

Episode 54: Building an Opt-In Audience with Joe Pulizzi

00:00 S?: Welcome to the Neon Noise Podcast. Your home for learning ways to attract more traffic to your website, generate more leads, convert more leads into customers, and build stronger relationships with your customers. And now, your hosts, Justin Johnson and Ken Franzen.

00:15 Justin Johnson: Hey, hey, hey, Neon Noise Nation. Welcome to the Neon Noise Podcast where we decode marketing and sales topics to help you grow your business. I am Justin Johnson and with me, as always, Mr. Ken Franzen. Ken, what's going on today?

00:27 Ken Franzen: Hey Justin, how are things going with you?

00:30 JJ: Things are well. Things are very well. I am excited to chat with our featured guest today. He is an expert when it comes to content marketing. We will be talking with Joe Pulizzi. He is the founder of the Content Marketing Institute, the leading education and training organization for content marketing, which includes the largest in-person content marketing event in the world, Content Marketing World. Joe is the winner of the 2014 John Caldwell Lifetime Achievement Award from the Content Council. He is also the author of five books including his latest, "Killing Marketing." His third book, "Epic Content Marketing," was named one of the five must best read business books of 2013 by Fortune Magazine. I was told that Joe wears orange everywhere. I don't know what that's all about, but I'm sure he's going to tell us soon. Joe, it's exciting to have you here today. Welcome to Neon Noise.

01:28 Joe Pulizzi: Well, now that we've put everybody to sleep with my bio, we can...

01:31 JJ: Boom!

[laughter]

01:34 JP: Get started. No, it's great to be on the show, guys. I really appreciate it. I am wearing orange today. But unfortunately...

01:40 JJ: What's the deal?

01:41 JP: I'm wearing a Cleveland Browns hat...

01:44 JJ: Ooh!

01:45 JP: Which nobody wears anymore.

01:47 JJ: No.

01:47 JP: But the good news is we're in the running for the number one overall draft pick, for the second year in a row. There's not many organizations that can say they've done that. So, I'm a proud Browns fan.

02:00 JJ: I love it.

02:00 KF: Hey Joe. I'm a Detroit Lions fan so I was looking forward... This past Sunday I'm watching the first quarter of that game like, "This is the ugliest thing I've ever seen in my life."

[chuckle]

02:10 JP: [02:10] \_\_\_\_ They almost gave us one. I mean, which is really...

02:11 KF: We thought about it. The only thing that I think could be comparable to being a Lions fan is a Browns fan, and I think you'll agree with me vice versa.

02:22 JP: Well, I would rather be a Lions fan but that's... And you guys have actual victories this year.

02:28 JJ: You guys have had four victories in... What? Like the last four years? That's not bad.

02:33 JP: Four victories in four...

[laughter]

02:36 JP: I've been a season ticket holder for 10 years and I haven't seen 10 wins.

02:38 JJ: Oh, man. That's...

02:39 JP: So, there you go.

02:40 KF: There we go.

02:41 JJ: Wow.

[laughter]

02:43 JP: But anyways...

02:44 JJ: Alright!

02:44 JP: We're not gonna bring everyone down with this talk.

[laughter]

02:46 JJ: No.

02:46 JP: We're gonna lift them up.

[chuckle]

02:49 KF: There we go.

02:50 JJ: Good stuff. Hey Joe, do me a favor and fill in the gaps on anything I missed. Share with us a little detail about your background.

02:56 JP: Yeah. I've been in what's known as the content marketing industry for almost 20 years now. Started at a business to business publishing company, where I first got my taste of content marketing. Had the entrepreneurial itch basically all my life. Started what became Content Marketing Institute in 2007. Like most startups, really struggled the first three years until we found our core niche around training and educating in this little thing called content marketing and expanded it from there. Grew the company to over 410 million in revenues. My wife and I owned the company and we sold in 2016 to a really large events and media company called UBM, and they're a great company. Love working with them. And I work on a nonprofit called Orange Effect Foundation now, where we help get funds for autistic children and families for speech therapy and technology they can't afford. That's a passion area of mine.

03:57 JJ: Cool.

03:57 JP: And I talk all over the world about content marketing and write books and try not to work very hard these days.

[chuckle]

04:06 KF: It sounds like a good plan, I like [04:07] \_\_\_\_...

[laughter]

04:09 JJ: Try not to work hard [04:09] \_\_\_\_.

04:10 JP: I got two teenage boys, I like to spend time with them. After being on the road and getting elite status on airlines and hotels for 10 years...

04:18 JJ: Nice.

04:19 JP: I'm trying to take some downtime over the next year or so.

04:23 JJ: Sounds like an awesome plan.

04:24 KF: Good for you.

04:25 JP: [04:25] \_\_\_\_ there you go.

04:25 KF: That sounds like it's well earned.

04:29 JP: Well, I don't know about that but...

[laughter]

04:31 JP: I'm taking it anyway.

04:33 KF: Perfect.

04:33 JP: So who cares? Yeah. No, it's great. I'm looking forward to it. In January, I'm doing "no internet January."

04:40 JJ: Nice.

04:40 JP: No social, no email, nothing. I'm gonna go cold turkey. I'm gonna see how that feels. So, I'm looking forward to it.

04:48 KF: Alright. Lay out the game plan real quick on that, because I'm interested.

04:50 JJ: No kidding.

[laughter]

04:51 KF: I read that you're stepping away from Content Marketing Institute, and you're gonna do this 30... What is that, 30 days?

05:01 JP: 30-day cleanse, yes. All of January.

05:02 JJ: [05:02] \_\_\_\_ Dude, that's...

05:02 KF: A 30-day cleanse, and I'm thinking to myself...

05:04 JJ: 30 days [05:04] \_\_\_\_ the internet.

05:06 KF: How can you detach yourself because it's everywhere now. So, what's your game plan? Are you literally gonna put a...

05:13 JJ: He's gonna put a landline in.

05:14 KF: Put a lock on a door somewhere with all your electronics in it?

05:16 JP: Well, I was going to go without phone at all, but I've been told that sometimes I need to be texted, especially from my... I got two teenage boys, so sometimes I need to go pick them up...

05:27 KF: Sure.

05:28 JP: Or my wife needs to get a hold of me and I'm not around. So I'm going to leave the texting ability there, but I'm going to hide the Facebook icon and hide my inbox and all that stuff. All the stuff that I normally go to, I'm just gonna delete them off the phone so they're not there. I won't be on my... I mean, I'll be writing, so I can't... I'm not gonna go electronics free because I'm gonna have Microsoft Word, but I'm not gonna plug into the internet at all. We'll see how it goes. I've done a week before, and at the end of that week, it was one of the greatest weeks of my life. Not having to worry about who says what, what our government's doing and all of that kind of stuff that I don't wanna be involved in.

06:12 JJ: Sure. Hell with it.

06:14 JP: Yeah, so we'll see how it goes. I've talked to a couple of people about the experience, and after the first couple of days, which are really rough because you check Facebook, you go on Twitter, I'm pretty active on social media. Then you really get to this point of, "Oh my God, what am I going to do?" and you may be getting bored here or there. But then you find what's important to you. I'm looking for that. Sort of the walking through the desert, see what I find. So...

06:42 KF: Sure.

06:42 JJ: That's cool.

06:42 JP: I don't know, I don't know. I'm just... And it gives me time. It gives me an excuse to actually write, 'cause I wanna do a lot more writing in 2018. So I'm gonna hunker myself down in front of a word processor. I was actually thinking about, I should get one of the old typewriters, like a real typewriter. So it would be like no electronics, but I don't think I can use that white out anymore. [07:05] \_\_\_\_ I can go backwards, I can't do that.

[laughter]

07:08 KF: Yeah. I can't type mistake free, so that typewriter would kill me.

07:13 JJ: [07:13] \_\_\_\_.

07:14 JP: I know...

07:15 KF: They don't do the red squiggly lines on the typewriter either, so...

07:17 JP: No, they don't do any of that.

07:17 JJ: No. [chuckle]

07:18 JP: I could use a [07:20] \_\_\_\_ well or something like that [07:21] \_\_\_\_ to get the old ink out.

[laughter]

07:24 S?: [07:24] \_\_\_\_.

07:26 KF: Perfect, perfect. Are you planning on writing about your adventure, this 30-day... Are you gonna share with us what you thought or what happened, your experiences, or [07:35] \_\_\_\_ keep to yourself?

07:36 JP: No, the plan is to journal it. If anybody is interested to see how...

07:39 JJ: Alright, cool.

07:40 JP: I mean, I've got a lot of book ideas, a lot of things I wanna write about, I wanna start to... I've written five non-fiction books, I wanna write a fiction book. But I thought this would be... I know there has been things written on this, no electronics or no internet, detaching yourself, but I'll write a journal and see how it goes. If I've got something at the end of the process, then I'll put it out there in a blog post or something like that. I have no idea. So, we'll see. I don't have any plans for what the output would be but I'm definitely gonna chronicle the journey.

08:15 KF: Cool. I'm looking forward to it. Good luck with that. That's gonna be a test of willpower, I'm sure that will definitely pay off.

08:24 JP: I don't know. I'll probably just be a nicer person at the end of the process, 'cause I'm not getting frustrated by whatever...

08:29 JJ: Totally.

08:29 KF: [08:29] \_\_\_\_ paid...

[chuckle]

08:32 KF: Exactly.

08:32 JP: By news...

08:33 KF: All these external influences that...

08:34 JJ: Stress-free [08:35] \_\_\_\_.

08:37 KF: Perfect. Alright, Joe. I wanted to start off, you talk a lot about owned content, so I figured we touch base on just defining what owned content is and why it's important.

08:49 JP: Oh man, it's sort of the essence of content marketing. The idea is how do we create valuable relevant information on a consistent basis, in order to build an audience that actually wants to get your content. Most small businesses, entrepreneurs out there, we create lots of content, lots of product content, lots of information. We're on Facebook and Twitter. We've got our website, but generally, we're not delivering value on a regular basis to a very defined group of people. It could be your customers, it could be influencers, it could be gatekeepers, whatever the case is. So the idea is, how do we build an audience. And then you can do that a variety of ways. You could do that through a podcast, you could do that through a blog, you could do that through a video series, an email newsletter, whatever the case is, but you have to be targeting a very specific audience with really helpful relevant information. That's the hard part. There's a lot of businesses out there that are creating all sorts of content, but are they creating content where they can actually be the leading expert in the world on that particular area, to that particular audience.

09:54 JP: That's where it's hard for most small businesses. 'Cause if you're, "Oh yeah, I'm an HVAC contractor, I don't have time to be creating content." Well, if that's the way you look at it, that's fine. You can advertise. You can still do PR. There's nothing wrong with those things. We still do those things at Content Marketing Institute. But the idea is if you build an audience that actually wants to hear from you on a regular basis, you've built an asset that you can leverage for a long, long time, possibly throughout the entire business. So that's the one... So, basically, if you have let's say 5,000 email subscribers and you wanna launch a new service, it's easy to say, "Hey, I know you've been loving this email newsletter, this content. Here's a new service," and they probably will try it because they know, like, and trust you already. And it's easier to launch new products, it's easier to sell things.

10:46 JP: My take, and I wrote this in my fourth book "Content Inc.," if you were going to launch a business today, I would never launch it with a product or service first. I would always launch it around building an audience first, because you don't know, in most cases, 99% of the time, a startup launches and their product or service doesn't have the right market pick and they have to do some kind of a pivot. Well, what happens if you have an owned media strategy, you can build the audience first. And when you build a close relationship with that audience, they will absolutely tell you what they wanna buy, what they're willing to buy, and what they won't buy. 'Cause you know that audience better than everyone else. You're talking to them on a regular basis. So you can then launch your product or service after the fact, and you increase your odds of success. And that's what I like my good friend Brian Clark, who has the site called Copyblogger.com and he's got Rainmaker Platform, a fast growing Software as a Service company.

11:43 JP: I talked to him recently and he says... Basically, he launched a blog in 2006, blogged for 19 months, built over 100,000 email subscribers through that process. And he's launched six or seven different products or services, and he says they've never failed. Every one has been successful, because it's basically, he's already known from talking to his audience whether or not it's going to be successful, and whether they would try it and buy it. So, that's a great place for an entrepreneur to be in, and I wish that more companies would do that. So that's the overview around content marketing or owned media, it's talking to a customer base, an audience base, that actually wants to receive your information, and you can build that asset over time, and then you exponentially increase your options to grow your business.

12:36 KF: And that's kind of fits in line with how Content Marketing Institute was born, a little bit, right?

12:43 JP: That's exactly how we did the... I almost screwed up in the beginning. Because in 2007, when we launched, I launched with the blog 'cause we didn't have the product ready. So in April of 2007, launched the blog called the "Content Marketing Revolution" or the "Content Revolution." And the product we were launching wasn't gonna be ready for a few months, and it was basically an eHarmony matching product for content marketing. That's what I thought was gonna be the greatest product ever, I'm like, "Oh, agencies, they need customers and it's very hard to find customers, and brands wanna do this thing called content marketing, and we'll match them up. It'll be awesome." Well, it wasn't awesome. It didn't work very well at all, because what I realized is that less than 1% of any company out there is actually ready to outsource their content, at any one time. So I was building this audience through the blog, luckily, trying to sell this product or service, and it almost put us out of business. We were losing money like crazy. I was putting all this money into the online product. And I was gonna give up the whole thing and go back and get a real job, if you will, in the end of 2009.

[chuckle]

13:52 JP: And I said, "Okay, well, I'm not just gonna feel sorry for myself. I'm actually gonna try to do this thing for real one more time." And I went back and I started to read all the emails from our subscribers and our audience. And they were saying, "Joe, we love the blog, what I really need is... I need consulting." Or somebody else would say, "Do you have training that you can come in and teach our organization?" "Joe, is there a content marketing event out there?" "Joe, is there a real destination for content marketing where we can learn how to [14:22] \_\_\_\_?" All these things and I'm like, "Oh my God, they're telling us exactly what to do and I'm launching this matching product that is killing us." So we pivoted, and I remember I had a cocktail napkin, I probably was drinking heavily at the time said a cocktail [14:37] \_\_\_\_ and I said, "Okay, in the next three years, we will launch the leading education digital platform for content marketing. We will launch the leading print magazine for content marketing. And we will launch the leading event, the largest event, in the world for content marketing." And we accomplished those things in three years.

14:58 JP: But it was after that struggle and figuring out, what, just build the audience, and then listen to your audience and they will absolutely tell you what they wanna buy. So in 2010, we launched Content Marketing Institute, in May. In January of 2011, we launched Chief Content Officer Magazine. And then September of 2011, we launched Content Marketing World. And we were hoping for 100 people to come to Cleveland, Ohio, I'm like, "I don't know if we could do it. Can I get 100, 150 people to come to Cleveland?" We had reserved this small room at the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Cleveland, and we had 660 people show up. And I'm like, "Wow!" That's the first time, by the way, when I was on stage and I was looking out at the 600 people, it's the first time I realized, "Oh my God, maybe I don't have to go out and find a job. Maybe this thing is actually gonna work."

[laughter]

15:45 JP: And now, this year, we had over 3,500 attend from 70 countries. Thank God it worked because...

15:52 JJ: That's awesome.

15:53 JP: I can't work for anybody. I'm a horrible employee. So, it worked. It worked fairly well, but it was the [15:58] \_\_\_\_. That was it. Build the audience, listen to that audience, deliver them regular consistent information that's gonna help them with their jobs, their lives. And then once you build that asset of an opt-in subscriber base, then you can monetize that in multiple ways. And we monetize it through sponsorship, advertising, training, in-person events. We sell some products and services. All different kinds of ways and it worked fairly well.

16:25 JJ: Cool.

16:26 KF: Awesome. You have a new book out called the Killing Marketings. Let's start with the title.

[laughter]

16:35 KF: It's pretty bold. I like it because it makes me instantly want to read it. But you're not stating that marketing's dead. This is a different approach, right?

16:46 JP: Yeah. Basically, the first purpose of calling it "Killing Marketing" is we were tired of Bill O'Reilly killing everything. So he's killing England, he's killing Lincoln...

[chuckle]

16:58 JP: I don't know what he's gonna kill... I think he killed Jesus already. So, he's killing everyone...

17:02 KF: Yes, he did kill Jesus.

[laughter]

17:03 JP: And I'm like, "If he comes around and kills marketing, I'm gonna be really upset." So Robert Rose, my co-author, and I, we were like, "Okay, we're taking that title." But seriously...

17:11 KF: Awesome.

[chuckle]

17:15 JP: Even though buyer behavior has completely changed for all sized businesses, the marketing department is basically structurally the exact same way it was built 75 years ago. We have not changed the way that we set up marketing communications in PR and marketing itself. We're based around... We're built around interruption. We're built for advertising. We're built for, "Where are our customers at? Let's go interrupt them, let's throw an ad in front of them, let's see if that worked. And the content we're gonna create is all product and campaign-driven." Well, the opportunities are not for that traditional marketing department to flourish. The opportunities are we need to build audiences and we need to think differently about what the marketing department should do. Our belief in the book is that, marketing itself should drive direct revenue.

18:07 JP: And most organizations look at it as a cost on the business, as an expense. We don't believe that. We believe that if you build audiences, whatever that... Some of those are customers, some of those are not, some of those are influencers. You build key audiences, you can monetize those audiences in 10 different ways. And we're starting to see that. So, everyone knows the example of Red Bull Media House. They've been able to do it. They're a profitable marketing entity within Red Bull, and... Does anyone like the taste of Red Bull? I don't. Nobody likes the taste of Red Bull but they sell like hotcakes because they have these amazing audiences. I mean, the Red Bulletin Magazine has over two million subscribers, print magazine. Nobody realizes that, how big this media entity is. You look at Mandalay, you look at Pepsi, they've already made announcements that they're launching these for-profit marketing entities. These things are happening right now and we're still running business as usual in most organizations.

19:02 JP: So what we want with the book is we want to put it in front of them and say, "You don't have to do... " "Question why we do things the way we do." "Why are you doing PR like we've always done?" "Why are we doing marketing like we've always done?" Oh sure, we've launched social media groups and we've launched these little digital groups and these little content groups, but basically, we're set up for interruption. And the opportunity is not for advertising an interruption in traditional PR. The opportunity is how do we create amazing experiences with our audiences all day long. And if we do that well, they'll know, like, and trust us and they're more likely to buy from us. So the book is all about how to do that. If you get people in your organization that don't have a clue about this whole thing called content marketing or owned media or thinking differently. So it's built for a chief marketing officer, a CEO that really doesn't get it. And there's huge opportunities there, because 95% of organizations are doing things the way they've always done.

20:01 KF: So you spoke of some pretty big brands there and you said this is written for that CMO, but what about... 'Cause I think a lot of our listeners, small business owners, enterprenuers, they're sitting there... Alright, that HVAC contractor you referenced earlier, where they might not have time to create that content. And they look at all these traditional things that they've done in the past, that have less of an impact but are still there. They still have that TV rep calling at 'em, the yellow page person comes around once a year. It's all these things that we all know are on the decline, and you're stating you build this audience. How could they apply the Killing Marketing approach? You talked about 10 different... What is it, streams of revenue?

20:53 JP: Streams of revenue. Absolutely.

20:57 KF: What are some things that they could do or some takeaways? Without giving away your book, obviously, I think that there are some secrets you want to keep in there for the reader.

21:02 JP: Well, so here's what I'm gonna do, I don't normally do this. But your audience of small businesses, enterprenuers, I would say don't buy Killing Marketing. Don't go buy that book. The book for you is the one I wrote last time, is Content Inc. And that's around how do you do this if you have no money and no resources, and that's what that was about. Because most of the small businesses we deal with don't have a million dollar budget, a multi-million dollar budget like a Pepsi or a Red Bull. If you're a small company, you're like, "I can't do that. I'm not gonna do 10 documentary episodes of people jumping into space, or whatever Red Bull's doing next."

[chuckle]

21:41 JP: "Who cares? What I want to do is I need money. I need to grow the business. I need revenue. I need to pay for the kids' college education. Now, how am I gonna do all this?" Now, it is a long-term approach. So if you say, "Hey Joe, I want to do this content marketing thing, what should I expect in six months?" I would say, "You should expect nothing in six months," because it takes a longer period of time to build a loyal audience than six months. You need to go 12, 18 months, maybe more. Like for Content Marketing Institute, it really took us 24 months plus to build a loyal audience that we could then start to drive revenues from. So that's what...

22:22 JP: So if you look at some of the examples I talk about in Content Inc., look at Copyblogger's a really good example. They had no... He was a recovering attorney, he saw an opportunity online to talk about online copywriting and how to get found in search engines, and those types of things. He started a very simple blog, distributed it five days a week, through this blog, textual content, and in 19 months had 100,000 subscribers. It's a great fairytale story. It's amazing. Could that be done today? Absolutely. John Lee Dumas... You know John? Stared the podcast Entrepreneur on Fire, started with no money. He thought there was an opportunity to do a daily for entrepreneurs, he says "Great, I'm gonna do a daily podcast," and now he's a multi-millionaire. It took him about 12 to 18 months to get there.

23:07 JP: So if I'm a small business listening to this and you really wanna make an impact, first of all, of all the audiences that you communicate with, you have to identify one of them. So, let's go back to the HVAC contractor example. So you want to install heating and air conditioning equipment, and you want to install more of it. Well, what are you gonna do? Do you target homeowners? No, too broad. You can't identify anyone's needs through that. So you have to really... Are you targeting the mom that is working on the job, that makes all the decisions for the family? Are you targeting the dad? Are you targeting people who are retired? Think about those things. What are their wants? What are their needs? What keeps them up at night? And really go through the process like a media company would and identify, okay, who is that audience? And then when you actually create something, how are you going to tell that story? Is it through a audio like podcast like we're on right now? Is it through a regular video series? Is it in an email newsletter component? Which I think all businesses should have some kind of a regular email component.

24:15 JP: I was talking to actually a contractor, this is about six months ago, and they were saying, "Joe, I don't have a lot of resources, what should I do?" I said, "Well, what are you really trying to do?" He said, "Well, if we could just make sure that we keep our current customers and have our current customers buy more stuff and sign up for tune-ups and add on more as we go, we'd be in really good shape," and I'm like, "Okay, well, let's say you go for a tune-up and you go to your customer, you have that customer already in place. How do you keep in touch with that customer ongoing?" He said, "Well, every once in a while, we'll throw them a coupon. That's pretty much it. Or if we've got their email address, we'll say, 'Hey, we've got a new deal on some tune-up' or whatever." And I'm like, "Well, what if you delivered something that they really need on a regular basis? Even if it's on a monthly basis." And we talked about how energy efficiency is... And saving money and also being energy efficient is so critical to most homeowners. And they were talking about who they would target, and they actually target a lot of people in retired communities.

25:18 JP: So we were talking about that and those needs are different than other needs. And we said, "Okay, you could put together a regular email newsletter. And when you have your technician go on site, spiff him a dollar or two to get the email address and get them to opt-in to the e-newsletter. You're already communicating with them. They don't wanna give their email newsletter unless you give them something of value, so give them something of value. So that you are communicating with them all ongoing, so you're not pitching them product all the time or say, 'Hey, here's a coupon off our services.' Of course that's all they're only gonna think about price then 'cause that's all you're differentiating yourself with, is price. What if you differentiated yourself by delivering better value than anyone else? And when they're ready to make a decision about their heating and air conditioning solutions, they're only gonna think of you because you deliver value on a regular basis to them."

26:05 JP: That's a very, very simple example, guys. But that's just the kind of thing that I would look at if I'm a small business, to get those opt-in subscribers from your customers or other audience. And that way they're just not looking at you as, "Hey, do you provide this product or this service, and what's the best price?" 'Cause, you guys know, once you get into the price conversation, you're not showing any other value. All they're looking at is price. So how do you differentiate yourself so they think of you as more than just you providing this service, and something where they're really leaning on you for ongoing expertise.

26:40 JJ: Totally.

26:40 KF: Sure. I think most of us aren't structured... We don't have our business created to be the lowest cost provider. We're not the bargain. We want to position ourselves for value, so that we'd like to think that it isn't the only consideration, is going to be the price itself.

27:00 JP: Be the highest. I mean, I wanna be the highest price. That's what we'd wanna be, right?

[chuckle]

27:04 JP: The most value, the highest price, the most in need.

27:06 KF: Sure.

27:08 JP: You wanna get to a point... I mean, this is where we were just blessed in so many different ways at CMI. We had so much work from a consulting and training standpoint, we had to turn it down. And why is that? Because we built up the subscriber base and we were delivering value on a regular basis, and when people were ready to buy, they never went out and they never said, "Okay, how many people that train... " There are thousands of people that have training programs and do in-person training for content marketing. Thousands of them. But when we get contacted by one of our subscribers, they don't go out and check anywhere else, they just go to us. When they're ready to buy, they're like, "Okay, Joe, Robert, can you help us out? Great." And that's the position that you wanna be in. And that's the position you can be in if you deliver value outside of the products and services you offer. That's what's hard for small businesses to get their head around. Most of the content that's created by small businesses is around the product and services we offer.

28:06 JP: You know what? Who cares. Every company has that, you're probably doing just fine at that. When somebody gets down to that buying decision and they're just about to pull the trigger, they might go in and look at that content. 90% of the time, they're not. They're in other stage of the buying process. And they need help. They need education. They don't wanna waste their time with content that's not gonna help them in some way.

28:35 KF: And I think the key is, is planting that seed now, knowing that it will bear fruit long-term. But it's easy to get hung up and, "Let's do something today to impact business today, and I'll invest in tomorrow later." And that's the key, that to get to that point, you have to begin the journey today.

28:54 JP: Yeah. If you're a small business and you only plan on being in business for two years, don't do this. [chuckle] Don't waste time on this.

[chuckle]

29:02 JP: But if you want to be a multi-million dollar company, or instead of having a million dollar company and be a $10 million company, I don't know of a better way to get there than doing this. Basically, what you're doing is you're building a customer database in advance. So you're building a customer database that's not a customer yet but they will be. What better value can you deliver instead of waiting for, "Okay, well, I'm gonna do this in the yellow pages, and I'm gonna be in this online directory, and I'm gonna buy this ad in the church directory, and hope." So let's be a little bit more strategic about it. You could do all those things, by the way. If you're seeing results with those, great. But those are temporary things. You have to see value right away through those, "Oh, somebody saw my ad, they're ready to buy. Great. Good for me. Good for them. It worked." But in most cases, it's hard to build an asset ongoing from advertising, so that's why we're talking about building this audience of opt-in subscribers.

30:03 KF: Sure. And if you think about those traditional means, once you stop adding the fuel to the fire, it goes out. Where the content you create is long-term and stable.

30:16 JP: Yeah, it's an annuity. That's even... Just share another CMI example. We have a blog post called "What is Content Marketing?" I wrote that blog post in late 2007. So that blog post, it's been updated many times, but it's 10-years-old. And we still get more than 1,000 people a week. A week. To read that post. And that's a 10-year-old post... [chuckle]

30:43 JJ: That's [30:43] \_\_\_\_ rude.

30:43 JP: That took me initially like an hour to write.

30:46 JJ: That's awesome.

30:47 JP: And we've updated it since then.

30:48 KF: Sure.

30:48 JP: Those are the types of things that you could see when you build a resource for your organization. So, it worked.

30:57 KF: And it didn't get a 1,000 visits that first week though.

30:58 JP: No. No, no, no, I didn't get anything...

[overlapping conversation]

31:03 JP: When I wrote that post, I think I had one reader and it was my mother. She had no idea what I was talking about.

[laughter]

31:11 JP: When I started the blog... And that's the thing.

31:12 JJ: What is all this stuff, Joe?

[chuckle]

31:13 JP: And you're right. This is a marathon and not a sprint. Most small businesses, they're distraught because they wanna see results right away and they're not seeing it. So go back to now, I don't know, we do like 400,000 visitors or something every month now for Content Marketing Institute. In the first six months, there was literally no traffic. It was very hard to build an audience. And you get dismayed, you're like, "Why am I doing all of this?" It just takes time. There's some things you could do, you could buy advertising to promote your content, you can work with influencers, you're gonna wanna do those types of things, so that you can get as much visibility as possible when you're creating this content. But it takes a long, long time. It really took us that 24 plus months until we were easily found in the search engine keywords that we were targeting, people were sharing our information on social media, people knew about us because of the content we were creating. We were doing regular research reports, we were getting some visibility.

32:14 JP: So yeah, it definitely takes some time. So that's where... When I did the research for Content Inc., the book, we looked at, okay, for a small business, how long does it take until you can actually see direct revenue from a program like this. And it takes on an average between 12 to 18 months.

32:34 KF: And it's key to... You have realistic expectations in place when you embark. Because it can get disheartening, especially when you put a lot of time and effort in creating content. It's not an easy adventure to embark on.

32:48 JP: No, it's not. I was dismayed. 'Cause you don't know when you're going... We know the model works and we know that if you're patient and you identify a content area that's underserved and an audience that's underserved, that you will be successful at some point. The odds are in your favor because everyone that starts stops at some point. I've seen it a million times. I go in and I'll do a content audit for a small business and they have... They started a blog, they started a podcast, they started a video series, they started an email newsletter, and they stopped. And it's like, I love going in and doing an audit of somebody's YouTube channel, where somebody uploaded like six videos the first week and that's all they have, and they're done. And it's like...

33:33 KF: Sure.

33:33 JP: And you know if you're gonna be successful with video, you have to deliver consistently over a long period of time. And I mean consistently. Like if you're gonna deliver a video on Monday and you're gonna promise to do a weekly, every Monday, you better deliver that video out there. And most small businesses don't treat this as part of the job.

33:52 JP: And that's where I think we're heading and that's where I think we're at right now. Like part of your job is, yeah, you install heating and air conditioning equipment but you also provide value to your audience, to your customers every day or every week or every month by communicating better than the competition. 'Cause I'm a big fan of Don Schultz. Don Schultz, professor at Northwestern University, he talks about the only way that you can differentiate yourself today is how we communicate. You can't differentiate yourself on price or product or anything else, because that can all be duplicated by another company. We're all in pretty much the commodity business today. How can we differentiate ourselves? How we communicate. That's it. So if that's true and I do believe that, we just have to be better communicators than our competition and we'll have an advantage.

34:47 KF: Perfect. Trust Joe, everyone.

[chuckle]

34:50 JP: Yeah, trust me. I've been real close to failure many times. Don't go through what I went through, please...

34:57 JJ: Don't trust Joe.

[laughter]

35:00 KF: But you pushed through that though, and that's where you see so many breakthroughs. So many quit right before they're about to experience that breakthrough. And you gotta know... If the model is there, it's tried, it's proven, it works, but so many quit. And I think what you said there is paramount. You're not just... Your responsibilities don't just lie with the products and services you provide for your customer, but there's also this commitment... If you're gonna make this commitment there holds the commitment to educate and to make that part of your routine, and that'll lead to, in my belief, that breakthrough that you can't put your finger on when it's gonna happen. But if you continue the journey, it will happen.

35:48 JP: I had a conversation the other day with a small business and I was talking about some YouTube examples, because I love what some of the YouTubers are doing. They're following this model to a tee and they were like, "I can't believe that all these YouTube rockstars or whatever, they become multi-millionaires. And it's just like I'm working hard selling my products and they go and they hit the lottery." And I'm like, "Do you know what they... " Look at what Casey Neistat did and look at what Matthew Patrick did. They developed consistent videos that take a lot of time to produce. Mathew Patrick, he's got a YouTube series called "Game Theory." He's got eight million subscribers now. And in the first year, he barely had any subscribers. He's building these videos, his audience. It took him about 100 hours of combined time per video, to put these things together. He found a content niche, and he was struggling for a long, long time. And then over time, he built that audience. He got to about 500,000 subscribers, started to monetize it. Now he's actually the leading consultant for YouTube itself, on how their algorithm changes. It's unbelievable what he's been able to build, this multi-million dollar business.

36:57 JP: And I told the guy, I'm like, "He just focused on different things than you. You are focused on doing the same old things that everyone else is doing, selling the same old product the same way." And he said, "I'm gonna communicate something different. I'm gonna deliver this value in a different way," and blows right by all of us. But he goes from tortoise for a long period of time and then you just see this hockey stick move up, once you begin to monetize it, once you get to something we call in the book "minimum viable audience," that Brian Clark uses all the time. So whatever that is for you, it could be 500 people, it could be 5,000 people. In Matthew Patrick's case, 'cause he's targeting consumers, it was 500,000 people, and now he's living the high life. He can do whatever he wants to do. So, it's just thinking differently. We don't get it.

37:46 JP: Like if you talk to somebody that wants to be an entrepreneur and go into business, the first thing they start talking about is their product and service they offer. What we should be doing is talking about our audience. Don't fall in love with your product and service, fall in love with your audience. That's the mistake I made. I fell in love with my product, I thought it was awesome, "Oh, everybody's gonna buy this, I'm gonna be a millionaire." And what I should've been focused on is, how do I deliver amazing value to this audience every day, and if I do that well, then it'll work out alright for me from a revenue standpoint."

38:15 KF: So, Joe, talk to us a little bit about... Because this is... A lot of things have changed in a short period of time. And every single day, you look at the newsfeeds and you see something different that Facebook is doing, or there's a new platform coming out, and there's a new strategy. What trends do you see in content marketing that we should look for in 2018?

38:43 JP: Well, the first thing is do not put your trust in Facebook. That's for sure. [chuckle] Or any social media channel. By the way...

38:51 KF: Perfect.

38:51 JP: I don't wanna hate on Facebook or Google Plus, if anybody still uses that, or MySpace for that matter.

[laughter]

39:00 JP: Those channels... And that's what a lot of small businesses run to, "Oh, great! I can publish on a regular basis on those channels, or not on a regular basis. And I can build an audience and build likes on Facebook, and those likes can turn into business for me." But what happened is, is that the rules have all changed for social media networks and now we don't have organic reach to our audience. Basically, if you have 500 people that liked your Facebook page and you put out a post, you'll be lucky if a couple of those people actually see it. And Facebook, and LinkedIn's going this direction, and Twitter's going this direction, it's becoming pay to play. They're gonna show the content that's gonna help them drive their revenue, and they should because they don't have to do what we want. They're driving their own business model and they've found a pretty successful one, so great for them. But we put our faith in those social media channels, so that's why I love...

39:56 JP: I think that the trend for 2018 is back to basics. Instead of worrying about being everywhere your customers are and publishing on every site, I think you really focus on how can I be really great and deliver something amazing in one channel. This is great for small businesses. Just focus on doing one thing great. Are you gonna do an amazing podcast? Are you gonna do the leading industry blog? Are you going to do an email newsletter that kicks ass? What are you going to do that's the best in your industry? And then use the social networks that makes sense for you. Maybe you just use Facebook as a customer service channel, maybe the same is for Twitter. Use those social media channels for however you can and get the most value today, because what we talk to our team, our social media team at CMI, all the time, "We use those channels for how we can today, 'cause tomorrow they might be gone." And when I say might be gone, we might not have access to them like we used to. Like we've got 100,000 plus people that like our Facebook page, but we can't lean on that because Facebook continues to take away our organic reach.

41:02 JP: So, Facebook is great for advertising by the way. I have no problem with Facebook from that standpoint. But it's definitely pay to play. So I think the trend for small businesses for the next year is focus on what you can be really great at, to cut through the clutter, so you can be that resource. And I think email is the way to go. It's hard to believe we're talking about email in 2017, 2018, but if you look at what BuzzFeed, the media company's doing, the New York Times, Washington Post and how they're changing their business model, they're moving entirely to this opt-in segmented email strategy that is really starting to pay off. If you've been starting to look at the results of these companies, they made the pivot and the move from this traditional media company of let's say New York Times, into full-fledged digital media company selling advertising subscriptions and products and services.

41:52 JP: BuzzFeed kills me, where you can actually go and buy a smart cooker from them. You can hook it up with your phone and you cook stuff. They're actually launching products. So, is BuzzFeed a product company or a media company? And they're both. And that's what we learn is we're all both, we just decide to monetize in a way that we think is best. But we all have access to an audience, we can all do this. So I would say simplify, don't worry about augmented reality, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, all that stuff.

[chuckle]

42:25 JP: That'll all come in its due time, but we're still a long way off from that impacting our business. Just deliver value on a regular basis, doing one thing really well, kill off some of those social channels that are not giving you value so you can spend time on what's gonna be value. And I think 2018 is all about simplification, consistently driving value, and I think that's good news for enterprenuers and small businesses that don't have a lot of time or budget.

42:56 KF: Joe, what's your thoughts on Facebook's continual push for their Messenger component? I know that they recently launched their "Slack killer" for businesses, where internal communications, I keep hearing more and more about how Messenger is going to replace email, which might pose a threat to that back to basics down the line. And it scares me as a marketer because then the consumers we're after are encompassing themselves only in this Facebook stratosphere, that we have zero control into. What your thoughts on Messenger? Or how is it a threat to email? Or do your think that email is something we're not going to see go away?

43:45 JP: It's hard to say. I never say never. I'm telling you what I think is gonna happen for right now. Could it change in six months? Absolutely. There's no doubt that Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, what companies like Tencent and Alibaba are doing in China, they're gonna make a huge impact for this direct communication person to person. It's absolutely happening. Is it gonna take away some of the other things that we do? It's possible. I don't see that hurting this email strategy. Or if you're gonna create an owned app, which is much harder to do 'cause you have to deliver so much content in it... Well, is that gonna hurt that strategy? It's possible down the road, but I don't think so. So I think we just do what we know right now. And I'm always weary of saying, "Oh, this company has got" whatever killer it is, "we've got to succumb to that and we've gotta launch a Facebook page, or we've gotta launch this Messenger thing, or we've gotta launch this MySpace thing or whatever." It's never happened that way. If you look at the history of media for the last 300 years and how it's worked, it generally works when you create a platform that you can control and you leverage other platforms to let people know about it.

45:00 JP: So if you can use Facebook Messenger on a personal basis to let people know that things are going on, I don't know if that's gonna work that way. Obviously texting is... People are very personal over that. They don't like using it unless they're getting like huge discounts and you use [45:13] \_\_\_\_ weekend strategy, where you come by a shop and they'll let you know through texting or Messenger. Those are all things that are up in the air, that are being tested, that are experimental right now. So I would just say, "Go with what makes the most sense right now, for where your customers are at, for where you're at with the resources you have, and wait to see what happens with Messenger." I'm very wary to go all in on anything where I don't have control over it, and so I would.

45:44 JP: If you wanna experiment by the way, go do it. If you wanna experiment with a LinkedIn publishing strategy and you wanna experiment with... To see and really get involved in Messenger. I use Messenger all the time with my friends, but I don't see them making buying decisions outside of email and going to certain websites that's replacing anything that they do on Messenger. I think Messenger is more a replacement for a phone call. Which we'll never see again. Who knew that?

46:12 KF: Sure.

46:13 JP: I mean, who knew that we'd just stop using the phone entirely?

46:14 KF: No...

46:15 JJ: Right.

46:16 KF: Right.

46:17 JP: I wonder if it was invented the other way, like if we first invented texting and then we invented the call, I think we'd all be calling. And be like, "Oh my God, I can't believe I'm actually talking to you." But we were like regressed.

[laughter]

46:31 JP: We've regressed and now we're just using...

[overlapping conversation]

46:33 JJ: [46:33] \_\_\_\_.

[laughter]

46:34 JP: Spending time typing in a text when we could just call really easy. Anyway...

46:38 JJ: I'm gonna talk to everybody now.

[laughter]

46:42 KF: Sure. No, I like that approach. And thanks for your insights there, because I love to warn people against chasing the shiny object that's being dangled in front of us, that is the end all be all, the future of, and going to replace. And I think it's so important that when you're looking at the marketing and the activities, the things you focus on to really invest in the fundamentals, the foundations, the tried and true things that we know have worked for years and will continue to work going forward. And to, like you said, experiment with the things that show up on our radar but realize that many of these things are going to as quickly disappear off our radar as well.

47:32 JP: It's so crazy. I was just talking to a group of small businesses and I was telling them that, "You really don't have to have a Facebook page today. Maybe if you want to have one, like you have your resume out there just so people know who you are, like a secondary website, that's fine." But they were like, "Are you kidding me? We have to have Facebook, and we have to post on Facebook." And I asked the one person who was adamant, I'm like, "Why?" "Because we have to."

48:00 KF: Sure.

48:00 JP: Okay. Great reason for that, that you don't know. Really, why do you use Facebook? And that's the same question like, "Why will you use Messenger? Why will you use Twitter?" We have to have reasons and business objectives behind each of these. And if you don't have a good business objective, to your point, get back to the basics of why we're doing what we're doing, then don't do it. Then don't do it.

48:21 KF: Exactly.

48:23 JP: It's just, we have too many things going on to waste our time with helping other people build their channels.

48:29 KF: Joe, touch on your nonprofit. You mentioned your nonprofit, I think that yourself and your wife are involved with. What's that about?

48:39 JP: Yeah. I got involved in this years ago. Our oldest is on the autism spectrum. He's high functioning. He's doing really well. He's in regular school. He's 16-years-old now. So, the reason why he's in regular school right now and doing so well is because we got him speech therapy and play therapy early. When he was two years old, he was diagnosed, couldn't talk, couldn't say a word. When he was three years old, he wouldn't look anybody in the eye, really worried about it so we set up this aggressive speech and play therapy schedule. And by the time he was six years old, he was in regular kindergarten. He had a tutor at the time to watch him, but he was in regular kindergarten and he was saying a few words and we were amazed with the progress. And now he's basically taking apart all the computers in the house right now and doing crazy... [chuckle] He's amazing. He's gonna be some kind of engineer. And he has no lack of communication now. You can understand him fully. And I love him and it's just amazing to see how that's happened.

49:43 JP: But what we found out is that a lot of families aren't in the financial position that we were to be able to afford that kind of speech and play therapy. And what we're finding, especially with insurance changing so much, speech therapy in a lot of cases isn't covered at all. And what happens is, is when you see a diagnosis of autism or apraxia, which is going on right now, and they need active speech therapy or technology, they're going without because they can't afford it. And that breaks my heart. It breaks my wife...

50:11 KF: Yeah.

50:12 JP: Who's co-founder with me for the Orange Effect Foundation. We started a little golf tournament in 2007 to start giving back. We partnered with the Easter Seals. At this time, it started to take off. A few years ago, we started a real 501C3 and started to build this thing up, and now we've been able to... I think we've delivered now already to over 100 families in 17 states and fund speech therapy and technology which can get really pricey. So we are a fundraising organization and we go through a process to identify cases all around the country where kids need therapy, and we're like a last resort. Like you try insurance, you try whatever, you don't have the funds, and then hopefully, you come to Orange Effect Foundation and we can try to get those funds for you, so that your kids can get the speech therapy they need. And groups like Autism Speaks, fantastic. Love them. The majority of funds for organizations like that go to research, which is great but what about the rest of the kids that have autism... [chuckle]

51:14 KF: Sure.

51:15 JP: And apraxia and they're dealing with it right now, what do we do for them. And we've found that there's this really needed gap where that's not being filled, and that's what we're trying to fill.

51:24 KF: Fantastic. Fantastic. And do you have a website address for the foundation?

51:28 JP: Oh yes, I'm sorry. Yeah, I probably should... TheOrangeEffect E-F-F-E-C-T dot org. You can get there, and obviously, if you have the means and you wanna donate, great. But even better, if you know of families or you are a family that is in a situation... And everybody knows, usually, somebody that has autism or speech therapy issues. Please send them our way so that we can deliver funds to them. There's just so much need, and if we can help out in some way, we wanna do that. So, TheOrangeEffect.org is the place to go.

52:00 KF: Fantastic. Awesome. We'll include that link in the show notes.

52:04 JP: Thank you so much. I'll be working on that a lot in my... Since I'm taking time off from the content marketing world and going into the speech therapy world a little bit more in 2018.

52:16 JJ: Beautiful.

52:16 KF: Perfect. Perfect. Alright, Joe, so you talked a lot about some things that are coming up trend-wise, some changes in your schedule, the 30-day internet sabbatical. I always like to ask a question to our guest, what do you have coming down the line that you're super excited about? Maybe beyond the 30-day internet sabbatical.

52:43 JP: Yeah. It's strange. I promised myself... So my last official day at Content Marketing Institute is December 31st, and I'll still be around. I'll still be speaking at Content Marketing World and doing those things, but I'm completely out of operations for 2018. We're shutting down our podcast, "This Old Marketing," that's been going for four years. We're making a lot of decisions that were tough to make, and I'm excited about the fact that I'm basically taking six months off. And I'll do the 30-day sabbatical. February, I'm taking a trip to Sicily with my dad. I'm really looking forward to that, doing some bucket list type items. And I'm looking for the next chapter in my life and I'm excited about the possibility of figuring out what that is. I know that some of that's gonna be the Orange Effect Foundation, but I think there's other things that I want to accomplish, make an impact, and accomplish my goals in content marketing and running that small business and selling that.

53:40 JP: And now I wanna see what's new for me out there. But probably more than anything else is, in the previous 10 years of running a business, and entrepreneurs listening to this will understand, you have to make sacrifices. I made a lot of sacrifices in the way of travel. I travelled a lot. I was in a lot of different countries, giving a lot of speeches, doing a lot of consulting and training, and I miss things with my boys, who are now 14 and 16. And for the next two years, I'm not going to miss anything. So that's my...

54:11 KF: That's awesome.

54:12 JP: Kind of my pledge is, I will make everything and I will be around. And that's the one thing I guess I've learned as a father is, you don't always need to know what to say to your kids, but what's really helpful is you're just present...

54:24 S?: [54:24] \_\_\_\_.

54:25 JP: You're just there, like I will just sit next to them and hang out. And that's what I'm gonna do.

54:29 JJ: Sweet.

54:30 JP: I'm gonna hang out for the next six months and hang out for the next three years with them, before they go off to college and don't want to hang out with their dad anymore.

54:38 KF: Sure.

[chuckle]

54:38 JP: That's what I'm looking...

54:39 KF: [54:39] \_\_\_\_ dad, yep.

[chuckle]

54:41 JJ: Super cool. That's great, man. Hey Joe, if you have one piece of parting advice for our listening audience, what would that be?

54:49 JP: Oh man, I think the... That's a great question... The thing that when I talk to entrepreneurs and small businesses, the one thing I find that they're not doing is they don't have specific measurable goals, and they don't review those goals on a regular basis. And if I had to point back to one thing that really helped my personal journey was doing that and reviewing my goals on a regular basis. So I took a regular notebook and I split my goals into six categories, so I do financial goals, career goals, spiritual goals, family goals, philanthropic goals. And under each of those, I would list two to three measurable things and I would write them in the present tense, like I have sold my company for X amount, or the company did X amount of revenue in 2018. And I would start my day with those.

55:50 JP: And the reason why that was so important to review those is, I didn't get caught in stupid things like email and things that wouldn't help me accomplish those goals because I just read them. I'm like, "Well, I just said I'm gonna hit this revenue figure for 2018," "Well, I'm not gonna waste my time with that meeting," or, "I'm not gonna waste my time doing that." So it gets you really focused on what's the most important. Or even the family goals, what's the most important to you right now? So I would say get your goals in order, however you want to do them, and make sure, on a regular basis, at least weekly, I would say daily, but at least weekly, review those goals. It will change your life. And if you can do that on a regular basis, give it three months, give it six months, and you will see massive change in your life in a positive way.

56:37 JJ: I love it. That's awesome advice. Neon Noise Nation, get your goals in order. Good stuff. Hey, what is the best way for listeners to get in touch with you, Joe?

56:47 JP: Well, thank you. January, it's gonna be tough to reach me, but...

[laughter]

56:52 S?: [56:52] \_\_\_\_.

56:54 S?: [56:54] \_\_\_\_.

[laughter]

56:55 JP: Yeah, the easiest thing is JoePulizzi.com, P-U-L-I-Z-Z-I. It's got all the links, my email address, if you want me for speaking, all my books, Content Marketing Institute stuff...

57:05 KF: Perfect.

57:06 JP: It's all linked right on that site. And then I'm @JoePulizzi on Twitter. It's my favorite social media site, as well [57:12] \_\_\_\_ me directly.

57:14 JJ: Beautiful. Alright. Thank you, sir. Neon Noise Nation, we hope you enjoyed our conversation today with Joe. Joe, thanks again for being on the show.

57:23 JP: That was fun. Thanks guys, I appreciate it.

57:26 JJ: Yeah, it was awesome. We will have the show notes available from today at NeonGoldfish.com/podcast. Until next time, this is Justin, Ken, and Joe signing off. Neon Noise Nation, we will see you again next week.

[music]

57:42 S?: Thank you for listening to this episode of the Neon Noise Podcast. Did you enjoy the podcast? If so, please subscribe, share with a friend, or write a review. We wanna cover the topics you wanna hear. If you have an idea for a topic you'd like Justin and Ken to cover, connect with us on Twitter @NeonGoldfish, or through our website at NeonGoldfish.com.