

Digital Marketing Newsletter

For Entrepreneurs, Small Businesses, and Professionals

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Talking to Steve Phipps

Founder and President at [Wayfind Marketing](#) based at Cordova, Tennessee, USA.

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Wayfind Marketing's goal is to help business owners and leaders navigate all the options and filter through the noise to put together a strategy that makes sense, and that is focused on helping you increase sales, increase brand awareness, and drive your business forward.



What motivated you to start your own business?

To give you a little bit of the back story, I always was interested in running my own business. You would have seen in my LinkedIn profile, several instances like running a restaurant for 4 years, a previous consulting business, etc. Before starting Wayfind I was with a company called Lunaweb, where I was second in command.

The services offered at Lunaweb were very similar to the services offered by Wayfind. They did it slightly differently but were more or less overlapping. I was the main marketing person at Lunaweb. So, for clients that we worked with, in a lot of ways, I was the chief marketing officer. I worked with them on marketing strategies and their overall online marketing activities.

In the summer of June 2014, the owner of that company, Dave had a kayaking accident and sadly passed away. That incident put that company into

a very difficult position. His wife took over the business and ran it for about 10 months before selling it out.

It was during that timeframe that I had to take a decision about what I was going to do next. With everything that happened, I decided I needed something where I could stay long term. So, towards the end of 2014, I realised that I had three options at that point:

1. Start something of my own
2. Find another job that was similar to the one I had at Lunaweb
3. Work for a company as the VP Marketing or Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)

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Each time I pondered and researched my options, the one that kept coming back to me and the one I felt the strongest about was option 1 - starting something on my own.

After putting together a business and marketing plan, I launched Wayfind in February of 2015 - 4.5 years ago. That was about how I started the business.

Earlier in the business, when it was just me, I focussed heavily on marketing strategy, and till date, that is the cornerstone of everything that we do now as well.

I have now formed a team of 7 people other than myself. We serve clients across the globe - we have a China-based client too. We now do strategy, websites, content, blogs, writing website copy, email, social media, creating ebooks, etc. We also do traffic generation. We work with folks on Search Engine Optimization - SEO, paid advertising, etc.

The main thing is we work with our clients to develop an effective marketing strategy - we focus on what to do and what to say. Even if you know what to do and do not know what to say, all of those activities could be wasted.

All the activities that one does should essentially communicate exactly what we want to communicate to readers, customers and prospects, in a sensible manner.

What type of clients you work with?

When I started, I would work with a wide variety of businesses. As we continued to refine what we are doing, we narrowed down to either B2B companies or service-based B2C companies. We generally work with businesses that have a failed process in their customer journey.

On the B2B type it is pretty straightforward. But, on the B2C side, for instance, we are working with an orthodontist in Memphis right now. A set of braces, today, can cost over \$5000. That is a big investment for a family especially because their insurance doesn't cover it. We work with those kinds of businesses.

Generally, not always, we focus on companies that have between 5 - 50 employees. That can vary. We, at times, work with product businesses, on a bud-

get, to build up awareness and try to start connecting with people.

Sometimes, companies are stuck and they try to figure out how to continue growing. One of the things that I am really passionate about is helping people develop a good story. When we work with people on strategy, it really boils down to what they say and what they do. We use a marketing messaging framework that really helps businesses convey a story in a way that their customers understand their business objective and their relevance to their customer.

This is something my team is really passionate about - trying to help our clients, and clearly say what they do in a way that connects with their customers.

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Can you give an example where a client with no proper strategy, approached you; wherein, you put in place a

strategy that actually was instrumental in delivering results the client was looking for?

Sure. I'll quote the example of the orthodontist I was speaking about earlier. We have actually known this person for a good number of years now. I have worked with him previously while at Lunaweb and we started working with him again a little over a year ago.

In that industry a lot of things have shifted. There is lot more competition in that space. Some dentists do their braces rather than sending them over to an orthodontist - there are a lot of different things that happen in that space and so, we redid what they were doing. We put together the plan for them, redid their website, etc. We created an infographic - 20 things you should know before you get braces. We have offered that as a resource for people who are considering braces. We have that on the website. We worked on the SEO, which helped in bringing

up the website traffic. We have also been working with them on Facebook campaigns. They now do Facebook videos and they are on Instagram too. As a result, I know that they are seeing an increase in their revenue. We are starting to see traction.

A funny little story was that once this doctor was having lunch, and the server came up and commented that she had seen him on Facebook! There have been a couple of people who mentioned to him regarding the videos that go live.

So, it has been a combination of things - there has been blogging, Instagram, Facebook, videos, etc. We are currently working with them on testimonial videos, we have been working towards getting more reviews online, etc. We work on getting the client's word out through channels where people spend time.

You offer marketing strategy, website design, traffic generation, and content writing. Which of these categories account for the main chunk of your business?

It really is a combination. Honestly, it is a good combination because when we go through a strategy process, there is always a list of tasks that get generated - the actionable steps that need to be taken.

The very first step, of course, is to have a strategy. The second step is what we call building for conversion. That is redoing/updating the clients' website so that it can do a better job of helping convert visitors into leads.

A lot of times we create some sort of marketing material so that there is the next step of building implementation.

Then, in the third step, we get into creating an ongoing monthly marketing relationship. We create some sort of content like blogging, putting up something on the media, perhaps uploading a video, a Facebook ad campaign, etc.

In some cases, we have some clients who enjoy writing perhaps. In such cases, we may step into a coach type of role.

It is a good combination. I would say the vast majority of my clients will want us to work on some sort of a strategy or even building the website - 80% of my clients would go in for some sort of a monthly work with us. We continue to support them and help them with their marketing activities.

Most of these businesses - these entrepreneurs that come to you - have they not thought out a strategy? Why is it that this is something so hard to figure out?

That is a really good question. There are several situations that are very common. Here is a couple of examples.

One type of business owner is the business centre who knows that they need some sort of marketing. But they are not wired for marketing.

They don't think in terms of how marketing works and so it is a mystery. It can feel intimidating. That is one group.

All the clients that we work with have a common factor. They understand that marketing is something that they need and want to do. Occasionally, there are business centres who don't feel like they need marketing or they need to be convinced that they need marketing.

We interact with our clients on the understanding that they want marketing, but they don't have a plan in place. They are not sure what to do. They are not sure what their options are. They really need help in getting an idea of understanding what their choices are.

Another example is the business centre which has an understanding of marketing. They would have tried different things and perhaps worked with other agencies or may even have a marketing per-

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son on their team. The challenge that they typically run into is that they are not sure how to put all of it together into an overall strategy. They may not understand how to make all the pieces work together. They might know, for instance, how to do search engine optimization or they may think they should do email marketing. A lot of times, some of our clients have done some of that. They send out some emails or they may do some blogging. They will have all these pieces but wouldn't know how to crack the puzzle and fit them together so that they all work together towards a common goal.

Sometimes, one of the things that can keep a project from being successful is the lack of focus. Or, may be a continually changing focus on the business side. We create a plan based on what we understand their goals to be - that is a collaborative process. It is always us working with them and we work together. We hear each other.

Having said that, sometimes even after we chart out a plan, business priority keeps shifting. Or, in some cases, the business owner isn't committed enough to the project. These factors can derail the project.



So, in a nutshell, whilst the second type of business owner has all the pieces of the puzzle with them but they are just not sure how to put it all together to get the big picture; the first business owner is the type who is not at all sure what to do - they don't have the pieces of the puzzle yet. They may know that they need a website, they don't know how to optimize it. These are things that perhaps they haven't come across or never needed in the past.

These are broadly the two different kind of folks that we work with.

Some projects you take up may not have turned out successful. What are the things that can go wrong with a project that seems to start well?

There are certain aspects of marketing that are made based on judgments on what you think is going to work and given a particular audience there has to be testing, commitment for the long term to see what is going to work and what is not. Sometimes, some business owners for whatever reason, don't stay committed for the long run. Those are some scenarios wherein the project doesn't work as expected.

Then, if within the company there is a lack of clarity around who their target customer is, it can create difficulty. Not being sure of your audience makes your marketing strategy rather shaky.

Marketing can help create materials in terms of messaging and campaigns that help the sales

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people have more effective opportunities. Their communications can be more effective. But, even in those cases if there is no clear idea about who the key customer is - who they are trying to target, everything goes for a toss.

These are the factors that diminish the effectiveness of marketing.

How do you go about marketing your own business?

It is much easier for me to offer advice and guidance to other businesses where I can be a lot more objective. In my business, I have all these thoughts and ideas and it becomes very easy for those to keep me from having that objective pushed back. Couple of things we do:

1. My team is very good about giving me feedback. I can sometimes come up with an idea and keep refining it. I come up with great ideas and share it with my team and open it up for brainstorming. Sometimes, they are very positive about my idea and there are times, when they openly say that they are not very clear or they will have opinions of how it can be tweaked for the better. They are a good sounding board and are not afraid to tell me openly if the idea that I have is not good.
2. Earlier this year I got certified as a guide by a marketing framework called StoryBrand. StoryBrand is a marketing and messaging framework that was created by a gentleman

named Donald Miller. His organisation does workshops every couple of months. This is a 2-day workshop where they work with business owners to re-clarify their messaging. It is based on the whole idea to structure your story. As a guide I am going through a digital training. So, I can now use their resources and their framework lists a directory of certified guides. One of the biggest benefits here is that I am now part of a community of guides. There are about 400 guides who are global in nature. We have guides from Australia, Europe and all over the US and North America. That group provides a resource where I can get feedback, share ideas and learn from what other people are doing. I have a network of people who are in similar roles that I am. So, this is another space where I have been able to get objective feedback.

3. I am also part of a group called Vistage. Vistage is a peer group for business owners and I meet with that group every month for half a day. That is another place where I can share ideas. We actually have plans to launch new things later this year. So, I can share my ideas with that group, get objective feedback. They ask me hard questions that help me think through what I propose to do.

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Excerpts of a conversation with Kartik Isvarmurti, Managing Editor.

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