteboard or something, and then start segmenting around that. I know that it sounds very basic, and I'm sure you've already thought of that. But again, I think at the end of the day, your ability to personalize your communication to that particular person I think is ideal.

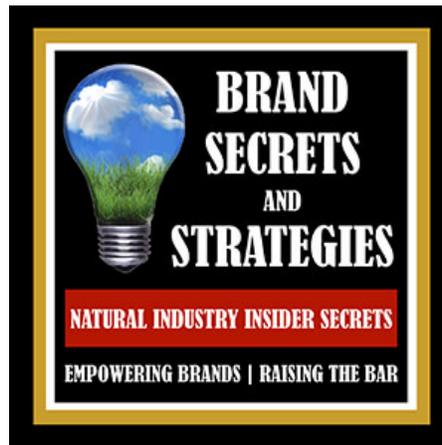
Now, one of the things that I've been trying to learn myself from my own business is how to segment brands, how to segment people for my email list, etc. It is an art, and it is very difficult to really hone in on what makes each entrepreneur different. A new brand versus an old brand versus an established brand, that's pretty easy, but to get into some of the other things is challenging.

One of the things that I want to suggest is that when you look at the data, and because of the fact that since most of the data's commoditized, it doesn't break out the consumer in terms of what are the attributes that they buy, how do they buy their product? That might be another thing for you to consider. Are you using any data, any syndicated data or any store-level data when you're trying to develop your strategies for traditional retailer?

Josh: Syndicated data. I don't know what kind of data you mean.

Dan: SPINS, Nielsen, and ROI specifically.

Josh: Oh, no. I have seen it. I know that when we won Pitch Slam, they gave us one free snapshot of data, and so I did look at that. But, again, I lack the sophistication and experience to be able to do something, to create some actionable tasks based on that. That hasn't happened. Now, we do look at data on an ongoing basis.



We have access, for example, to the retailing system at Walmart. We can see literally all the way down to the transaction level. I can see what's happening, where products are being sold exactly in the world, but it doesn't give me much insight into the person.

I do have insights that we get from Facebook and Google Analytics that does have some information that we can use for segmentation, plus we can connect it to the purchases so we have some idea of somebody continues to... If they buy an AIP product three times in a row, I've got a pretty good idea that they're probably an AIP segmented customer. We have one guy in our office who specializes in data. He is a data analyst, marketing data analyst. He crunches numbers and uses them to create unique Facebook audiences, for example, to send particular advertising messages.

That's happening, but as far as getting SPINS or ROI data out there and trying to use that to effect some type of retail strategy, as I said, I just don't have the horsepower internally. We don't have anybody who's ever done that.

Dan: Well, that's what I do. I'm not trying to obviously sell you anything but my thought is this. I wonder if it would be beneficial, I think it would be, for you to understand how your products interact with other products within the category. And because the categories are not segmented around the way that customers shop them, especially in your category, especially since your products are unique, I think that might give you some additional insight as to when you're ready to start personalizing your messaging and communicating with retailers both online and offline, how you could differentiate your product.

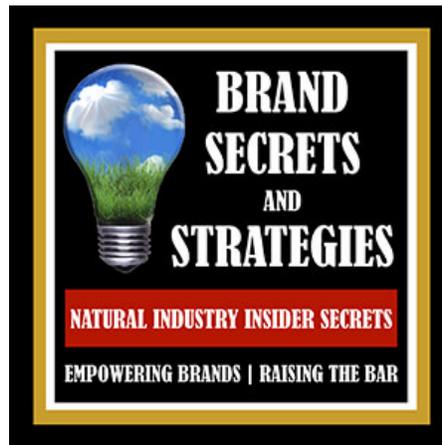


Something that we might want to consider. We could talk about that more offline. But what I'm getting at is trying to hone in on, what are the trends in the market? What are the trends that you may or may not be missing? For example, just generic trends, what's happening with gluten-free? Is it growing or shrinking in your category? What about if we throw in some of the different attributes that are being measured by the various syndicated data providers but yet, we could measure, are those growing or not? That might give you some additional understanding in terms of what the opportunities are.

You've got all this robust data, but unfortunately, it's only about your product for the most part. What if we were to overlay something else on it? We can talk about that, like I said, offline, but I think that that might be an opportunity for you to broaden your understanding of what's possible, and then go after that unique whatever it is, where those consumers are, where those consumers are buying your products to help identify and kind of get it out in front of the curve what they're looking for. Does that make sense?

Josh: Yeah, yeah. I'm a little worried, of course, because I remember the price tag on the SPINS data. As I said, we never bought it, we never paid for it. But then again, maybe no one has ever showed me what type of ROI we could actually expect, or what would be possible from properly utilizing that data, which again, I lack the experience to do that, but maybe we could find someone who could help us.

Dan: Again, that's what I do. I'm not saying one data source over another data source. Data can be very expensive. I will say that one of the biggest challenges that brands have is they go out and

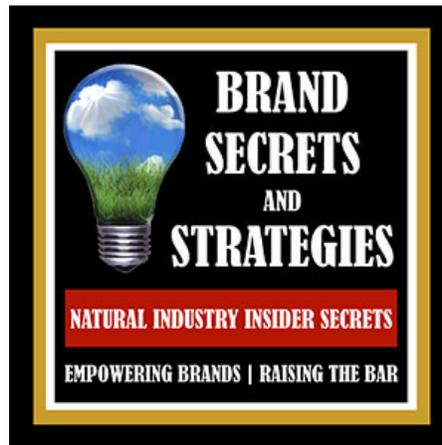


buy the data and they don't know enough to be able to ask the right questions. The salespeople for the syndicated data providers are focused on selling the data, and they look at the data from the cookie cutter world, etc. What I do that's unique is I help you identify, first of all, the right kind of data you need, segment the data the way that it makes sense around the way the consumer buys the product, and then give you a deliverable that goes way beyond that.

My point is this. There are few people out there that do this, but when you look at the data generically speaking, you're not going to get the insights that you want. It's not going to provide you with the value that I'm talking about here. But yet, I think that if you were to get the right kind of data, the right kind of mix, and there are ways to get it fairly inexpensively, I think that this would provide additional insights that would really help you. Where I'm going with this is, and then we could overlay that with robust data that you've got right now that you're already capturing. My point is to build a data center, to build a better understanding of not only what's going on in consumer market, etc., but what the trends are.

What I kind of hear you coming back to is we built this business, it's doing amazing, but yet you feel a little bit stuck. My gut tells me that maybe there's been a shift in the way people are buying food or thinking about food, different attributes. What's more important than the grass-fed versus whatever? I don't know the answer to that, but that might be something worth exploring, if you're interested.

Josh: Yeah, sure. Absolutely.

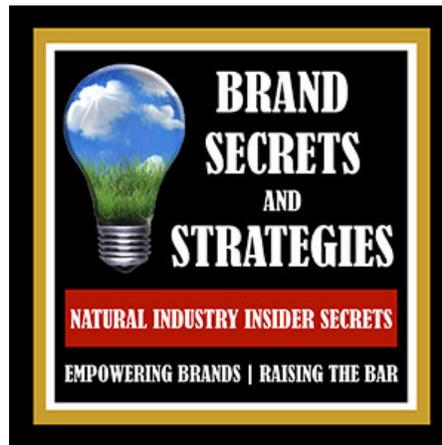


Dan: Then being able to overlay that on there. Anyway, I didn't mean to get off way into the weeds, but when you're talking about your digital strategy, I really want to applaud you for what you've been able to do because I think what you've done is an example. Not should be but is an example for other brands to follow. Being able to develop a strong community, a solid community outside of traditional retail is put you in a unique position where you have insights that other brands don't have. Are there other ways-?

Josh: I was going to say what we really have is a runway because we're not burning cash right now. I've gotten myself, at least to the first lily pad, and it's much more comfortable position than we were in back in 2016 where we can take a step back and then try to figure out, how do we get to the next lily pad? I know there are a lot of brands that don't have that luxury. If they burn up all their cash and they're still not profitable, then it's more or less back to crisis mode. That can be very, very uncomfortable. Thankfully, we're not at that point.

Dan: Absolutely. This is exactly what I'm getting at. I mean, imagine this. Obviously, this isn't going to happen, but if every retailer were to shut their doors, most brands would be out of business overnight. You still got something, you could still sell your product. You're in a unique position, and one of the things that I recommend to every brand and this is what I was recommending to you on that first time we connected, is that if you can build a brand offline, and then build a community around it, then that's going to give you something that you can leverage for future down the road.

As you build this out, what are some of the other ways that you're leveraging this? Then what I wanted to do is pivot into,



how does this relate to what you're doing with NatchCom? What is NatchCom? Then how are you working with other brands to help understand the strategies that you use?

Josh: Well, I mean, NatchCom just happened I think because we dived into the world of online marketing. We met a few folks, Jennifer Krupey and Jim Moscou and a few others and they recognized the same things that we did and that digital marketing is really the... That is the first safe lily pad that a food CPG company like ours can jump to and they wanted to help others do it too. That was the genesis of NatchCom. They asked me if I could help because they had seen that I had just made that transition from our first early retail customers to our first reasonably sized chunk of our online business, and they wanted me to share that story. I've done that. I consider NatchCom to be partners with me in that.

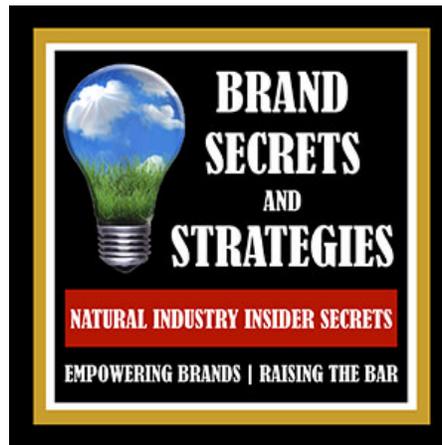
Dan: Good group.

Josh: Hopefully, I've been able to help some other companies as I've been involved in that organization to make that first jump. I stay involved because now I'm hoping to perhaps find someone else within that group or associated with them that can help us get to the next level as well.

Dan: Absolutely.

Josh: That's my hope.

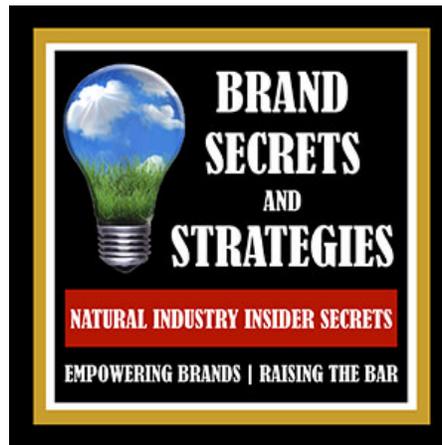
Dan: Well, and it's a good group. I really appreciate what they're doing and I've put so much value in to what they're doing. I've had Ted Ning on the podcast, Robbie Vitrano, and Jennifer and Jim both, and it's now you. The reason that I've been focused on this is,



again, how do you help brands build outside of traditional retail so that they can leverage that relationship with their unique customer to drive sales in retail, both online and in traditional retail? You've spoken on several stages regarding this. Can you talk a little bit about some of the things that you cover? I'm actually looking at one of your decks right now. What are some of the things that you would recommend to a brand that wanted to go down this path?

Josh: Yeah. I think the key insights for us were... There were just a few of them. One of them sort of ran counter to my background, my business background. I've always learned that focus is power and that in almost anything that you do in business, you want to take the beachhead, a small one first before expanding out into the broader whatever it is, marketing strategy or any other business strategy. But here in this digital marketing space, I think I've found the opposite. I think that if you're just getting started, you can't have a leaky vessel. You can't spend money on Facebook ads and then forget to spend money on or not choose not to spend money on conversion optimization because you're going to have a leaky bucket.

I think that all of the digital marketing activities that you do tend to help influence each other. You see an ad and then you see some natural SEO and then you see a Facebook post and it all contributes. The biggest example of that was probably Amazon, right? Because we weren't even focused on Amazon and suddenly we grew on Amazon a business that was even bigger than our direct web business. Yeah. I think that was the biggest takeaway in that very early stage was don't neglect any part of it. Do all of it. Now, there's lots of tactical pieces of advice that I would give



someone who are actually rolling up their sleeves and getting into the execution of it, things like the pay per click advertising campaigns. I think Google is in the business of getting your money out of your pocket.

Dan: They are.

Josh: Keyword ads are not very effective very early on, but on the other hand, branded keywords, in other words, advertising on your own brand name is extremely effective because it means that it's another result that shows up in a Google search and it pushes down any other related results, which are most likely in the early stages to be competitors, and so it makes you more visible which increases your overall conversion rate even though maybe in principle, you're kind of annoyed that you have to pay Google to show a result that is your own company. Right?

Dan: Right.

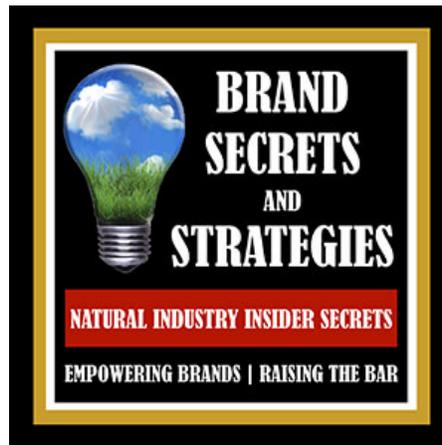
Josh: That's a very specific tactical piece of advice. There's a bunch of other pieces of advice I would give someone around the creation of their product landing pages. They're just things that various search engines, both Google, Bing, and also the Amazon A9 engine want to see. You need to pay attention to it, but you can't really game the system. If you go too far... I actually saw a piece of data once around the number of times that you list certain keywords. If you want really good organic visibility on a keyword, you need to have it listed in certain places on your product landing page a certain number of times, but not more than another number of times because once you cross over that limit, then they actually downgrade your visibility instead of upgrading because they think you're gaming the system.



Yeah, there are lots of things like that. I've actually been asked by several companies, probably half a dozen now in the past year to come and help them. I've had some companies come and hire me and I spend half a day or a day with them, and I've just shared with them everything that we learned in that first stage that we went through from a very tiny online presence to the first million dollars of online revenue. Of course, now, I feel like I need to find the person that's gone from one to five million in online revenue so they could help me. That's the next thing that I'm looking for, but I guess it's always an ongoing process. Learning and then, of course, teaching others what you've already learned up to that point.

Dan: Well, it is. Again, that's one of the reasons why I wanted to have you on the podcast because this is so valuable. To challenge brands, not to get, but to challenge brands to think more strategically, and to be able to use some of the strategies that the big brands are using, but yet I don't think they use them effectively because they tend to commoditize or talk at us and not to us. One of the things I think makes natural natural is we have more intimate relationship with our core customer kind of going back to the personalization, all the other stuff we talked about. But in terms of your digital strategy, what are some of the other recommendations that you would give to a brand? What would you recommend to your younger self? How about that?

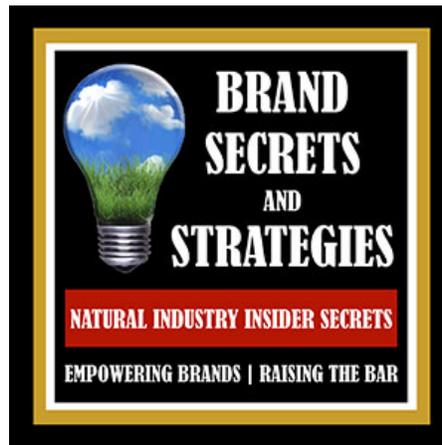
Josh: Gosh, there's so many lessons. The biggest lesson I think I would do is just find help, find someone who's done it before. But also be careful that you find someone who's going to teach you about the next appropriate stage and strategy for your business. Right? Early on, we got helped to get us into retail, but looking back, I



think it was actually a little early for us. I wish I had met those folks couple years later. What we really needed was we needed the NatchCom folks in that first stage just to get us to the profitability, so the first stage of profitability. That would have helped me learn some of those lessons even quicker than we did, although I don't think we did a terrible job, and obviously, my business back, I'm helped.

I have run marketing teams in the past. The tools are different in digital, but a lot of the principles are the same. We also just ran a very tight financial ship in general. I had an accounting background, and so we didn't spend any unnecessary nickels at all. We were just very, very tight and my wife would say scrooge-like. I'm sure we annoyed plenty of vendors out there because we squeezed as tight as we possibly could to get us to that profitable breakeven point. I told them very honestly, hand on heart, "Hey, if we don't survive the next year, this investment you're making with us is not going to be fruitful, but if we do, it's going to be a very long-term return for you because we're going to be around a long time and hopefully we'll have a good ongoing long-term business relationship with you." That worked. That has borne out to be true.

Dan: That keeps going back to that authenticity, that honesty that you have. Brands need to not apologize for being able to communicate at that level because like you said, you want to be successful. You want to help the retailer be successful with your products. One of the challenges I run into, completely off topic here, is that a lot of brands are so excited to gain distribution. They accept an offer to gain distribution in a store way across the country that they can't begin to support. That's just a recipe for



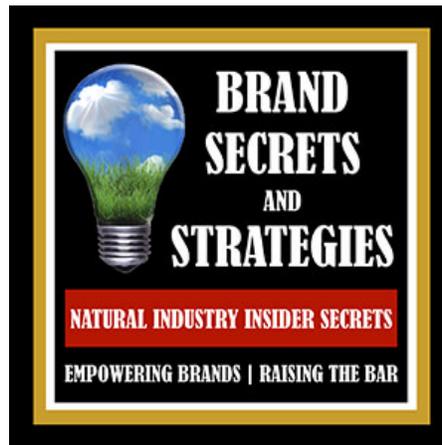
failure. The fact that you were able to negotiate based upon what you can actually deliver, every brand needs to hear that. It's so critically important.

Then going back to what you said a minute ago, finding the right people. Someone said to me once if you go to a doctor who's a surgeon, they're going to want to operate. If you go to a doctor that does medication, prefers the pharmaceutical route, they're going to recommend a prescription. If you go to a doctor that recommends a homeopathy or some other strategy, they're going to do that. My point is that finding the right person, like you said, you go to a lot of these experts that are out there and they mean well. No ill intention at all, but that's what they know. That's all that they know. How would you recommend a brand identify what does that right person look like? Then how do you engage that person once you identify that person?

Josh: Yeah. Obviously, in the early stage of a business, if you're not yet profitable, it's got to be number one because cash flow is the fuel, it's the food and the air of a young business. That's got to be your number one priority. If you're out there looking for someone to help you, you're an early stage business trying to get to the next level, the first question has to be, "Hey, I'm not profitable yet, I need to be as fast as possible. Are you the one that has a strategy that can help me get there? If not, who is?" Ask 20 people. Don't just jump in with the first one or two people that you find. Look for the person that really has experience getting brands over that first hump from inception to cash flow.

Dan: You get what you pay for.

Josh: That's the moment.



Dan: Yeah, absolutely. Well, and I'm sorry, I didn't mean interrupt, but you get what you pay for. Paying a little bit extra for somebody who's got a proven track record is going to save you a ton of money as opposed to helping someone try to figure this out as they go. You don't want to risk the business against it.

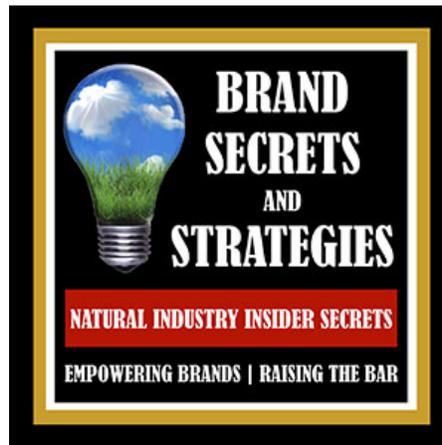
Josh: I think there's a balance point in that, of course. Again, there's plenty of people out there in the service industries that have really big price tags. With someone that costs \$10,000 a month to provide you double the benefit and get you profitable twice as fast as someone that charges 5,000, I don't know. You just have to look at it very carefully.

Dan: You do.

Josh: If you have any friends that have been through it, if you can find someone to help you in that evaluation process if you are looking for a consultant or a service provider, I think that would be very helpful.

Dan: What other advice would you offer a brand?

Josh: Look at trends. It's hard to see it in the moment. It's much easier to see it with the benefit of hindsight, but there are, in general, trends that happen in industry and in markets. I think that we were kind of lucky. Zora and I had an idea to do a paleo product and paleo was on trend, and I think that helped. If I had to do it over, I would go looking for that rather than depend on serendipity. I think some products tend more toward the commodity side than being more unique. I think that toilet paper can be a great business but it's harder to differentiate your toilet



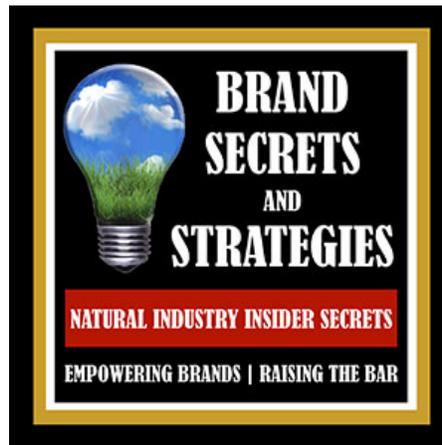
paper unless you come up with some brand new thing and you can patent it.

Speaking of toilet paper, it's a great category because it's recurring because once you get used to a toilet paper, you tend to keep buying it. Things that you buy often can be a stronger business model than things you only buy once a year. I said that to a friend of mine who started a salt company, not assault but salt. Sold salt, and gosh, a big jar of salt. I buy one of those once a year. I guess that was a harder row to hoe than something that people have to buy every month. I think that we can't ignore the larger trend of movement from in-store to online. Online is growing and it's unstoppable. The center of a grocery store is shrinking, and more and more people are more and more comfortable buying their shelf-stable staple products online, and you just can't ignore that. If you're developing a product from scratch, I wouldn't pick an ice cream.

Dan: Yeah, that'd be tough.

Josh: I wouldn't pick something that's heavy, that has to be shipped in a glass jar. I wouldn't pick something that has a short shelf life. I would pick something that's light, shelf-stable, easy to ship. Again, people want to buy on a recurring basis. I think it's easier. Maybe once you have a profitable business, you can afford to venture out into those product categories that are more challenging, but if you're just getting started and don't have a ton of money, you're going to have an easier time starting out with a product that can be sold online.

Those are just some broad pieces of advice for today. Looking back in hindsight, I think that it was... One of the decisions that

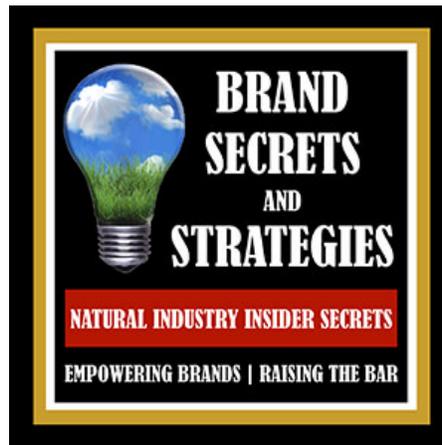


we made that was not very effective was that we chose a meat product. Oh my God, the amount of complexity and cost that we incurred because we have a meat product and we have to be produced under the auspice of the USDA and a federal inspector in our building every single day, that's been a high cost to bear. I wouldn't have done it if I had known from the beginning just how expensive that would have been. Yeah. But then, of course, if I chose a cookie, there's plenty of cookies out there. Then I would have a harder time with differentiation, so there's a balance point. But I think knowing what those variables are can be very helpful, especially if you're at the stage where you're just trying to come up with a new idea.

Dan: Well, I appreciate that. Thanks. I mean, at the end of the day, kind of a lot of what we've talked about is, how do you remain relevant? Then how do you help your retail partners remain relevant? Getting back to what you were saying, yeah, there's a lot to know. But one of the things that makes natural natural, one of the things I love about this community is that there's so many people like yourself that are willing to give you some advice and help you out and share some of the things that they've learned along the way, how they've scraped their knees and gotten back up, etc. Thank you so much for sharing that.

Is there anything else that you'd like to share? Then how do we get ahold of you? Tell us how to get ahold of Wild Zora and I'll make sure that I put a link to Wild Zora in this podcast show notes and on the podcast webpage.

Josh: Yeah. Thanks, Dan. Yeah, I'd say that people are certainly welcome to reach out to me. If I can respond in an email, a quick email, I'm happy to do it. I do occasionally get people to ask me



to spend half days or full days with them, that is something that I used to do. It was my old business as a business consultant. But I still do it occasionally just to help folks out. Then how do we reach us? Wildzora.com is our website. That's obviously the best place to find us. My email is [josh@wildzora.com](mailto:josh@wildzora.com). I thank you for the opportunity to talk to you and perhaps you can help us. I'm curious to have a longer conversation with you about that. Maybe this conversation will help a few of your listeners out there too just a little bit, I just hope.

Dan: Thanks. I appreciate it. Yeah. We'll definitely continue this conversation. This is not the last of it. I am a huge fan of what you guys are doing. I think that what you created is amazing, and I love it. I am one of your ideal customers in terms of these are the kind of products that I flock to. I don't like the overly sugared energy bars, etc., that are more like a candy bar. I like products like this that offer me the fuel so that when I'm out doing things, riding my mountain bike, etc., that I'm not going to crash in the middle of it, especially when I'm riding up a steep hill or something. Anyhow, thank you for what you guys do and tell your lovely wife hi.

Josh: You welcome. I will.

Dan: Again, thank you for coming on today.

Josh: You got it. Thanks again, Dan.

Dan: I want to thank Josh for coming on today and for sharing his insights and his wisdom and all that he's learned about digital strategy. I'll be sure to put a link to Wild Zora and to NatchCom in the podcast show notes and on the podcast webpage.



Today's free download are my [Top 10 strategies to meet your business goals](#). Goal setting is critically important to every brand. It's critical to your business strategy, and it's the foundation that every brand needs to be built on. You can download this instantly in the podcast show notes and on the podcast webpage by going to [brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session131](#).

Thank you again for listening, and I look forward to seeing you in the next episode.

Wild Zora <https://wildzora.com>

NatchCom <https://natchcom.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.