

David Abrams: [00:00](#) Hello. Hello and welcome to episode number 11 of the SaaS Breakthrough Show brought to you by Demio this aspect the 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 Rod Austin who is the director of marketing at Pagely. Rod is the director of marketing at Pagely The Premier managed WordPress host where he specializes in narrow B2B marketing and growth campaigns. In today's episode we'll talk about what his role was when he joined the team in late 2016, what that look like and how they were able to really push forward in 2017 with some of the new initiatives that Rod brought to the team.

David Abrams: [00:48](#) Now as I mentioned Rod works for Pagely which is the most flexible secure and reliable manager WordPress hosting solution available today. And they help big brands scale WordPress. Now on today's episode we'll be breaking down the exact steps that Rod took to really streamline the marketing process for Pagely, to figure out the best channels to take their marketing forward and actually finding which ones were not as successful as they thought they would be, as they found a new niche to a new market to go after they made some really big changes based on what they learn from their data in 2017. Now the big win that we take from this episode is a new form of marketing that they're doing called Value Based Outreach - VBO it's a really really powerful way to reach out to your target audience you guys will absolutely want to listen to this episode you'll love what we talk about and this whole concept of VBO. So I hope you enjoy today's episode. Don't forget to rate us and leave comments and questions. I would love to hear them. Also don't forget to join us on our Facebook group The SaaS breakthrough community on Facebook, truly appreciate you taking the time to listen. Let's jump right in.

Narrator: [02:06](#) 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: [02:21](#) Hey Rod thanks so much for joining me today. How are you doing?

Rod Austin: [02:25](#) Just fine David glad to be here.

David Abrams: [02:26](#) Yeah thanks so much for taking the time. I know you've got a busy busy day so we'll jump right into the questions. I would love to know about your start with Pagely and you join the team. And what did that team's size actually look like when you're joining. What was going on.

Rod Austin: [02:42](#) Yes I started officially in late 2016. September of that year I believe. I was the first official marketing hire prior to myself, the cofounders did a lot of marketing and we had a sales and marketing director that that kind of tag team the marketing efforts up to that point. Shortly thereafter probably

you know Q2 of 2017 we hired a second marketing person to help with our content (...) which I identified pretty early on is vital to our growth.

David Abrams: [03:22](#) What's what did you guys look at when you coming in as one of the major first hires in marketing. What does it look like getting handed off like an objective list from the founders? what are you looking at doing at this point?

Rod Austin: [03:33](#) Well a number of things you know I think at the core of everything that I did then and do now it has to move the needle for us and ultimately that that boils down to revenue and leads and all the things that feed into those two buckets. So we definitely had priorities that covered the whole spectrum of marketing from brands exposure brand popularity brand messaging all the way down to the leads of you know PPC and and how would do content SEO as you pretty much like social media etc.. So it was really assessing where everything was prior to me being there and then really looking for the low hang fruit where can I make the fastest impact on and that ultimately was SEO and by direct connection content marketing.

David Abrams: [04:27](#) I find it very interesting we just kind of did an analysis like this this week actually. What were you guys doing to figure out where the low hanging fruit actually was like. How did you guys sit down and actually make that call?

Rod Austin: [04:39](#) Well it really you know was it was a lot of me, part of me onboarding Pagely it was getting my feet wet and learning the lingo, reading our stats, our data, who's doing what where why and when. And so we kind of had a goal of finding a good B.I tool - business intelligence. They were using Mixpanel, I find Mixpanel to be a bit cumbersome and more app centric. So we unsuccessfully tried to find that right tool, put them on the shelf later in 2017. But ultimately it came back to living in places like Google Analytics they did use and we still use a program called Offlabs which shows what terms we rank for and how those change over time. So really it was looking at the existing tools, what tools do we need to help us identify those opportunities. And really you know when I looked at our stats then realizing that about a third of our traffic, a third of our conversions or more is coming from organic SEO. So that's pretty much how it went in on that being where where we should put a lot of our chips early on.

David Abrams: [05:56](#) Absolutely. And when you came in was there already a clear and established target persona you guys were going after. Or was it so early on in the process that you had to come in and also kind of help look through the data and say hey this is our this is our prime demographic based on what our data is telling us?

Rod Austin: [06:14](#) Now I'd say it's a little bit of both so our sales team as a team it was really our Director of Sales and one other guy, they know who we talk to. Right. So we only host Wordpress sites. And those conversations really are in about a handful of industries, so we know the industries we needed to look at. And we also had a pretty idea of the roles within those companies. And they're pretty evenly split between marketing folks and technical folks that are looking to improve their performance with their WP site. So they had a lot of that knowledge but it wasn't really formalized or mapped out anywhere. So one of the very first things I did was create a marketing board in Trello and one of the first cards was establishing a formal approach to persona identification with the goal of going deeper on those over time.

David Abrams: [07:11](#) I love that actually is a really great idea to have a marketing board with all your data in there like that. Definitely going to steal that I love that idea. So I guess talk to me a little bit now coming in you did the research and looking at the data you're coming up with whereas I laying low hanging fruit. What do you do now to plan for 2017. You guys print together specific KPI numbers or goals 2017. How do you guys do. What does that look like.

Rod Austin: [07:36](#) Yes for 2017 we weren't as organized as we are now. I'll be transparent there. We just at the end of 2017 really formalized KPIs. I knew what mine were obviously lead gen and conversions traffic increase etc.. But right now my weekly KPI is centered around those things but we just have a formal approach to that. So every week I run what the traffic looks like in terms of monthly unique or weekly visits. The conversions from those visits and that subsequent percentage. And then also adjacent to that is the lead volume for that and the quality score of those leads. So those are the five that we really drill in on every week. Big picture wise we had the goal of doubling our annual revenue in 2017 from of 2016. We got halfway there. So nice. There's a lot that we can attribute to that and I think the biggest the biggest thing we did was in early Q2 right this time last year in March we dropped our lowest plan which was 99 dollars a month and then the entry point was 400 a month so that greatly altered the landscape of who we could effectively market to and with and how we did that. So it took us a little bit to adjust to that and I think we're in a pretty good place now.

David Abrams: [09:15](#) If you don't mind me asking if you guys can talk about this but what made that decision to drop that lowest plan and did you keep customers that were already in it or did people have to upgrade to stay on the service?

Rod Austin: [09:25](#) Yes so you know Pagely since its inception as has been constantly moving I guess upstream if you will. So very early on really our plans were in that 20-30 dollars month range. And then over time as as we grew the size of accounts that hosted with us the technology and people that support that kind of hosting just really different from what you get with a shared or or

lower price plan. So strategically it makes a lot of sense. I mean I was as a guy in marketing I was like oh man this is going to be tough to really dial in because now we can't do as much broad marketing as we used to. But hindsight works on a number of levels. So in terms of our margin by supporting fewer larger clients we're more more available. We've got more resources on our own so we get more bang for our buck. And in terms of marketing if you're able to adapt to that it's really a more ideal scenario. So you know once we found that things that worked for us which are a handful of things we could double down on those and just a lot of them. For example we don't do PPC anymore. So it took some adjustment but both strategically and from a marketing perspective I've got to appreciate the concept of you know moving upstream in terms of existing folks. Those are we still have folks that are in the 30 to 60 dollar month range. They basically grandfathered so getting a hell of a deal because as technology grows you know these folks can afford three to four dollars a month so they're just along for the ride.

David Abrams: [11:11](#)

Absolutely and we me my co-founder actually just had a long conversation about grandfathering and dropping pricing plans, pricing plans I think that's how it's such an interesting conversation and it's so great when you do really define that target persona and understand who you're going after and it always evolves over time. So you guys it sounds like a really great decision and handled it very well. I want to kind of move some of those market marketing experiments that you said some things worked some things didn't what worked in 2017 that you guys were were working with and you were surprised by, what were a couple that didn't work. You said PPC for instance.

Rod Austin: [11:48](#)

Yeah. So. So going back to that first you know low hand fruit the content marketing thing that works to some extent so we we start doing more of the generic this is the best WordPress plug and this is the best WP theme. We still do a little bit of that admittedly. But that's for a broad audience so when we look at a more narrow audience we really went industry specific. So we cater to enterprise, higher end, agencies big publishers et cetera. So we really start to ask ourselves and some of these folks the question: What were your pain points? What do you see as things you need or challenges you have that content can answer? So we made a mindful shift to do that. And I would say that you know since the time I started to now we've been able to increase monthly visits by 54 percent. So that that works but the traffic did hockey stick, the traffic was a gradual increase and that is intentional because as we really shifted who our audience was we didn't want to really disrupt that so it was really a long long transition between those two different content types.

Rod Austin: [13:07](#)

In terms of PPC... Yeah we have we're probably halfway through last year that the ROI wasn't there as it had been when we had the lower price point. And as you may know there is a growing growing influx of folks in the managed hosting space/ managed WP hosting space that sounds

super niche but everyone who is a host is kind of different these days, so with that makes the pricing for PPC not there especially when some folks have a three dollar entry point and ours is now four hundred dollars. And one of the things you know Pagely has a lot of different philosophies. And one of those is that you know we, we believe in people first and a fair approach to doing business certainly we love competition but we know that some competitors were bidding on our branding and that just seemed dirty to us we don't do that. But Google hasn't really seem to agree with that. And so they we try to have conversations with them about bidding on registered trademarks as keywords but it's just not their MO and so it's not really in our MO supporting a company that that doesn't jive with our mission. Probably the more interesting thing that we stumbled upon as we made the shift was the idea of ABM - account based marketing. Nice. So we we realized that outreach had always been a chore. You know I don't like to get it. I don't like to send it. It's an ugly thing.

David Abrams: [14:44](#)

Outreach mean specifically like cold e-mail outreach.

Rod Austin: [14:51](#)

Yes so we we know we wanted to do that. That's that's one of the few things emerging that you can actually have control over is like conversion rate optimization. You can adjust things and measure those things in really such an outcome. And so we always want to do that but but not really fans of how it has been done most commonly so we kind of put our own flavor on it, we called it value based outreach VBO because the market needs more acronyms. Always. So the concept was fairly simple in that. So we know we can narrow prospects down by technology, for us it's Wordpress, by industry by size whether it be revenue or traffic or anything else being pulled from the web. Once we have those companies that fit that mold, there are tools exist to allow us to go out and find who those key decision makers are for us from a technical market size. So we were pretty good at doing that right. So finding ok here's a batch, a thousand people that fit that mold. So we decided to do then was a little different and you might actual relate to this because I think this podcast does the same thing and that was to really offer them value with no value to us. So value is and can be a lot of things, it can be an interview on a podcast, or for an article that we publish somewhere, it can be something that either strokes their ego for lack of a better word or gives them a real sense of value and with no value to us so we lost that in November (...)

And been kind of wrapping it up since because we saw really good returns early on we had 80 percent to 90 percent open rates, we had a 40-50 percent response rates. And as we went through the process we we had people that were signing up as customers without us even getting to the final stage where we talk to them about hosting. So it really checked boxes for us in that one we were actively working out something that we control the outcome. We can you know upscale down change how we do it et cetera. And two as we did that we were producing content that we get to SEO you know whether it's on our side or on a third party

publishing site. Content we could share on social media and the folks that we talked to would help us share on social media. We're hearing more about the industries that we cater to and the things that are important to them. It really you know we take a step back and realize how many things we can do with this just beyond the gen. And may be the thing that we're doubling down on 2018.

David Abrams: [17:45](#)

I love that. And you know obviously we do a very similar strategy something that we love to do we'll do it with the intent always of of getting users as much as just getting branding in recognition out there in the marketplace or stuff like that but I think it's an insanely powerful strategy and I think your acronym is VBO value based outreach?

Rod Austin: [17:45](#)

Yeah VBO

David Abrams: [18:10](#)

I love the word right there says everything and that's absolutely incredible to hear. You may not want to disclose these but do you have any suggestions for tools that people were going to be looking at going this approach for searching the data for this specific customer segments or where you're getting those you know lists of people from?

Rod Austin: [18:30](#)

Yeah. You know I debated whether or how close to keep our favorite tool to the best.

David Abrams: [18:36](#)

It's still fine if you don't want to share it.

Rod Austin: [18:40](#)

You know it's not, it's not rocket science so I can tell you my process how I landed on a tool that we use. I basically went out and looked at CMRs. So there's Agile CRM and salesforce has one and there's a bazillion of them outthere. But I list the features that I want the CRM to have and to put them into a spreadsheet and then you know weigh the value versus time saving versus does it check all these boxes and ultimately we used AgileCRM in the beginning. Typically a CRM is more built for that cold outreach and keeping track of how those contacts interact with you and your brand. And Agile was OK but it didn't didn't go far enough for me because the other missing side of this is how do you prospect. And so early on we used Builtwith which was okay. Now we still ever and now then pull a list from built with. But we realized that it wasn't always accurate seem seem like the results were dated, some were no longer using Wordpress or we didn't know how much their site was powered by WordPress. So I think one of the tools that I stumbled on was called SimilarAttack. They did a much better job in my estimation of really drilling down to the current data. It seems like every time I checked one the prospects or one the companies from it, I was finding that it was it was right about WP and not only that but the tool told me what percentage of their pages were powered by WP. Right. So you might have a huge corporate site and then there's this PR kit that runs on WordPress. That's not a good fit for us. So knowing that percentage really works. It

didn't come up with names so we had, end up with a series of tools where we find the companies then find the prospects and then we use more or less a CRM to engage those folks.

David Abrams: [20:51](#)

I love that. I mean it's definitely a really really great process and we started doing that too which is finding specific segments of people in a cold e-mail outreach campaign that we have that's a little bit different then like our podcast campaign stuff like that but using tools like maybe like a Clear... as one of the tools that we use before. Stuff like that to find specific tools that people are running so just for anyone listening it's a really great way to once you dial in on your customer Avatar customer persona if you know the tools that they're using. You guys are pretty easy because it's Managed WordPress hosting. For us it's more like if we know you're using you know maybe this CRM or you already have maybe a webinar platform or something like that right. We're so for people that are doing that. So really really powerful ways to find of people out there that are perfect prospects free of yeah.

Rod Austin: [21:41](#)

And I would say I would add to that. So you know you're in the SaaS space as we kind of are too obviously but if you have if you have a competitor that's doing something similar. You know that's that's another way to approach it. If you're not about you know trying to sway customers from a competitor over. Yeah the technology that there really is a look at the data that was really interesting because it really helped us shift to a content site where we could look at these companies to create a partnership or do a joint marketing effort. So yes it's very much the more data you have and you have the range of that data the more informed your decisions can be and the more effective marketing campaigns will be.

David Abrams: [22:28](#)

So smart and so smart and now like looking back over the past two years what you've been doing at Pagely if you're going to start in a new team or new company what lessons would you take away with to start again. What would you do first maybe.

Rod Austin: [22:46](#)

Probably that. I mean that knowing, getting all the data you can and getting in a place where you can make actionable decisions, it's probably the first thing I would do anywhere because you know you can you can go with your gut and noone says to do that but a lot of people do that anyway. But you know you end spending a lot of time in the wrong direction. That said don't be afraid to experiment but just collect data on all those experiments put in on the place where it makes sense to you and your team. And double down on what works, give up on what doesn't. And keep it lean and mean.

David Abrams: [23:17](#)

I mean I love that. Such good advice. Where do you think marketing is going on 2018 any things that you see you know marketing teams need to refocus on or change their thoughts on.

- Rod Austin: [23:31](#) I've always been pretty heavy on SEO side of marketing lance. I think as search evolves to incorporate voice, user intents and you know whatever trickery the search engines used behind the scenes, I guess is important to keep a tab on that but really focus more on value, you know not just as value for your prospects or how how the world perceives you or your company but the value for your team. You know I dove into how different Pagely is but we have our own personal values. We try to let that bleed through and everything we do from sales to support to marketing. So yeah I went out on a tangent there but really using that value in all parts of your business especially marketing. I think that's why value based outreach concept is so successful is in that scenario we're kicking the value ball to the other side of the fence. You know we want to give these folks value so we can establish a relationship with them and at a later point have a conversation about where they host WP. In terms of the big picture I would say you know getting more personalized because you can't really give them value unless you know what's important to them. And really optimizing for people not necessarily the search term buzzword thing.
- David Abrams: [24:56](#) I love that optimizing for people with value and I'm definitely going to be branding this whole episode about value based outreach. So VBO is going to be a thing after this. But let's go ahead let's shift into the lightning round question. I don't want to waste too much of your time today. We're kind of wrapping up on our time limit here. So in the lightning round questions I'll just ask you a question quickly and just answer the first thought that comes to mind on how to think too deeply about these but very powerful ways to get some good advice that everyone.
- David Abrams: [25:30](#) All right advice for early stage SaaS companies or I guess not just in SaaS but early stage companies starting marketing.
- Rod Austin: [25:30](#) Know your audience.
- David Abrams: [25:42](#) What marketing skill do you think is vital for marketing teams to improve and build on today?
- Rod Austin: [25:48](#) Content or the ability to write.
- David Abrams: [25:50](#) With value. Right. Yeah. Best resource you'd recommend for marketing.
- Rod Austin: [26:02](#) Boy that is a tough one. Google Sheets. I have sheets to keep track of my sheets.
- David Abrams: [26:02](#) What about a favorite marketing tool you can't live without.
- Rod Austin: [26:13](#) Google Sheets if it's all right. If it's not. And I would say OffLabs... I find myself outside the analytics I find myself checking it a few times a week.

David Abrams: [26:24](#) Love it both very good. Brand, business or team that you admire today?

Rod Austin: [26:34](#) Elon Musk and some of his projects. You know every time you shoot a car into space. You're doing something right from a marketing perspective

David Abrams: [26:39](#) That was a pretty darn good marketing move there. That's amazing. Well great, great advice. All throughout really amazing episode Rod. Really appreciate you taking the time to get on with us on this Breakthrough show and the things you guys are doing at Pagely is awesome. It sounds like you guys are on a rocketship here with growth as you guys have set your goals.

Rod Austin: [26:39](#) Yeah we're (inaudible) and having fun. I appreciate the time thanks David.

David Abrams: [27:05](#) Thanks. Talk to you soon.

David Abrams: [27:07](#) Wow. How good of an episode was that. A big thank you to Rod and the amazing team over at Pagely for taking the time to sit with us on today's podcast. Now I learned a ton today and I absolutely love this new acronym right VBO (value based outreach) something that we're absolutely doing already, not even knowing that we're doing it and I hope you guys got some great nuggets of information things that you can implement in your business. Now if you want to learn more about Pagely, check them out at [Pagely.com](http://Pagely.com) we'll have all this information in the show notes on our website along with some great links to new articles on VBO by Rod and his team. Hope you guys enjoy them. I would love to hear you guys, continue this conversation in our SaaS breakthrough community we've got Rod in there already. He's happy to answer questions and talk more about this concept. Thank you again for listening. And we'll talk to you soon.

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