

David Abrams: [00:01](#) Hello, hello and welcome to episode number 19 of the SaaS Breakthrough show brought to you by Demio. SaaS Breakthrough show will be an inside look at what is working in marketing for SaaS companies today by the marketers who are in the trenches experimenting on a daily basis to grow their MRR and build amazing businesses. My name is David Abrams and I'll be your host today as we bring on John Bonini, who is the director of marketing at Databox. John refers to himself as just a guy that does everything in marketing. He previously ran growth for Litmus and now, like I said, is the director of marketing over there at Databox, a software company making performance insights more accessible to everyone. We go through a ton on this episode. They are a great company, kind of a younger company, but we learn how they just broke the 1 million ARR mark and the big celebration. Congratulations to them for doing it. How they did it? How they use things like content marketing, using specialized systems like polling of user generated content to create amazing articles that have created a wave of traffic to their website or referral marketing using partners and how they've been able to bring a Hubspot style agency model into their business to really push their growth in a great way. We talked about the focuses that they had to do as a younger company and what it meant for the marketing department. How do you actually keep your focus on one or two main channels as you grow and expand and how are they stayed focused but also created innovation inside of marketing systems. I really, genuinely love this episode. Felt very relatable to the Demio journey itself. Our own bootstrap journey. So I think you guys will really love the honesty and the openness of this conversation. Really hope you guys enjoy. Don't forget to leave a comment, can be questions, ratings on itunes so that we can get this message out to more people. Let's go ahead and let's jump right into the show.

Narrator: [02:10](#) This is the SaaS Breakthrough podcast. Uncovering what's working today in SaaS marketing by the actual SaaS marketers who are building companies day in and day out. Let's get started.

David Abrams: [02:25](#) Hey John, thanks for joining me. How are you doing today?

John Bonini: [02:28](#) I'm doing good, David. Thanks for having me on, man. I'm pumped to be here on the podcast, is a big deal, I saw it on Openview, right? Was it under Openview blog recently?

David Abrams: [02:35](#) It might have been. It's been on a variety of places luckily, but yeah, it's an exciting time. It's you know, a lot of great guests is the big thing is having great people like yourself on here is really what makes the show.

John Bonini: [02:45](#) Oh, I gotta I gotta keep it up because you've had a long line of good guests. So I'm, I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

David Abrams: [02:51](#) Yeah, I'm excited and you know, let's jump right in and talk to us about Databox. Who you guys are, customers, what you guys are doing unique in the marketplace. Give us the full rundown.

- John Bonini: [03:01](#) Right? So. So Databox makes it the way we like to position it as databox makes it easier for, for marketers or salespeople or customer success reps, anybody really in a business function to, to access deeper performance insights quickly. So, traditionally people might call that a dashboard software, but in addition to dashboards, we allow marketers, salespeople, success reps to also create and set goals inside the APP, set alerts for performance, a specific KPI so they get notified when things are trending up or trending down. So really it's a place that you can sort of monitor, improve and report on all of your business performance and bring all of it under one umbrella, right? Because think Hubspot had a stat recently, like the average business has like 12 different tools that they're managing, that they track performance from. So Databox brings all those 12 or more into one place under one umbrella. So the data's just there. And yeah, you can monitor, improve and report and basically do better work once you have all that all in one place.
- David Abrams: [04:03](#) Who do you guys actually serve? I could have best customers that you have come in. Is it the bigger companies? We've definitely had some guests on here before. We've talked about enterprise level tools to those customers. But you know, obviously different dashboards and different software for different things.
- John Bonini: [04:19](#) Right. Yeah. So, our beachhead market really was marketing agencies because that challenge of, that I just mentioned of having 12 different tools that you're pulling data from, you know, multiply that by 10 or 20 or 30 clients for an agency and you have a really costly nightmare, that many marketing agencies face once a month when they're going to put together their reporting decks and they're, you know, copy and pasting out of out of all these different tools and downloading csvs and then pasting into spreadsheets and then putting it into slide decks and creating bar charts. And it's a really costly exercise. So, that was like our beachhead market and couple that with the fact that Peter Caputa who's our CEO actually built a Hubspot partner program at Hubspot. And so we had a really a really good tie in to you know, the agency community, so it was a, it was a really strong product fit, I think right off the bat. And we have a really strong direct side of the business as well, lot of SaaS companies, lots of ecommerce, but our, our initial beachhead market so to speak was, was marketing agencies.
- David Abrams: [05:30](#) That's really cool. And I want to talk a little bit more and a little bit about that product market fit there and how you guys found that so early, but you know, maybe explained to us when you joined the Databox team maybe ballpark of where company ARR was at that time when you joined.
- John Bonini: [05:44](#) Yeah. So that was like a, gosh, I was talking to Pete and Davorin, one of our founders about joining last summer. But I think I officially joined the team sometime in October and I think we were around like 40,000 MRR. And actually just yesterday we just went over 86,000 MRR. So we just crossed the 1 million ARR mark, which is, which is a pretty big deal.

- David Abrams: [06:10](#) Congratulations to you guys. Seriously. That's so awesome. And I hope you guys threw a big party.
- John Bonini: [06:15](#) Yeah oh not yet. Not yet, but I think there's still a lot of work to be done and it's still early and uh, I think that's probably not the nature of a lot of the folks here. We just still keeping our eye on, on the opportunity ahead of us and, and stay focused.
- David Abrams: [06:30](#) Totally. It's just the beginning, just the beginning of a great milestone to it. So when you came in, how long had the company been open? What was your first initiative? What were you trying to solve when you first joined?
- John Bonini: [06:40](#) Right. So, I mean, when I had joined, like I had mentioned before, Pete, our CEO had come and join the company from Hubspot probably in, I think it was like January 2017. So the company had been around for a bit though, Databox has been around for a few years. They were more positioned toward the enterprise, which is funny because you were mentioning that earlier, but I think they just faced some challenges with scaling and it's, you know, an enterprise relationship every, every customer, sort of like a customer relationship. And so when, when Pete joined he kind of repositioned to the smb market who are, you know, folks that have a real challenge with tracking their performance and managing their data in general and there's not a ton of options for them in terms of things that are affordable and things that do the things that they need. So yeah. So, so just to answer your question on how we were positioned. So when I first came in, we were still sort of positioned towards that enterprise market primarily, as a, as a tool for executives to be able to track their data anywhere that they were right, so on a flight, if they're traveling to a board meeting, they could check it on their phone, they could check it on their desktop. And so we were still positioned towards that market. And so what really the first thing that we did, was sort of rebrand and reposition. So it was a project that span the website or copy, you know, how we were positioned on social and yeah, so, so really the first thing that we did was, was just sort of rebrand Databox to who they were already currently serving at that time, which was the smb market, marketing agencies. And so there was a lot of things that we weren't saying on the website. So our digital footprint really didn't, didn't convey that. So that was really the first big project that we did really like literally week one, day one.
- David Abrams: [08:37](#) That's awesome. We actually kind of just went through a big update ourselves in that same light at the end of last year. So let me ask you this. I mean I think it's a big thing to say, hey, we did rebranding, but like what does that mean? Are you getting on phone calls with customers? Are you trying to find actual person, build the personas, who you think those people are? Are you then going straight to try position that into messaging and then doing the website? I think a lot of people who struggled to try to find who their customer persona is or who their brand voice or what their brand voice is I should say maybe the order of how to do things and where the priorities lie.

- John Bonini: [09:13](#) Right? Right. Yeah. I think we definitely talked to some customers. I think in general, I think you, you can talk to a handful, you could talk to three, four or five customers and really get a good handle on it if, if your audience is well defined, which for us it is. And it was so I, I did talk to a bunch of agencies. I still do. I also talked to more direct side customers now as well. But at the time, yeah, definitely talk to customers. I mean it spent a lot of that early, those early few days just learning, right? Like trying to become an expert in the product myself talking to customers that were already using it, kind of learning from Pete and the founders and some of the engineers, like the history of, of the product and what it did and who it was serving and why we built certain things. So yeah, that, that first was sort of just like a drinking from the firehose and in talking with our folks internally to learn, you know, what were the grand aspirations of this product, how should we be talking about it in future proofing it, talking to our customers about the value that we're getting from it. So that, yeah, that, that, that's step one, but at the same time they were, we were already, you know, we were already serving a market and a use case and building product and features for a user that was already pretty well defined. The problem was pretty well defined. What we were building for them was based of real feedback from real customers. So literally it just was a matter of us taking that information in and putting it on our website and making sure our marketing reflected that, which at the time our website didn't. And because really at the time they were just really trying to prove the use case, increased customer count and you know, after that is when the branding and the marketing follows. So yeah. We definitely did talk to customers still do. That's a, that's a big part of our strategy. But at that time we had a pretty good feel for the problem that we're solving who we were solving it for. It was just really a matter of getting that live.
- David Abrams: [11:07](#) Totally. Are you testing like the conversion from the website to ensure that the messaging is right or like what kinds of things do you guys do when you're testing the messaging and the content and the brand voice that you're approaching with? Obviously you guys have grown. So I want to know, you know, some of the channels and stuff that you did as well, but I think, you know, maybe maybe there are some lessons that are valuable, things that you learned during that part too.
- John Bonini: [11:31](#) So at that time that was a pretty big. That was a pretty big redesign on the site. We didn't actually, we didn't ab test anything. I find that ab testing isn't that effective when you're, you know, at the time, I can't remember the exact number, but our website traffic wasn't massive. Right. And I think if you're going to do ab testing when your website traffic is low, you're gonna, you're gonna be waiting weeks, even months till you get to statistical significance and you just burn a ton of time. So what we did was we just, you know, we changed everything right? And we use tools like, don't know if you've heard of Luckyorange, it's, it's kinda like Hotjar, it's a younger company. And so we use tools like Lucky orange and then obviously like tracked, you know, in Databox like how, you know, how the website was converting, you know, using Mixpanel and things like that. So what we do is we would just make these

changes, take big swings and then measure the effect a week or two out, compared to the previous two weeks, you know, on the website. So again, like our, our traffic was pretty low at the time. So if you're going to nitpick and do ab testing, your, it's going to take even longer to make moves. So what we did was we took some big swings on the site in terms of copy and design. We, you know, we tracked and saw how the website was performing two weeks out a month out and you know, if we saw like a massive degradation in signups or anything like that, yeah, we probably would have revisited what did we do here, should we backtrack a bit and, and maybe be less bold in the changes that we're making all at once. But yeah, we, we actually did see improvements and I think a lot of that had to do with the messaging just being more in line. You know, people are, we're, we're reading our blog content, which uh, you know, which was great, and then if they went to explore the site, it didn't always align maybe with what they had just read. So I think just from a logical standpoint matching, you know, having everything beyond brand matching the website with the content we're putting out, um, you know, it, it was, it was almost like a, a guarantee that we were going to see, see a small bump. And again, it wasn't anything massive, but, you know, we, we definitely saw some slight improvements and from there it was just about, all right, let's, let's focus and keep heads down on, you know, how do we draw more people to the site and draw more people to the brand because testing things when you're, you know, I don't remember the exact amount, but like for argument sake, testing things when you're doing 10,000 sessions a month, right is is almost a waste of time, right? Like drive more people to the site, make sure the message is on point, make sure everything's on brand and, and, and focus on getting more people to the site, which is kind of what we did after that.

David Abrams: [14:08](#) That makes a ton of sense and you're absolutely right. I love that, that feedback and advice. All right, so what are the next things that you did? Where did you guys go? How would you prioritize the channels that you went after with your new messaging?

John Bonini: [14:18](#) So they were already doing, Kevin Kononenko, who's our content marketer who had been on board with Databox since last really last spring and so he had been blogging and building sort of like a, you know, him and Pete, and some other folks and some of our partners had been blogging, you know, for, for six, eight months. So they had really built a strong foundation our organic was slowly growing. But really like the, the big thing that Kevin and Pete had sort of built early on, this is before my time, was this process of involving our customers and our partners in our marketing. And so what I mean by that is rather than just like, do the typical, you know, myself or Kevin or Pete would like write a blog post about, you know, um, something that, you know, thoughts that we had about improving a certain metric which we, which we do and there's value in that. What Pete and Kevin had had sort of conceptualized was a sort of survey lever, right, so to speak. So what they would do is they would involve our partners in our marketing and they would survey all of our partners and customers on specific questions related to marketing, whether it was, you know, software tools that you're using, SEO tips, ways to make your

email marketing better. And they would come up with these survey questions, survey all of our partners and customers or even other marketers. And then they put out these posts with like 25 to 50 and sometimes even 60, 70, you know, insights from different contributors. And so what that would do is you would put out this post that was pretty well aligned with our product and a lot of cases it was keyword driven and it would have all of this, you know, all these different points of view and all these different insights from 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 marketers in it. And now all of that content was inherently shareable. So, you know, when we would poll 50 people for a survey post, afterwards, it's, it's highly likely that those 50 people are then going to share that post, right? Because they are featured in it. So, um, yeah, early on, Pete and Kevin had, had sort of put together this process for creating surveys and it was a way for us to more quickly create content as a small team that was super valuable because you were, again, collating all these different points of view into one post and then you're getting more out of it because the post is inherently viral because, you know, a significant portion of the people who contribute are also going to share it, you know, whether through social or their email list or they're going to link it on their site. So we still do that to this day. And, and that was a really big driver of, of driving sort of short tail traffic to our site. Because again, people are sharing it as soon as it comes out. But also on the long tail too our organic has, has grown significantly over the last 12 months.

John Bonini: [17:08](#) And a big part of it, is that content that, you know, Pete and Pete started building, you know, in writing, by himself at first. But then when Kevin joined, it really sort of took it up another level and then we also created a podcast and I'm, you know, we were talking about this before, but, you know, really for a brand piece, but also, you know, as, as marketers are more and more engaging with these different channels and mediums as they become more accessible to listen to and more accessible to create, you know, I think it's important that we have a presence and talk about the things that, you know, our customers would be interested in. So we started a podcast all about growing a business, and talk to founders about the goals that they set and how they met those goals and you know, the good, bad and the ugly of growing a business. And yeah, I mean this, I mean, we could talk all day about this stuff, but lead nurturing and really there was a lot of stuff that we implemented, you know, in the fall that really started paying dividends over the following months. But it all really traces back to, to that content strategy that we started building that's really, really helped us grow in awareness and, and just, you know, as a business too.

David Abrams: [18:27](#) I think it's so interesting when people talk about like their first major wins, I guess for you guys, it was content you double down on content marketing from user generated content from those polling surveys, which I think are brilliant. And then also the podcast, both of those being long term strategies that you guys really, like you said before, a swung for the fences there with long term knowing that could pay off in six, eight, 12, 24 months. But what about the short term wins in the meantime, do you guys look at those as your long term marketing and then say, hey, we gotta do some short term

marketing strategies now too? Or do you guys just focus on those and stay really clear and focused on what you're trying to accomplish?

- John Bonini: [19:05](#) Yeah, that's a good question. I think, I think especially when you're in startup mode, you really are focused, in the early days on know the next 30, 60, 90 days at least from a marketing standpoint, right? So, but we were always thinking long term as well. I think the great thing about content is that when done effectively, it serves both, right? Like if you're creating content that involves your customers and that, speaks to, to, to a need, right? Like that's going to be something that's going to take off right away, right? Because if you're involving, your customers are going to share it, but if you're, if you're talking about things that, you know, are evergreen and keyword driven, it's also going to sort of perform even better in three to six months. So I think, we've always focused on, on both, right?
- John Bonini: [19:58](#) Like we kinda got an idea of what we needed to do in terms of volume to be able to hit the goals that we needed month over month. But at the same time, we're also looking at, you know, what is this going to do for us three to six months out, where, where are we headed and what are we going to need to do by then? So like that's the beautiful thing about content is it service both. But with that said like, yeah, you know, as you grow and as you sort of build out those channels, I think you need to find more innovative ways and approaches to growing your audience, you kind of need to continually disrupt your way of doing things. And by that I don't mean you ditch old things, I just think you keep adding to it and you find additional ways to scale your audience and things that are repeatable. So yeah, I mean, I guess it's not a great answer, right? Because both, right? It's never a great answer, but I think when you're doing content right, it should serve both the short and long term.
- David Abrams: [20:49](#) I love that answer. What you said, you mentioned innovating on processes you already have. How are you finding ways to innovate? Are you just trying to creatively think of a new way to share this post or are you doing research and looking at other companies are doing in other verticals and you're like, we should try to do that too. Like how do you guys really breakthrough that? Because it's easy to just get the process. Like we have our blog post process, we do this every week for three months straight, but you're not necessarily innovating all the time. Like how did you find that process?
- John Bonini: [21:16](#) I mean, I think we're still doing it right. I don't think there's an easy way to finding that out. I think the things that you just said are things that all of us do. Like, right, we look at case studies and we repost about what works for others. I think for us, I think what's interesting is when you work within your limitations, it actually creates more focus around what you can or should do. And what I mean by that is, you know, you know, for us, like we're not really, we're not in a position right now to spend a ton of money on paid ads, right? So that's paid acquisition is something that, you know, we might, you know, we might dabble in, you know, in the future, but right now it's not something, especially as a small team that we're, we've prioritized and it's probably not



going to have the return that we're looking for. Also being a small team, you know, a lot of our design and engineering resources as they should be, are focused on product, right? And improving the product and building out more features. So really when you think about, okay, so what am I working with from a marketing standpoint, you know that maybe we can't spend a ton of time developing, you know, new and crazy things, although you know that that doesn't include webpages and stuff like that. And you're not going to spend a ton on paid ads, so like that already kind of zero in your focus on. Okay, so this, this is going to be an organic play, so you know, what can I do with others, you know, you're looking at organic, you're looking at referral traffic. So for us it's about getting smarter, I think with how we approach our topics and our subject matter.

John Bonini: [22:52](#) So again, being, being more keyword driven, but it's also about like I just got off the phone with, with a partner of ours before I jumped on here, finding new and innovative ways to work with our partners because we have this base of evangelists already sort of built in to our marketing engine. And so I think it's about the, a lot of the innovation, I think that will drive us or some of the innovation that will drive us in the short and near term will come from how we can partner and make those relationships more productive for both of us. So how can we, how can we make co-marketing more advantageous for our partners? And, and in doing so, how can we drive even more awareness and traffic to our site? So I think for us it's really about increasing organic, which, you know, we know the playbook there, right? It's about execution and being able to write about the right things, serving the right audience, but then for us too, it's referrals and co-marketing has been a really big deal for us. So I think it's about getting, getting even more refined there and, and seeing like where else can we take our partner marketing and co-marketing so it benefits not just us but them as well. And in doing so that's gonna, that's gonna recruit a whole new line of people that want to co-market with us or maybe even do business with us. So I think that was a long winded answer but really it's about working within your limitations that helps you really focus and zero in rather than being like, well I could do a million different things. So I think working within your limitation helps you focus. And then for us it's really like the organic play, doing more innovative things with co-marketing and just seeing other, other people that we can maybe partner with. And seeing how we can partner with other marketers that might have, you know, an overlap in audience and seeing what we can do there. So I think there's a lot from the organic referral, direct play and obviously social and email for people that are in our ecosystem. So I think there's a lot there for us to innovate from that were, that were just in the early stages, mid stages now of trying to cracking that up.

David Abrams: [25:03](#) I love it. And I mean you said a lot of great advice there, a ton of great advice that people can absolutely listen to. I think that the idea of focusing in your limitations and you said a lot of things that resonated with me and I'm going to take some of these conversation pieces and talk to our team about it as well. What about tactical strategies or advice or things that you learned from referral marketing? It's something that we're starting to really break into more.



What have you guys been able to take away from doing it over the past few years?

John Bonini: [25:29](#) So I think in, in terms of referral marketing, I think what a lot of marketers think of is sort of just trading links, right? Like guest posting and doing those sorts of things. But I think what we've really tried to do and really this is like pizza influence is, is really over deliver on value to, to our partners and Co-marketing. And I think really what that does is it obviously it keeps them interested in wanting to do more co-marketing. But it, you know, if, if they're successful, if we open up an additional channel to make our customers successful, it's only going to make more people want to participate. Right. So, you know, I think we've just learned that, you know, if we can, if we can outwork everyone else in terms of creating value for our customers besides the product, right? Like, you know, take away the product for a second. Yeah. Obviously the product delivers value, otherwise we wouldn't have customers, but outside of that, if we can outwork everyone else in terms of additional value that we can bring our customers, they're going to want to work more closely with us. And as a result, you know, other other people, other, folks in our target market are also going to see that as well. And I think that that's, that's been something that I've learned really from, from working with Pete is in, in something now that makes a lot of sense. The way Hubspot approach things. When I was working with an agency, Hubspot would always over deliver and go out of their way to roll out the red carpet for partners. And, and that's how, you know, the agency that I have worked at, that was a big part of how we grew as by attaching ourselves to Hubspot. And so I think, you know, specific tactics aside, I think really, again, if we could just outwork everyone else in delivering value to our customers outside of the product, I think that, that we could build something really special, not just in the product but also our marketing approach to. And I think that that's something unique, because I think, like I said, I think a lot of marketers approach referral marketing as like an exchange. It's very transactional. I'll write this post, you give me a link, you drop this in your newsletter. Whereas we're really just like having one to one conversations with our partners, seeing what we could do to add value to them and then trying to scale that and open up programs that make it repeatable that all of our partners can participate in. But really it starts with talking with a few of them, seeing what would add value, seeing what would make sense and then helping everybody sort of get on board with it. And yeah, I mean that's been, that's been the pillar of our marketing. And I think it'll, it'll continue to be.

David Abrams: [28:07](#) Has that been your biggest win for marketing since you started?

John Bonini: [28:12](#) I would say so. Yeah. Because I think that that's really what, what put us on the map. It's what built our initial marketing audience. I think what, you know, what never gets old is Pete or Kevin or somebody or Brian or Tory or other people on our team will share tweets from people that say stuff like, you know, the Databox blog is, is I feel like I shared, you know, five posts a month to my team from that blog. And I think when we see stuff like that, we know, we

know that it's working and that that's really the side that's not as measurable. Right? And like we can certainly measure and see the impact that it's had on traffic and the impact that it's had on business. But I'm seeing how it's helping people. I think, think strategically or think differently, I think is the part that's most rewarding. But I would say, yeah, that's, that's been, aside from the product itself and all the innovation that's, that's happened within the past year to align with our customers. I would say that, yeah, uh, the sort of involving our partners in our marketing and involving them on this journey has been, has been a massive win.

David Abrams: [29:21](#) That's incredible. And where do you go see marketing changing this year? Are you guys going to be doing more innovation in the content and referral side of your business or do you guys see yourselves evolving now that you've hit this kind of new milestone into any other channels or any other parts of marketing?

John Bonini: [29:38](#) Yeah, I mean, I think we're going to continue to do the things have that have gotten us here. You know, keep, keep throwing coal on the fire so to speak. But I think as I mentioned before, I think we, we have to continually reinvent how we grow our audience. And I think, yeah, some of that will involve, you know, we've started to record a lot more video and include that in our onboarding and to make it easier for people to get started. So I think that that's, you know, as you, as you increased traffic, right, the new problem that you create for yourself or as you increase traffic and sign ups, I should say the new problem that you create for yourself is alright, how do we onboard all these people effectively, right? Because, as your audience grows your customer base, or your free user base, we have a free product that's going to evolve as well. And you know, maybe what worked in terms of onboarding and lead nurturing at the beginning a month ago or three months ago or six months ago, won't work, you know, six months from now, right? As, as that audience doubles or, or growth 25 percent or whatever it is. So I think, we're going to have to continually get creative and reinvent ourselves, not just at the top of our funnel and how we grow our or organic and referral and how we partner with other people, but also how do we, how do we service these people and get them up and going as quickly as possible. That's one thing we pride ourselves on is how do we, we want to be the easiest to use a performance tracking tool that there is. Because I think for, for so long, people think of data and they think clinical, right? They think, they think in very clinical terms are very complex terms and we're trying to sort of flip that on its head by making the product insanely easy to use and then having our marketing sort of a really speak to the different use cases and show people how to, you know, derive value from it and such. So, yeah, I mean, yes, we're going to have to continue to invent ourselves. You know, we'll talk again in six months and I'll probably go be able to give you more color around the things that we're trying and the things that are working. But I think really for us it's a, it's a huge focus on organic and a huge focus on just, you know, in more ways that we can partner with our partners as well as maybe other other marketers and influencers in the field.

- David Abrams: [32:04](#) One thing I would love to hear in the next six months when we do talk again and I would love to check in and see how things go is learn when do you make the calls on priorities? I think that's always an interesting question to me because you guys can double down, but when do you expand into new channels? When do you do new things? When do you say, hey, we need to switch back to the bottom of the funnel or middle of the funnel and, you know, move some of our efforts there. That's always an interesting question. So I would love to learn, how you guys prioritize those ideas. And you know how that's contributed to growth as, as you guys get there, but you're in a really exciting time. I'm really happy for you where you're at and know it's really exciting that you've, you've done so well with the marketing process that you've done so far. So congratulations to you guys. But, uh, let's, let's do this. Let's jump over to our lightning round questions. We'll wrap up here. We're already about 30 minutes into the episode here. So I do want to get to these questions which are really fun and really helpful for a lot of people. Just go ahead and you can answer these questions, as fast as possible. Just your first thought that comes to mind. It's a lot of fun. You ready to go?
- John Bonini: [33:05](#) Yeah, let's do it. Let's do it.
- David Abrams: [33:08](#) What advice would you give early stage SaaS companies starting marketing today?
- John Bonini: [33:12](#) It's gonna sound so cliché, but talk to your customers, especially early, like if we're saying early stage, early stage customers tend to be more tech savvy. They're willing to stick around through the bugs, reward them, by having open and honest communication. And, and work with them in building your product and processes and marketing and all that stuff.
- David Abrams: [33:32](#) Totally love that. What marketing skill do you think is vital for marketing teams to improve and build on today?
- John Bonini: [33:39](#) I'm going to say writing all the time. I come from a journalism background. So, and I think the most, in terms of sort of in demand skill for, for marketers is, is people that can write and tell stories, but I think it's also become increasingly more important to, to also be able to tell stories across different mediums now, audio, video. So I think, you're gonna, you're gonna see a lot of bloggers, you know, content and the written words always going to work, but I think you're gonna see a lot of content writers trying to expand their skill set to also be able to feel comfortable on camera and be able to put together audio. So I think those three things, being able to write and tell stories and then being able to sort of, you know, write scripts, right, and be able to, to, to perform in those different mediums is going to be huge.
- David Abrams: [34:24](#) I think you're absolutely right. And I think the answer to that question, 75 percent of the time people say writing, I think it's just so critical right now. What about the best marketing educational resource you'd recommend for marketing today?

- John Bonini: [34:36](#) A good reading list. I think if you, especially if you go back and look at the, look at the classics, I'm looking at Al Ries Positioning on my desk, Tested Advertising Methods by, is this by John Caples, Ogilvy, the Robert Collier letter book, right? All these things that nobody listening probably even knows what the hell these are. But these are like the copyrighting and advertising books that have sort of stood the test of time. You know, they've been around 50, 60 or more years and I think, it's not a sexy right, as, as reading blogs and, and maybe getting the next, Tim Ferriss' book, but I think if you go back to the basics and learn the foundations, I think that that's been, that's been transformational for me for my own career. So, I would definitely recommend building up a good reading list and powering through those.
- David Abrams: [35:29](#) Absolutely. And you just recommended some legends of copywriting and marketing, so highly recommend those books as well. What about a favorite marketing tool that you can't live without?
- John Bonini: [35:29](#) Databox.
- David Abrams: [35:29](#) Love it. Love the plug.
- John Bonini: [35:43](#) After that, after that I would say I would say, we love love Hubspot and we're creating so much video these days at Wistia has been, I just love that product.
- David Abrams: [36:00](#) Yeah. Oh Man, they definitely got it. Yeah. Great. Great Company, great team, we look up to them all the time. What about a brand business or a team that you admire?
- John Bonini: [36:10](#) I mean there's a few here. I guess I mean, we just mentioned Wistia, I like their approach and staying true to who they are. I think one brand and these guys have been around for almost 20 years now, Basecamp that I really admire these guys because, they've, first of all, they were one of the you know, the OGs when it comes to SaaS, right like that 99... before Facebook right. So, I mean, this is, they've been around for such a long time, but also they've never compromised on the way they want to build a business. They, they chose not to raise money. They have like a, no, don't work over 40 hours a week policy for their team. You know, remote, you know, most of their town. I don't even think they have an office anymore. They're, they're remote. So I just, um, I admire the way that these guys have grown and then not grown to like they've, they know that they've probably could've grown, you know, 100x, but they don't want to, they want to grow with their pace and build a company that they enjoy to work at. And, and I think Jason Fried said something like, like, who says we have to conquer the world or something, like why can't we just build a brand and business that we're all proud to be a part of. So I just appreciate the way that they're so different, than the typical silicon valley mindset and how they've approached things differently and managed to be so successful. So Basecamp is, is one.

David Abrams: [37:29](#) Yeah, you articulated that so well John, I think, I mean that's one of our top favorite companies and the things that they say and their mission and vision and values are definitely seeped in our own kind of culture here at Demio, but I love them. And I think that's a really great resource. If you're listening to this and you don't know them, definitely look them up. Look up their blog Signal vs Noise and also their book Rework, which is an amazing resource to to kind of get an introduction to the way they think, but John, I do want to thank you so much for your time. It was an absolutely incredible episode. Really appreciate you sharing so much, being so knowledgeable and so, you know, happy to share with us. So thank you again for joining us today and we'll talk to you soon.

John Bonini: [38:09](#) This was a blast, David. Thanks a lot.

David Abrams: [38:12](#) That was a pretty amazing episode and I really hope you enjoyed it. Again, like I said earlier in the episode, this felt very real transparent and relatable for us. You know, there's a lot to be said about having resources, limited resources that make you really stay focused and stay smart. And I think Databox is a great example of a company who has been able to weather the storm of the long ramp up debt and create great marketing systems. I'm really excited to see where they go over the next year. Congratulations to them for breaking that 1 million ARR mark. I hope you guys enjoyed the episode. Go ahead and give us a like a rating, some feedback on itunes or soundcloud. These things really help us to get that message out there and don't forget to join us in our SaaS Breakthrough community, it's a Facebook free Facebook group where you can come in and talk SaaS, continue to talk with some of these experts. That's Demio.com/fb or grab us on the blog. It's demio.com/learn to learn more about these episodes. Get all the different SaaS breakthrough episodes that we've had, all the resources, transcripts, everything you need. You'll find that on our website. Really excited to have you listened to our next episode and thanks so much for your time.

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