

Rachel: Hello. Today, we are talking with Ron Douglas. Ron is a New York Times bestselling author. He has sold 1.4 million books and he has a huge, huge audience base. And we're going to be talking with him today a little bit about how he does what he does.

So first, we started out just asking questions around how he got started because this was originally just a little side project for him. And he eventually got laid off from his job so he went to working on his business full time. And he's been able to get several hundred thousand people on his mailing list, and he had \$100,000 book advance at one point, sold all those different books. He has, in his words, a "cash cow of a business" now.

And so I ask him about how he was able to generate publicity for his books, what he needed platform-wise to be able to get the book deal that he did. We talk about some really cool things that you can do to get to media, one of them was really surprising to me - basically paying your way into getting a story, but in an interesting way. So he'll tell you about that. And then we just dig into how his business runs now, what his day to day looks like. And so this is a more business-y oriented website but I think it's just really interesting. I certainly learned a lot and I hope you enjoy it. Let's get into it.

Rachel: Hey. So, Ron, thank you so much for being here.

Ron: Well, thanks for having me. It's a pleasure.

Rachel: Awesome. So the intention behind "A Better Life" is to show people that if they have a choice, they can choose a better life. So in that spirit, can you take a minute to share with us some of the things that you're most proud of in your life?

Ron: Right. Well, yeah, actually I made the decision back in 2001 that I wanted to have a better life. I was working 60 hours a week for JP Morgan on Wall Street. And I had my first child and I knew that, me and my wife and I, and I knew that I wasn't going to be able to spend much time with her. And then when she was born, I was stuck at the job and I only got to see her on nights and weekends.

So I'm especially happy and proud for the flexibility that my work gives me. I'm proud for passive income and royalties that I have coming from my book deal and my online ventures that enable me just to spend as much time with my kids as I want to and as they need me to, and to be a

soccer coach and attend gymnastic events for my daughter, and just get out there and experience their young years with them, and just be that dad I always wished that I had growing up.

Rachel: I love it. I love looking at your [Facebook page](#) and seeing the different things that your kids are doing. What did they just do where they were bargaining? Oh, the [Netflix](#). Can you tell everyone about that?

Ron: Yeah. I talk to them about business and about entrepreneurship a lot, and we make them do presentations so just to get them comfortable with standing up in front of an audience and speaking and whatnot. And we started them doing that at an early age So I come home one day and they had been asking me for Netflix for the longest time and I keep saying, "Oh, talk to your mom," and the mom keeps saying, "Oh, talk to dad," and we keep passing it back and forth but nobody wants to get it and commit to paying for it every month. Even though it's not that expensive, but I just keep blowing it off.

So I come home one day and they're both downstairs and they have this presentation prepared for me. And they tell me to come downstairs into their little presentation room, which is their playroom and they have a whiteboard with these pointers, and they have a whole big thing rehearsed, and the presentation's about why we should get Netflix.

They made me sit down, they did this big presentation for me, and the number one reason was, "It's a gift from heaven." So they went through this whole presentation. And then they literally closed me at the end. They wouldn't let me leave the basement until I committed to get Netflix. So I was so proud of them for such a good presentation, I had to go ahead and get it.

Rachel: That's so cute. I love that. I love all those little stories. You have little things like that all the time where they're doing really adorable things.

Ron: Yeah. Yeah, they're adorable kids. My daughter's ten, my son is seven. If you can imagine a ten and a seven-year-old sitting, there selling you on why you should get Netflix.

Rachel: And I remember seeing the whiteboard. There was like, I don't know, five or six different points on there, right?

Ron: Yeah, it was very detailed. They were rehearsed and they would take turns going through each point. They were on point. I couldn't even deny them the Netflix after seeing that presentation.

Rachel: Oh, that's awesome. So have you been pretty much 100% at home since 2001 when you left Wall Street?

Ron: No. I actually started my business in 2001. And I was kind of a chicken, I stayed there probably three or four years too long. I actually left when my daughter was . . . So it was 2007, I finally left there, so I started my business and started making money part time, and I was doing that and doing my job at the same time, and I started making more from my business than I was from my job and I still didn't leave. Had a mortgage to pay for and had a young kid at home.

So eventually they did me a favor and laid me off, and I just never went back and never looked for another job and just focused on my business full-time. And even that was a little scary. I was making a lot of money from my business but my wife was like, "Well, it's about time you finally left that thing. You should focus on your business 100% now." She was more confident than I was, but things just took off after that because I was able to focus on it 100%. And it's amazing, when you're home during the day, the opportunities that seem to come to you versus when you're only home after work.

Rachel: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. So now, you have this whole lifestyle business. Was it a lot where you had to work really hard in the beginning? Or do you still work really hard now, you just kind of work around your lifestyle, like taking your daughter to gymnastics and stuff?

Ron: Yeah, I worked really hard in the beginning. I was 27 years old and I was just full of energy and I was just going hard. I was just into it. It didn't feel like work. It felt like a science project or building a tree house or something. You don't count the hours, you just build it and you see what you built. And you look back on it and you're proud of what you built, so it's like that type of thing. So what do they say? When you love what you do, you never have to work another day in your life?

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ron: Yeah. So I still put in the hours now. I don't even know how many hours I put in but I do it when I feel like it, when kids get bored with me and want to watch their Netflix. "Go away, daddy," then I can get away

and work. Yeah, I definitely do it around my lifestyle and whatever hours I choose. A lot of times, I might not work the whole day and then I'll find some motivation at 2 o'clock in the morning. The only thing about that is, I'm 40 years old now so about 2:45 or 3 o'clock, I completely run out of gas. But that last hour between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m., I'm like a ninja.

Rachel: You can get a lot done in an hour if you're focused.

Ron: Yeah, I'm a late starter. I'm not a morning person at all. I'm a late night person.

Rachel: Oh, man, I'm exactly the opposite, 3 o'clock I will be in bed but I'm up at, like, five or six and I'm just getting things going.

Ron: We'd make a good team.

Rachel: Yeah, seriously, round the clock support. So awesome. So now where you are, I know you're a New York Times bestselling author and you have so many great things going on. And I'd love to just dig in a little bit to how you were able to create that audience that you have now, and just be able to do so well and only work when you have motivation from 3:00 to 3:45.

Ron: Yeah, 2:00 to 2:45.

Rachel: Sorry, 2:00 to . . . Yeah.

Ron: Well, building an audience was one of the things I focused on when I first got started early on. List building, and now it evolved into social media building and things like that. But I think the main focus is just having something that people want to know about, or having something that people really like, and not really trying to reinvent the wheel.

You could find what people are already searching for, what people are already buying, and put your own spin on it. And you know you're going to have an audience because that audience is already out there, actively searching and participating in groups and actively interested in that particular topic.

And from there, just having something that they want to get on your email list to get, or join your group, or join your page, or anything like

that. Just having a lead magnet, having something good that people want to get, you could build an audience that way.

Rachel: Totally. So what did you create that people were already getting and you had your own spin on?

Ron: Yeah. Well, I created a business around my hobby, which is cooking. Back in 2000, or actually 2003, I started the website RecipeSecrets.net and it was a website that focused on giving copycat versions of popular restaurant dishes. So I found that there were a lot of people searching for like the KFC chicken recipe, or the Red Lobster biscuit recipe, or different chain restaurants like that, Olive Garden lasagna recipe.

So I just created an e-book, a free e-book that I would give away where it would have some of those recipes in it. And then I had another full version of that e-book and a physical cookbook as well. So after they would download that free e-book containing these secret recipes, I would make them an offer for them to buy the full version. So it's basically what a lot of people wanted to know, like what's the secret behind these dishes, so I leveraged the popularity of the restaurants and the popularity of those restaurant dishes.

Rachel: Oh, that's smart. So things that tons and tons of people were searching for. How did you find the recipes?

Ron: Well, a lot of them were already out there. People had tried them and posted their results online and some of them were just straight trial and error. Me and my wife took the time to do it in our kitchen. But recipes, there's no copyright on recipes.

So you can find someone's creation out there and then put your own spin on it. Say it needs more of this, less of that, maybe more of this spice, less of this ingredient. And then you change it around, switch it up, and then if it tastes more like the restaurant version . . . And it's all subjective, it's all a matter of opinion, but you could have that as a base and then create your own version from there.

Rachel: That makes sense. And so how did people know to download from you and to trust you? How did you establish yourself as an authority?

Ron: Well, I had a product. I think that's the main thing. You put a product out there and you have a sales page for it. And I started getting other sites to promote that product. So I had what's called an affiliate program. So other sites had an incentive to promote my product through my affiliate program because they would get a commission from it and because it was a quality product. So they kind of made me an authority by recommending me to their audience. So you get a whole bunch of different sites, blogs, and affiliates doing that, and all of a sudden, you're the authority.

Rachel: So your offer was so general, like doing the recipes. Who are you finding to go and promote your book?

Ron: Well, anybody. Any cooking site. Any cooking blog. It's more of a niche. There were things out there that people can promote at the time, like Amazon, generic cookbooks, or pots and pans, things like that. But I gave them something a little bit different to promote. I gave them these secret recipes which were hard to find, or my own version of them which weren't out there on the net for free

But people just had that curiosity and they wanted to buy it. And it was an easy thing to promote because they were able to leverage those keywords when people were searching for "how to make Red Lobster's cheddar bay biscuits." And then a blog post would come up and then it would point them to my site saying, "Here's a recipe for that. You could also get the cookbook featuring all these other secret restaurant recipes as well."

Rachel: Okay, that makes sense. And then how did the whole book deal come into place in the New York Times bestseller?

Ron: Yeah. Well, I self-published for many years and then I turned my e-book into a [physical cookbook](#). And between 2003 and 2008, I was just straight self-publishing and then I got the book deal. Well, anybody can get a book deal if you already have an audience. If you can sell books on your own and they know that by giving you a book deal, you'll be able to market those books, and if it's like a proven entity like I had, I had a platform for selling books so it's pretty easy to get a book deal.

So I hired a literary agent, a friend of mine, and he went out and pitched the book deal to different publishers and we ended up getting a book deal with Simon & Schuster within 90 days of him pitching it, and they gave a \$100,000 advance for me to do two books.

And I also had an agreement with them where I could still self-publish. Normally they don't want you competing with them, but I told them I wasn't going to cannibalize my existing business. I had to get them to agree to let me do similar cookbooks but with a different title so I could still sell them to my website. So I sold them the cookbook, "[America's Most Wanted Recipes](#)." So they published that in 2009, it came out July 2009. And on my website today, I sell "[America's Restaurant Recipes](#)." So I created a different title, bounced new recipes, and I still self-publish.

But I was able to get a lot of publicity early on for my version of the KFC recipe, and that really propelled the book into the national spotlight because it was such a huge trend for about six weeks where I was known as this guy who had cracked the code on KFC's recipe. And you can Google it and see, a lot of the articles are still out there.

But I made the rounds on television. I did Good Morning America, Fox & Friends. I did all these different shows, Home Shopping Network. And that helped the book. The first book sold over 800,000 copies to date, and since then, I've published six books total and they've sold 1.4 million copies. So it's a crazy thing just to think my face is on the back of each of those books, and there's 1.4 million families with a book in their household with my face on the back of it. It's just a surreal type of thing. I never thought it would get that big, but it took off.

Rachel: That's crazy. So I have so many questions about publicity, but before we even do that, my first question is just, do you remember how big your platform was when you got published?

Ron: Yeah, when I got published I had a little bit over 150,000 email subscribers to [RecipeSecrets.net](#) that would get my weekly email newsletter.

Rachel: And did they care about social media at all or was it straight emails?

Ron: At the time, it was straight emails. It was straight emails, I had blog subscribers, I had YouTube subscribers, but I hadn't started on Facebook or Twitter or any of those yet. This was 2008, before I got the book deal.

Rachel: And did you have to tell them how many e-books you had sold, too, and do you remember what those numbers were? I'm just so curious. That's a huge advance and a huge book deal too, off the gate.

Ron: Yeah. Between the e-books and the physical books, within that period between 2003 and 2008 when I got the book deal, I had sold a little over 60,000 copies, self-published, on my own.

Rachel: Interesting. Do you think those numbers would still, like in today's market, get a book deal? I mean, I can't see why not but . . .

Ron: Right. Well, it wasn't necessarily the numbers, I think it was more of the platform that I had. And it was also the fact that I was selling them on my own and it was like a proven entity, and it was just mostly through my website and on Amazon. So I didn't have the huge distribution that was in the book stores. It was a low-risk proposition for them because they saw that it was something that people want, something that people want to buy, and it just needed a bigger distribution. So I think that was the main thing that got me the book deal.

Rachel: Okay. And then let's dig into publicity. Do you remember any of the things that you did to get so much publicity? We can just start with one and then go from there.

Ron: Yeah. I think the first thing I did to do publicity was to tap into what's hot in the media. So if you think back to 2008, late 2008, that was right at the start of the great recession. Lehman Brothers was collapsing and Wall Street was going under, the financial system was at risk, and there was a big bank bailout and all that stuff, so I jumped in with my story of former Wall Street guy.

So I just sat down with a publicist and came up with some different angles to pitch to his media contacts. And the first story that they ran with was "Former Wall Street guy gets laid off and leaves his Wall Street job, Wall Street career to pursue his passion of cooking."

So it was a story that Fox Business really loved. I was on Fox Business and that was my very first interview. So it's just looking at the media, and looking at what the hot stories are in the media, and trying to come up with an angle for your own story that fits right into that with what they're already covering, is one of the ways you can get publicity. And it helps to have a publicist that has contacts as well.

Rachel: Yeah, that makes sense. So when you're reaching out to them . . . because don't most stories have a certain shelf life?

Ron: Well, I mean, the great recession, that was . . .

Rachel: Yeah, that's a big one, for sure.

Ron: They're still talking about that.

Rachel: No, totally. And then I guess for people who would want to apply it today, how would you recommend that they would do that?

Ron: The stories do have a shelf life, it's just a matter of getting your name out there. And you might not strike gold on the first contact, but you establish yourself as an expert on a particular topic, or you establish your story in the minds of the media, and then other related stories might come up as well, and they might call you because they already know.

It's just creating awareness, like you contact them and say, "Listen, I have this story. Do you have something that fits? Give me a call," that type of thing. It's about having relationships with the media and then creating awareness amongst them that you're the guy with this particular story.

Rachel: Yeah, that makes sense. And do you know how regular people would contact the media? Or do you think a publicist is definitely the way to go?

Ron: Yeah, a publicist definitely helps because they usually already have contacts in the media. But all a publicist does is establish contacts over time by contacting the media, networking with them, and telling them, "Listen, I have this story. I have this client." And you could really do the same thing on your own.

Every time there's a story published, there's a media contact person related to that story. You see a newspaper article, you see who wrote that article. You see a video on a news site, you see who the reporter was for that video. And it's just a matter of finding their contact information and reaching out, which is not very hard to do on the Internet.

Rachel: No, it's really not, I know. I've been looking at different places that I wanted to get published, and just finding the Twitter handles of different people, and then just following them, and I have a list on Twitter with just different people that I want to make sure I stay in contact with and just tweet them. It's amazing how easy it is to get into connection with people.

Ron: Yeah. I have two other ways you could do it as well.

Rachel: Yeah, please share.

Ron: The local media. I started out really getting the local media. That's what really broke my story with the KFC story, so that ties into both of two points simultaneously. If you can leverage something that's already popular or famous, you have a better chance.

Not necessarily a news story, but just something in general that's famous, whether it be a celebrity or whether it be a restaurant, something that's famous. So I was able to tie my story in with KFC secret recipe because I had a version of it. And I was able to get into the New York Post, which is the local paper in New York.

And what happened was once I got that story published about this local Long Island guy cracks the code on KFC, even though I had already said that it was a copycat version, that's what I maintained, it was nobody knows what their real version is, the real recipe, but they ran with the story and sensationalized it and said that I was the one who cracked the code on it. So I was able to get that first article in the New York Post.

What happens from there is the media looks at the local papers for stories. That they see an amazing story in the local paper, then they'll follow up with that story and try to have them on television. That's exactly what happened in my case. So I was able to get a bunch of interviews just from people seeing that story and like, "Well, we've got to have this guy on."

So one of the things that I also do for clients as well, to get into the local paper because a lot of these local papers are starving for ad money. Everybody's turning towards the Internet now, they try to get as much ad money as possible because they're struggling right now. A lot of newspapers are going under. So what you could do is just contact the newspaper, and it's always the sales department. You tell them, "Listen,

I'd like to run some ads with you guys. I have some things I want to promote, I want to run some ads," and they will always contact you back.

So then you tell them, "Listen, here's what I want to do. I want to give you guys a story that you could run, and I also want to pay for an ad. So if I pay for an ad with you, will you run this story? And you'll be surprised that 90% of the time, they'll say yes. So they'll publish your story.

I had papers that published the story verbatim. I wrote the story in a third person as if I was a reporter writing it, and they published the exact story that I wrote in their paper verbatim. So I would have an article from their reporter of my story that I wrote, but it looks like it's in their words, and they publish that story. And then on the next page, I have an ad.

And so I was able to get a client from one of these ads that I wrote, one of these stories that I wrote. I think a paid \$140 for the ad and they published my article in that paper. And a client told me he saw the article, and he ended up spending \$7,500 with me to help him promote his book, and get his website up, and do a bunch of marketing for him. So I was able to spend \$140 and get a \$7,500 client out of it using that strategy.

Rachel: That's brilliant. I had no idea you could do that. And are you going for smaller-tier papers or can you do this with bigger ones, too?

Ron: Yeah. Well, you want to try it with the smaller-tier papers, but you can try it with the bigger ones as well. I mean, something like New York Times is probably not going to do it. But if you're like in a small city somewhere, you could probably do it with your main paper in that city.

Rachel: That's great. And I guess we could probably do it with lots of small papers, too. It doesn't need to be even just your local if you have a big offer?

Ron: Yeah, for sure. The thing about a lot of these small papers, the people who definitely read these papers are the people who advertise because they want to see their ad, right? So they get the paper and they read it, and they say, "Oh there's my ad." So if you have something that caters to small businesses, you can run that strategy all day long because you know there are other small businesses that looking for their ad and reading that paper. They're going to see your ad and your article as well.

Rachel: That's such a good point. So you've been on all over, like Good Morning America, you were mentioning a zillion other places. Was the main thing working through the publicist and finding pitches? Or were there other things that you did to get all those media mentions?

Ron: Yeah. That was the main thing. That first KFC story catapulted me into the national media circuit, I was just everywhere in the media. And then it's just a matter of just using your publicity resume, like I was on this place, this place, this place, can we get on your show too? And then it became less about the KFC story and more about I'm an author who cracks the code on these different restaurant recipes, and they would have me come in bring some of my dishes with me and they would taste test it, and things like that.

Rachel: That's so interesting. It's really just so, so fascinating to me. I actually think that my mom has your book at her house because I remember you were all over the place for such a long time. So then when you go on TV, are you trained to speak a certain way or do you just go up and be yourself?

Ron: You'd be amazed at how little preparation goes into it. Usually 90% of the time, when I went on TV, it would be a short conversation with one of the producers ahead of time, a short, ten-minute conversation. And then they would just have me on. I guess they would vet you, they would do their research on you, Google you, but it wasn't a long process or any rehearsals or anything like that. And they would just tell you to have three things that you want to talk about, and that's what my publicist would tell me, too.

My first two interviews, the mistake that I made was trying to answer the question too briefly. Because you only have a certain amount of time to talk, and if you just go straight to the answer and answer it, they'll move on to the next question. And before you know it, your time is up and you hadn't gotten a chance to say what you really wanted to say. It's usually a five to seven-minute segment when you're on, so it goes by so fast.

So you have to have three things in mind that you want to talk about, and as you're answering the question, you want to be as long-winded as possible so you can get your points off. It's better for them to ask you a few questions that you get your long-winded-responses to and get all your points in, than for them to ask you a bunch of rapid-fire questions and you have little time to say what you want to say. You just give the

straight answer and they move on to the next question, and before you know it, you didn't get to say what you wanted to say.

So you want to have these three points in mind, what you want to cover, whether it be three benefits . . . I used to go in there with three reasons people should buy my book. And I would always get to mention my website address or where they're selling the book or the book title in my responses so it'd make the most out of the promotional opportunity.

Rachel: Oh, that's awesome that they let you use your URL. I was in Woman's World a couple of years ago, and they flew me out to L.A., and I had this whole big thing like with a photoshoot and all this, and then the very last minute, they took me from the cover - I was their cover picture - they took me from the cover picture to a cover story, and they took out my URL, and there was no negotiating about it.

Ron: Yeah, some of them are like that. Some of them don't want you to mention the URL. But you could always mention a book title, for sure.

Rachel: Interesting. Okay. That's awesome. And how did you find the media appearances in terms of book sales?

Ron: They were amazing, amazing book sales. A lot of times you can't really track it, but the ones I could track . . . Like a lot of times, I would be able to mention my website address, and I had one in particular where, well, two of them that I really was able to attract the traffic from it.

The first one was a story I did and it was crazy because I had did Good Day New York, and then after my Good Day New York interview, I had jumped in a black car and a publicist hands me the phone, and I had no idea who I'm talking to, and I'm just doing the interview with some person I didn't even know who they were representing, and it turned out to be MSN. So it was The Today Show on MSN. And they posted the story on the front page of MSN.com and they put a live link back to my website, RecipeSecrets.net, and that stayed there for about 18 hours.

And it literally crashed my server. I was getting so much traffic from that, I think I got something like 40,000 opt-ins from it. It was just crazy. I have a forum and a message board and a blog on the site and those, not to get too technical, but those create what's called MySQL queries which are very bandwidth-intensive, and I had to shut down the forum and the blog because it kept creating so many queries that it was crashing the

server. So all I had when people visited the site was just an opt-in page where they could get the free e-book.

Rachel: Wow.

Ron: I know. It's just an amazing thing. And the second time, this was my second appearance being on Fox & Friends. And they took that interview, made a video out of it, took the recording and it got syndicated onto Yahoo News. So it was on the front page of Yahoo News, and that just created a whirlwind of traffic just from it being on Yahoo News and people seeing the video there.

So I find with these TV interviews, you get a lot more traffic to your website when they link to your website, and they post the recording of the interview on their website because they get so much traffic. But I've seen a spike in sales as well. You could look at the sales, but I don't normally see it until the reports come out maybe 90 days later to show on that day how many sales we were able to get.

Rachel: Huh. That's really cool. Do you know Michael Ellsberg?

Ron: No, I don't think I've ever heard of him. What does he do?

Rachel: He is a writer too, and I'm not sure if he's been a New York Times bestseller, but his books are super popular. And he said that he was on CNN and Wall Street Journal and New York Times and all of this stuff, and he said the thing that ended up getting him more book sales than anything else was a blog post on Tim Ferriss' blog.

Ron: Yeah. You know what it is? It's like when people are watching these shows, they're in the middle of getting dressed, they're preparing lunch for the kids, they look at, "Oh, that's interesting," and then they go to work or something. They're distracted. But when people are online, they can just click and it's so convenient. They just click and go right to the site and they can buy or whatever and they can get more information.

But people on the news, they watch it, "That's interesting," and they forget about it and move on to the next news story or the next television show, or they get on the train and go to work or something like that. Being on the web definitely generates more web traffic than being on television.

Rachel: Yeah, totally. But it does make sense to start with a smaller kind of newspapers and then work your way up. I can see where that's still really helpful just to end up getting on the Yahoo News and stuff.

Ron: Yeah. You both have to have a publicity resume to become a proven entity, and they can look at your prior interviews and vet you that way and say, "Well, this guy seems to speak well, let's have him on. I like his story. He didn't do anything crazy so he seems like a safe bet." But when you think about it, it's a 24-hour news cycle, so they're looking for something to talk about 24 hours a day, so it's just a matter of giving them something that they want to put on.

Rachel: Yeah. Wow, that's pretty cool. And so you can really just start with like \$140. And how do you know what to write your ad about? Or was it just like explaining what you do in that ad?

Ron: Yeah, the ad would be about an event, like I did an ad about me publishing a cookbook, I did an ad about me starting a new service, a new website. Usually you want to make it about some type of new event that's happening. And if it's your local paper, it works especially well because you can say "local man." Even if you just started a new blog, a new startup, a new website, "created by a local resident, Ron Douglas helps people do such and such," and then you start talking about how great you are. And you do it in a third person type of voice so that you don't seem like you're being too arrogant or something like that.

Rachel: Huh. And so you still work with that site, right?

Ron: Which site?

Rachel: The recipes wanted?

Ron: Yeah, it's Recipe Secrets.

Rachel: Recipe Secrets, sorry. I knew I was saying that wrong.

Ron: Yeah. The cookbook was "[America's Most Wanted Recipes](#)."

Rachel: Yes. And so you're still working with that list and everything and talking late to your audience?

Ron: Yeah. I don't write the emails anymore, but yeah, I'm still on there. My site is still active. It's a cash cow. I have a whole process set up, a

whole system set up. A membership site, a frontend cookbook, and I run ads through it to build my list. I sell email ads as well. Does your group want to talk about some entrepreneurial type stuff?

Rachel: Sure. Yeah.

Ron: I have this real lifestyle business set up with that site that I developed. I've been doing it for 14 years. Actually, no, 2003, so I've been doing it 12 years on that site. So basically over time I said, "How can I make myself redundant? And how can I milk this thing like a cash cow so I could have time to focus on other projects?" So what I do is I have my frontend e-book that I give away for free, and then I sell them on my physical cookbooks after they buy the e-books. So it's like giving a sample of your product for free and then saying, "Well, if you like this sample, get the full product."

So from there, they buy the full product and then I sell them on my cookbook of the week club, and I have other cookbook authors that contribute their cookbooks to this cookbook of the week club, and I'm able to share their cookbooks, their e-books, with my audience in exchange for me promoting their site to everybody else on my list. So people just want promotion so they're willing to donate their e-books.

So that's the basic funnels. I have the free e-book, I have an offer after they get the e-book, and then I have a continuity offer from there. So I just run a lot of ads to it. I run a lot of Facebook ads, I buy ads and email newsletters, I have affiliates promoting it, and that builds my email list. And then I sell email ads to other Internet marketers and other publishers related to cooking, whether it be fitness, whether it be supplements for diabetes, cookbooks, anything that people in the cooking market might be interested in, fitness.

And I have a broker that I work with. He goes out, he has a sales team and he finds advertisements. When we want to advertise, he sends me the advertisers, and I run their ads and I give the broker a commission so it's of having your own sales team doing the selling for you. And I just publish an email newsletter, like a traditional publishing model. As long as I keep good content and the regular content in email newsletters, my list doesn't seem to mind the two or three ads a week that I tend to run.

Rachel: And that cookbook of the week is such a great idea to be able to keep giving good content, because one of my questions to you was

going to be how, after all these years, are you able to still have good content? But that does it, huh?

Ron: Yeah. Well, the content is just recipes, there's no limit. There's always restaurants coming out with new recipes. There's so many recipes that you never seem to run out of recipes you could publish.

Rachel: And do you have someone vetting all the recipes? Or do you look and see which recipes have really good reviews already so you know they're safe to post?

Ron: Yeah. Yeah, I have my assistant, he vets the recipes. He does the searches and he finds it. We give sites credit. We find a lot from different sites like The New York Times, and different newspapers, they publish local restaurant recipes, and we'll credit the source and post links to those recipes. But there's still a secret recipe newsletter, they subscribe to it. I have people that have been on that list since 2003 that if I go a week without sending out an email, they'll email me and say, "Hey, what happened? I didn't get your email last week." It's that type of thing.

Rachel: Wow. That's awesome. And so is it the continuity that's the cookbook of the week?

Ron: Yeah. Continuity is the cookbook of the week that we'll run.

Rachel: And that's something that a lot of people are into, huh?

Ron: Yeah. People just like getting a new cooking e-book every week. People always have to eat, every day they have to cook something, so they just like having . . . people collect cooking e-books and they just like having that new one every week for a low price, or a low monthly price.

Rachel: And how did you find your broker that you work with?

Ron: Just through industry contacts. They actually found me, the first broker. I have two different brokers that I work with, and actually they both found me. At one point, I was one of the Top 100 cooking sites on . . . What is that site? ComScore.com. So these people, the brokers, they buy a listing from ComScore, the top most trafficked sites, and then they reach out to them. And they asked me, they reached out to me to ask me if I wanted to buy an ad.

And I said, "Yeah, I want to buy an ad. You guys sell traffic in the cooking genre?" and they were like, "Yeah," and I was like, "Well, I also have an email newsletter. Maybe we could partner up and you guys could broker my email list as well." So it started with them just contacting me to buy an ad. And I actually didn't even know that I could do that, this whole business model, until they contacted me and the light bulb went off and I said, "That'd be a good way to monetize my email list is working with you guys, using your sales team, and just giving you a commission for sending me new advertisers."

Rachel: That's really smart because you know they're obviously good at their job if they're reaching out to you.

Ron: Yeah, exactly.

Rachel: I love it. This has been really interesting and really great. We haven't really had any interviews that have gone like this, but I think it's probably opening people's eyes up to all the opportunities out there, with these recipes. Some things that you're just finding on other people's sites and just curating, and now you have a list of all this and you've sold so many books. Gosh, it's amazing. You're really talented.

Ron: Thank you. I'd like to say that I'm so brilliant and all that stuff, but it's when you're in the game, opportunities just fall in your lap and one thing leads to the next. Like when you look at someone's accomplishments over a period of time, all you see is the end result, but you don't see the process behind it, you don't see, "Okay. Well, I tried this. That didn't work. Oh, maybe I'll try this. Oh, that worked. Okay, so if that worked, what else can I add onto that?" So it's like a process of building, like building Legos or something. And at the end of the day, you have this big thing, but it really was just one thing leading to the next. And it's just a matter of being in the game and you start to figure things out over time.

Rachel: And when you say "in the game," that's what you're saying about trying different things and seeing if they're working or not? Or are there other components to it? Because I'd just love to like, I guess, dig in a little bit more about what that means, what the mindset means to you, especially when you're getting started.

Ron: Yeah. Being "in the game" means actively taking action, actively taking steps, actively doing things. I guess there's two types of people. There's people that want to see the future before it happens. They say,

"Well, okay, I'm going to do this and that and that, and it's going to equal this." And there's other people that just say, "Okay, I'm going to do this today and I'm going to do three things every day, and at the end of the month, I'll have 90 things done," and they just start doing stuff.

There's people that are overly critical and it prevents them from actually putting things into production -creating things and putting things out there - because they're like, "What would people think about this?" or, "What if that doesn't work?" And there's other people that just go ahead and do it, and if it doesn't work they say, "Well, okay, I'll do something else." And that's how you really learn.

A lot of people out there think that they're supposed to learn everything they need to know before they actually put stuff out. But no. No. You learn as you're doing. Your best lessons come from doing things instead of just buying stuff and buying information and reading. Your best education comes from actually trying stuff.

Rachel: Yeah. And I can see that you've really done that because as you share your story, there's a couple of things that a lot of people would advise against, like your niche. So many people would say your niche is too big, that you should've went a little more segmented. And then the cookbook of the week, I could see people saying, "Well, that's too much information. That's information overload. People aren't going to want that," but you just kept taking action and trying different things. And obviously it's working very well.

Ron: Yeah, for sure. It becomes easier over time because once you build an audience, you can survey them and see what type of stuff they'd be interested in. You could ask them. I had a forum on my site and I would just ask people. And I would send them emails and, "Hey, what's your thought about this?" And I would get them all on the forum, and they would tell me what they think, and everybody would see everybody else's responses.

And that way, you actually create buzz for actually putting out the product because people were saying, "Oh," they see the comments, people saying stuff like, "Oh, yeah, that's awesome. I can't wait for that to come out." It makes them want to buy it more. So you could use your audience for what it's worth, and get them interacting and giving their feedback, and use them as a major source of research and intelligence.

Rachel: Totally. Did you get any ideas specifically from them that they gave you?

Ron: Yeah, for sure. A lot of the ideas would just be throwing stuff out there to see if they liked it or not. But the idea for the physical cookbook . . . I was just trying to do e-books when I first started. I was just looking for something to promote on ClickBank, to be honest. And the feedback I got from them was, "I bought this e-book from you, but I really thought it was a physical cookbook, and I'd rather have a physical cookbook." So I found out that a group of people, majority of them actually, that would prefer a physical cookbook that they can hold and just a traditional type of cookbook rather than an e-book.

Because a lot of my audience, I learned over time, is older women, the 45 or older, but it's not like 25. So it's between 45 and 65 is my main target demographic of people that are interested in what I'm putting out, and they're traditional people that just like physical cookbooks. So they started complaining and I accommodated them with a physical cookbook. And luckily I did that because that led to the whole me publishing books with Simon & Schuster and opened doors for a whole lot of other things.

Rachel: That's awesome. Man, I've loved talking to you. This has been so interesting. And I'm sure that other people are going to want to know where they can find more about you, too. So can you let people know where they can go online to keep up with you?

Ron: Yeah. We actually just started a project called Writer Help Wanted where we're helping writers get started, online marketers get started, making money from home. And I always tell people one of the easiest ways to get started and to make money online is to offer a service. And one of the most in-demand services you could offer is writing services. And there are many different things you could write about. There are hundreds of thousands of businesses, and websites, and people out there looking to get writing jobs filled, whether it be writing grant proposals, whether it be writing blog posts, or product reviews, whether it be writing press releases for people, or ghostwriting e-books for people or physical books. There are so many different ways you could make money writing. And if you're a decent writer, there's no reason why you can't provide a writing service or, find jobs or gigs, or freelance gigs that people want to pay you for and make a little extra money from home. So that's what the project WriterHelpWanted.com is about. And we're going to be working personally, me and my partner, Alice Seba,

who is also a professional writer, to help some people just learn about that opportunity, learn how to market themselves, learn how to get their services out there and make extra money from home just on your computer writing. So that's what I'm excited about right now - WriterHelpWanted.com.

Rachel: Yeah. And I've been on the site and it's great. They have all kinds of things for all kinds of writers, which I thought was really good. So not just article writers, but playwrights and copywriters and different things, so it's really good. You and Alice have been an incredible team.

Ron: Yeah. We work well together. I met her in San Diego and we hit it off. I've known of her and she's known of me from being online so many years, and it was a pleasure to work with her, for sure.

Rachel: That's awesome. Well, thank you again so much for being here.

Ron: Thank you for having me. It was great, a lot of fun.

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I really appreciate you.

With love,
Rachel Rofé