



Presents:

## Podcast Episode 116: How to Build Something BIGGER Than a Blog - With Michael Stelzner



By: Leslie Samuel



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## Introductions

*[Intro by Guy Kawasaki, Gideon Shalwick, and Farnoosh Brock]*

**LESLIE:** Hello, hello, hello and welcome to another episode of Learning with Leslie, the podcast where you learn, I learn, we all learn about how to build an online business with a blog. No, I'm not talking about one of those blogs that will fall by the wayside when Google has a mood swing. I'm talking about one that will thrive no matter what gets thrown at it.

I'm your host, Leslie Samuel from [BecomeaBlogger.com](http://BecomeaBlogger.com) where we're changing the world one blog at a time. As usual, I have another exciting episode for you today. I have another interview for you.

I'm on the line with Michael Stelzner who is the founder of Social Media Examiner, an online magazine that helps regular folks like you and I navigate through the social media jungle. In just 4 months, they were able to build to 10K email subscribers!

Now, over 210K email subscribers, 800,000 monthly readers... How did he do it? By delivering super-valuable content and then using Social Media to kick things into high gear. He runs one of the top 10 marketing podcasts on iTunes -- Social Media Marketing podcast.

Today, we're going to talk about how to build something BIGGER than a blog. That's what we're going to talk about today.

Michael, thank you so much for joining me, man. How are you doing today?

**MICHAEL:** Spectacular. I love your energy.



**LESLIE:** Well, I got to get us in gear so that we can get all these juicy details and help my audience to really build something that is significant. How does that sound to you?

**MICHAEL:** That sounds awesome. Let's do it.

## The Social Media Marketing Industry Report

**LESLIE:** All right.

You are currently running Social Media Examiner and there is something that you guys do that I found extremely fascinating. Every year, you guys do a [Social Media Marketing Industry Report](#).

Tell us a little bit about what that report is.

**MICHAEL:** Yes, well this is our fifth annual study. We studied 3000 marketers just like you and me, from small business to big business and we ask them, "What are they doing with social media?"

We put together this report. That's about a 42-page report. You can find it at [SocialMediaExaminer.com](#). It's free. We just ask them, "Where are you planning on investing your time and energy in the future? What social networks are most valuable to you?" And so on and so forth.

**LESLIE:** All right so, you did this report. I can imagine it took a lot of work to put it together because I think this time you surveyed 3000 marketers?

**MICHAEL:** Yes, it was a lot of work.

**LESLIE:** How long did it take you?

**MICHAEL:** Oh my gosh, well, the survey part wasn't that hard because it's just a matter of having people fill out at [Survey Monkey](#) but, it took me months to actually analyze the data, create all the graphics and those are like 70 graphics inside this report and create the actual report.

But, it's been a long process but, a very rewarding process and everyone has come accustomed to it. It's been a great benefit to my audience and of course, a great benefit to my company because we get a lot of presses as a result of it, as well.

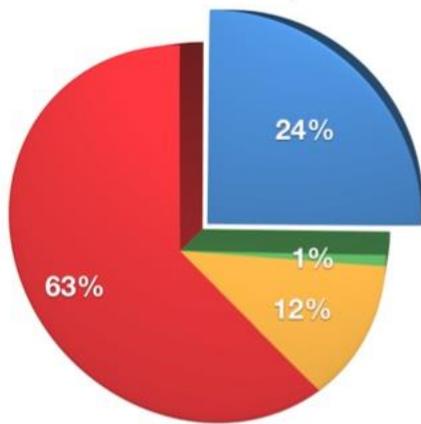
**LESLIE:** Definitely, and it's definitely very detailed. I have one question to you.

Of all the things you guys analyzed, what was the most surprising detail to you as you were putting this together?

**MICHAEL:** Well, you're going to like this one, Leslie.

**LESLIE:** All right.

## Podcasting



● Increase      ● Decrease  
● Stay the same      ● No plans to utilize

Source: Social Media Examiner - 2013 Report

**MICHAEL:** Only 5% of marketers are actually participating in podcasting yet 24% plan on participating on podcasting this year. That's a huge, huge eye opener for a lot of people. What that basically means is that, right now, podcasting is at about the bottom of the marketer's list of activities that they do.

However, 5x -- five times increase is going to happen this year alone in podcasting. I attribute that to a couple of things.

Number one, you got a billion smart phone users around the planet. Number two, you have Apple coming out in the last year with a dedicated podcasting

app and number three, you've got major auto manufacturers like Ford and BMW integrating podcasting into the car.

So, this represents a massive opportunity for marketers to essentially build a new platform.

## How it all Started for Michael

**LESLIE:** Definitely, and I encourage people to start a podcast. I'm actually going to be doing a talk at the Savvy Blogging Conference in a few weeks on that very topic. I think it's very exciting.

Before Social Media Examiner, what were you doing?

**MICHAEL:** Well, I was known as a writer. I was known as a "white paper writer" and for those who are listening right now that are thinking, "What the heck is a white paper?" Think about an

eBook. It's a lot like an eBook. I like to call it cross between an article and a brochure and typically, companies use white papers when they are trying to participate in a complex sale.

For example, if you are a big company or a small company and you got products or services that you're selling that are kind of expensive and requires some education to help people see the value proposition of investing in it, that's where the white paper comes in.

I wrote a book called, "[Writing White Papers](#)." I had a platform called, [WhitePaperSource.com](#) and I pretty much went around the world, speaking, training major corporations, speaking at conferences on how to write and market with this emerging media at that time. That was in the mid-2000s. I became coined as the, "King of White Papers" by Marketing Sherpa.

**LESLIE:** Awesome, awesome.

Were there things that maybe you learned back then that really contributed to what you are doing today and the success of Social Media Examiner?

**MICHAEL:** Absolutely, and I like to tell a lot of people that the best way to go from point A to point B is to leverage your strengths.

I was a really good writer. If you follow Social Media Examiner right now, I don't do a lot of writing but, you can see that our editorial standards are very, very high. There is a direct correlation between me having trained thousands of writers and then, being able to reach out to some of those writers when I launched Social Media Examiner and ask them to contribute to Social Media Examiner.

Then, of course, because I was working with a lot of marketers, I was learning a lot about how to market in this online era and, that of course, helped with Social Media Examiner.

Then, of course, if you peel back one layer, this is back in the mid to early 2000s, just after the .COM crash and like 2002 until 2009, I was doing all these.

One of the things that I was trying to discover back then was also how to train people in an online way. Back then, I was doing teleclasses which people were paying to hear me interview somebody. That was the beginning, the very early stages of beginning to charge for information. I was able to learn how to interview, which of course, came in handy now that I have a podcast. It's all about interview.

There was a direct connection with almost everything I did in the white paper space when I jumped over to Social Media.

**LESLIE:** Okay, so you're doing this white paper stuff, you're learning all these different marketing lessons, you're learning how to write, and that's a big part of it but, eventually, something happened that caused you to make a switch from what you're doing there to the idea that you had for Social Media Examiner.

What exactly was that?

**MICHAEL:** Well, you know, it's funny. I think one of my God-given gifts is the ability to see a trend before it becomes too big or, just as it's emerging.

I got into white papers, the white paper space literally just as they were about to explode as this massively important, at that time, the most important marketing thing for specialty business to business.

I began to see some similar trends happening in Social Media so, around 2007 and 2008, I started noticing that a lot of marketers were going nuts over this thing called **Twitter**, and I remember a friend of mine, Brian Clark, a friend of mine from CopyBlogger.com just massively evangelizing it and I had a blog called Writing White Papers but, I was writing for Copy Blogger so, I started writing about Twitter.

I wrote about Twitter for marketing process and it just so happened, this articles that I wrote were the Most Popular Article of the Year for both of these publications.

Then, my friend, [Ann Handley](#) at Marketing Pros, I said, "Hey, are you on LinkedIn?" She said, "Well, aren't you on Facebook?" I said, "I thought that was just for college kids."

I began to slowly but, surely see that there was this emerging thing that marketers were going gang busters over. I just started studying the marketplace, and I realize that there were thousands of bloggers in 2009 writing about social media, thousands.

I just knew because of my extensive background in content creation that I could potentially come to this new space where I knew nothing about it and become perhaps what I would call one of the princes of the space. I had no aspirations to be the kind of social media but, maybe I can become one of the princes.

I knew that if I could do this by following the strategy that I have outlined in my second book launch, if I could figure out how to do this and I could essentially do this twice, become a dominant player in two different industries within a decade, I knew that I could frankly do anything.

## Acknowledging "Marketplace Justification" (Why should I go into that space?)

**LESLIE:** Okay, so there's somebody listening to this right now and thinking to themselves, probably, "Oh man, he got in right there when it was starting to get going," or, something of that sort.

My question is this though, if there are thousands of people already talking about social media...

**MICHAEL:** I was late to the game, Leslie.

**LESLIE:** Yes. So, with that how do you still come to the game with confidence that you can build something significant because I know a lot of people look at how many blogs are out there, or how many podcasts are out there and they say, "There are already a bunch of people talking about that. Why should I go into that space?"

How can you look that straight in the face and still move forward?

**MICHAEL:** Here's how. I said to myself, I came in in October of '09 which is definitely late to the game. Twitter and Facebook were already going nuts by then. Still early in the grand scheme of things but, very late and all I did was instead of seeing that as a threat, I said, "That is marketplace justification."

I said, "The fact that everyone is there means there is something there to be [unclear]." That was the first thing that I did.

The second thing that I did is I said, "I know that most of what I produce is at such a high caliber and such a high standard that if I introduce this standard into the marketplace, I could essentially take the market by storm."

Just like in any marketplace, when Apple came out with the iPod and the Blackberry was all the rage, what happened? They took over the entire – I mean, with the iPhone, when Apple came out with the iPhone and the Blackberry was all the rage, whoever talks about Blackberry very much anymore because when you come out with something that is of such better quality, and I also knew Leslie that if I gave away the kind of content that all these other thousands of bloggers for holding tight and not revealing, if I simply just gave it all away, and I brought together these super-talented people and encouraged them to write the absolute best content ever, I just knew that people would go nuts.

One of the things I noticed was that the most popular stuff shared in social media was about Social Media. And, it still is today.

So, it was just me having eyes to be able to see that this is not a threat. This is an opportunity.

To anyone listening right now, even you, Leslie, your now working in the blogging space which is arguably old and arguably, in some people's minds, it had been around for a long time. And, why should I focus on that because it's old now, right?

Well, not necessarily true. All you have to do is create really, really incredible content for an audience that needs it and you can be spectacular.

Marketplace is huge. We are one of the largest business blogs in the world but, still, the vast majority of the world doesn't know who we are. So, the bottom line is it's a big world and you can make a great living off of this if you strive for excellence.

## Creating Super-valuable Content

**LESLIE:** You know you just said in those last few words that, "striving for excellence" because a lot of people just throw up a blog and they're like, 'Okay, let me just put some content on there,' but there's no striving for that excellence.

I think that is what really separates a site like Social Media Examiner from many others that are out there talking about the same type of topic.

My question is this, "What makes that type of content? What makes the kind of content where it really stands out from the crowd?"

**MICHAEL:** Well, first and foremost, the [Social Media Marketing Industry report](#) that you alluded to earlier in this interview is more important than may meet the eye.

Not only is the Social Media Marketing Industry report a piece of content that draws people to this, it is actually a research lab. We are asking thousands of people what they want to learn more about, what they are interested in and that data in that report is how we decide exactly



what to give them.

The key magic here is asking what people want and then, giving them what they want. So many times, we create content that we are personally interested in but, it may not be what our audience wants. So, we know for example, that our audience cares about Facebook more than anything else.

We have as part of our strategy to try to produce multiple articles a month on Facebook. If that changes, our editorial standards change. It's all about giving people exactly what they want. So, at a high level, first it's got to be what they want. Secondly, it has to be of value.

Our standard at Social Media Examiner is at least 1000 words. The standard at [Mashable](#) is no more than 400. So, the difference is we're the magazine. They are the newspaper. What we are trying to do is provide richer, deeper, how-to content.

We know at the end of the day, if someone is going to share our content which is critical to our marketing plan, it needs to be perceived to be very valuable in their eyes. If it's just a picture with a couple of words, why would anyone share it?

But, if it's actually peeling back the cover on how to do something in incredible detail, you build people that love you. They evangelize you and they yell your name from the roof tops. And, I got to tell you, we have some of the most loyal blog fans that you'll ever meet in the world. It's crazy.

## The Firestarters of Social Media Examiner

**LESLIE:** You can't see this but, I'm nodding my head in agreement very, very much.

Let's talk about how you built Social Media Examiner from the beginning because I know you were very strategic about the way you went about launching Social Media Examiner. Give us some insight into that process.

**MICHAEL:** First of all, I came into a marketplace where I had zero knowledge. So, I knew that I needed to rely on others. I called those others, "firestarters."

I had been working for almost a year to recruit -- or build relationships I think, is a better way of saying it with key people that had access to the audience that I did not.

These particular people are: Mari Smith who many people know as the "Queen of Facebook," Chris Garrett who co-authored a book with Darren Rowse called ProBlogger and he was very big in the blogging community; Denise Wakeman from the Blogsquad and Jason Falls from Social Media Explorer.

I had a relationship with all four of them, a very good relationship even to this day. After I build that relationship with them, I just essentially knew, and by the way, a firestarter is someone that has such a loyal audience that if they recommend something, it's like throwing a match in the kerosene and it just explodes.

I had these allies at the very beginning and I asked each of them, would they be willing to write one article a month? I said to them, if after that whatever period of time, it's not of any value to them then, no problem. They can back off.

But, I told them, the value proposition is that all of us working together can create something bigger than any of us working individually. That worked beautifully. Once we launched, people began to see the people that were writing for us and they wanted to be part of it.

And slowly but surely, we went from writing three articles a week to four to five to six which is where we're at right now -- slow, systematic growth.

At a high level, that's how we started out and we had a very detailed editorial guide that I build because I am a writer and essentially, I set the standard. That's how we got started in the beginning. Also, I asked my firestarters to re-tweet everything everyday. They did for a while and I asked even the writers to do it.

I told all the writers from the very beginning what's expected of them and part of it is they would go and comment on their blog post for the first couple of days. That built a bit of a communal aspect. People knew that if they left a comment that the author was going to reply back.

How many times have you been to a blog where there's guest bloggers and there's nobody replying to the comments. That's a problem.

You don't want to do that especially if you have contributors. So, I think that collaborative process was part of it. The other part of it, which we can talk about Leslie is I took a camera



crew with me to a trade show. If you want to talk about that, we can talk about that a little bit, too.

## Nurturing Relationships with Key People in Your Niche

**LESLIE:** I do want to talk about that but, I want to drill a little deeper into one thing that you mentioned because this is something that I see so many people trying to do and doing it the wrong way.

You spoke about the fact that you nurtured relationships with these key individuals. How did you go about doing that? Because a lot of people are thinking, "I don't know Chris Garrett. I don't know someone that can give me that type of exposure."

**MICHAEL:** Here's how that worked. Yes.

**LESLIE:** Yes, go ahead.

**MICHAEL:** Step one was Denise Wakeman was my [unclear]. It was someone in my personal network. Everybody, including you, Leslie has a network that you have because of your job, or because of whatever hobby you've got going on and you know somebody in your network that knows somebody about whatever these areas that you want to go into.



You probably already build a relationship with that person. So, it was very easy. Denise Wakeman had had me on her show and we had known each other pretty well and I just got on the phone with her. I said, "Hey, who should I get to know?"

She said, "You need to meet Mari Smith."

I went to a trade show in San Diego with one intended purpose, to get to know Mari Smith and nothing else. It just so happened we were both in the same city and we hit it off and we developed a great friendship and she turned out to be the number one key ally.

Jason Falls happen to be a fan boy of me back in the day when I was a writer. He was one of the guys that would comment on my blog all the time. He happened to be in town and we

hooked up and had a beer together. It's about that physical face-to-face interaction and that's where the real relationships are built.

**LESLIE:** I love that because my first time going to one of these trade shows was actually last year. The relationships that I made there have lasted and they have been much deeper than many of the other relationships that I have made just online.

There is something about that face to face and I have spoken about this [before](#) in the podcast that really helps you to take the relationship to the next level.

**MICHAEL:** Yes, if you can break bread with someone or share beverage with someone, there really is something magical that happens when you do that.

**LESLIE:** I want to drill down a little more just on that. I know we're sticking on this topic but, I think it's so crucial.

In that interaction, when you go to a trade show to meet someone that you want to connect with, what's that process like? Do you go and say, "Hey, I'm trying to launch this blog...?"

**MICHAEL:** No, you focus 100% on them. Leslie, you know what everybody loves? Themselves.

**LESLIE:** Mm-hmm.

**MICHAEL:** [*Laughs*] This is where everyone gets it wrong. Like, at my conference in San Diego, there was a guy from China who flew all the way over there to meet me. One of the first things out of his mouth was, "I want to do something with your website in China."

I just, you know, how awkward is that? To build a relationship requires a bit of courtship and had he spent time understanding who I was and what my passions were and what my interests were and not asking me, that would have been really ideal because it's not until you start talking to someone and see that you share passions together, you just know when you get to know someone when the timing is right.

Sometimes, it's not on the first talk. Sometimes, it's not on the second talk. Sometimes, it's not even on the third talk. You want to just give, give, give.

I pour myself into lots of people never really knowing exactly who is going to turn out to be a strong relationship.

But, I can tell you that I have built spectacular relationships for so many people in my industry because I do everything in my power to shine the spotlight on them and give them what they want. Oftentimes, they want exposure or they want recognition or, they just want someone to listen to their struggles. That's how you build real relationships.

Then, you know down the road if an opportunity comes up and it makes sense, the likelihood that they'll say "Yes" will go a lot greater.

**LESLIE:** Awesome. Guys, you that you're listening to this right now, you're going to hear a lot of tips. Please take this one to heart because it really is about that relationship. Yes, it's great to have connections but, it's about the relationships that you can establish with those connections in a real way.

**MICHAEL:** It doesn't require you to go after the superstars either, by the way.

**LESLIE:** Good point, too.

**MICHAEL:** There's plenty of diamonds in the rough that are going places and if you have eyes to see, you can tell.

Like for example, Jay Bear who is a really big wig in the world of the Social Media world today, likely New York Times best-selling author by the time this interview goes live, I saw him as a diamond in the rough and I met him at the conference and I just immediately connected with the guy and I said, "I'd love to give you an opportunity to write a monthly column for Social Media Examiner."

He said, "Sure! What the heck!" I just knew he was great and I knew that's what he wanted and he went on to do a lot of great things and now, he's one of our strongest allies.

**LESLIE:** Awesome, awesome, awesome.

You mentioned that there was a trade show that you went to and that had some significance to the growth of Social Media Examiner. Tell us a little bit about that.

**MICHAEL:** Well, one of the things that I knew, and this is back in October of '09, I didn't really know who the players were. So, a friend of mine, he's a camera guy, I paid for him to fly with me to Vegas and we were interviewing all the leading social media gurus at the time – Chris Brogan and Richard Jalichandra who was the CEO of Technorati and on and on and on.

I was just getting on camera with them doing this little ten-minute interviews, very professional and then, I ended up releasing these videos on Social Media Examiner like one a week over

time, but I got 10 or 15 of them at the Trade Show and then, I did it again in Chicago at a Marketing Process Event but, this time with my little flip cam.

The relationships that I built with these people as a result of sitting down and interviewing them just for ten minutes turned out to be really important because what I gave them was a gift.

Even to this day, if you go to Scott Monty's blog, you will see one of my interviews with him on the side bar on every page of his blog, Scott Monty from Ford Motor Company. It's giving these people this opportunity to be in the spot light that oftentimes, is really spectacular.

I think that was one of the key strategic things that I did at the very beginning.

My goal is to create great content and ask great questions and get it up on the site but, also to begin by nurturing lots of relationships with lots of people and I pursued to do a lot of hundreds of these video interviews over the period of years. And, a lot of these people on these interviews ended up speaking at my events and writing for Social Media Examiner. I've got great relationships with nearly all of them.

**LESLIE:** I'm curious. You said, the first time you went with someone that was a professional videographer. The second time, you went with a flip cam. Contrast the two. Why the professional one time and...

**MICHAEL:** Well, one was Vegas and one was Chicago and they were literally a few days apart from each other and I couldn't afford to... I didn't have the money to fly the videographer again to the smaller conference. So, I just took the flip cam with me.

At the end of the day, it didn't really matter because it's not necessary that the production quality look spectacular. What's necessary is that you just get that person on camera.

Someone had done that to me in the past when I was a white paper guy and I had made a mental note that that was something I was really kind of impressed by. I just knew that it was something that I could do for others.

**LESLIE:** That's the thing that I wanted to bring out there because some people might be thinking, "Man, I can't afford a videographer." But, you can go with your iPhone. You can go with a flip cam. You can go with something where you can just make a simple video and you're taking action that's going to help you accomplish your goal.

I just really wanted to kind of bring that out there because I think there are some significance in that. We try to do things perfectly and, as much as possible, it's good to put your best foot out there. But, sometimes, it just takes putting that foot out there.

**MICHAEL:** And, if you go there with the idea that you are going to do something of value for the person that you're interviewing, instead of that you want something from that person, that's the mentality you need to approach.

Don't even ask them to re-tweet it. Don't even ask them to share it. Just let them know when it's ready and say, "Hey, it's out. Thanks so much. Here's the link." Many will share it and if they don't, that's fine because at the end of the day, what you're trying to do here is build the relationship, not get someone to promote your content.

## Increasing Engagement and Email List with Social Media

**LESLIE:** Awesome. So, ten thousand email subscribers in four months, two hundred and ten thousand email subscribers, now, over that. Email is a big thing for you.



**MICHAEL:** Totally.

**LESLIE:** Why?

**MICHAEL:** Well, we are Social Media Examiner and you would think that having 130,000 Facebook fans would be more important than having 210,000 email subscribers. But, indeed that's not.

At the end of the day, I knew because of my prior experience that email is absolutely critical because it's the one thing that you own. And, with Facebook, it's almost impossible to get in front of that 130,000 fans without paying a lot of money and even then, it's not guaranteed.

Same thing with Twitter. So, at the end of the day, I knew that if I could grow an email list, I could grow a business and the key to Social Media Examiner is to produce great content to persuade a segment of the 800,000 people that visit the site to want to get on the email list to get more content.

Then, once I get on the email list when we have an event or something to sell, what we've got this owned media platform if you will which is the email list upon which we can broadcast out these opportunities. That doesn't cost us anything.

And, because of that, we really haven't had to do hardly any advertising in our entire existence because our goal was to build this massively humongous list.

**LESLIE:** Awesome, awesome.

**MICHAEL:** It doesn't cost fairly anything as you all know to have an email list but, it cost a lot of money to pay for Google search results or Facebook ads but, gosh, if you can own the list, at the end of the day, that's how you can build a business.

## High Standard Editorial Process – A Key to Super-Valuable Content

**LESLIE:** Definitely, definitely. I wanted to definitely bring that out because that's a very important part of what I teach at Become a Blogger.

All right, let's talk about managing something like Social Media Examiner because you have a bunch of writers. You spoke about the fact that you have some extensive editorial guidelines and so on. What does that look like?

If I'm thinking about starting an online magazine, in whatever niche I'm talking about, whether it is knitting or whatever, how do you structure those editorial guidelines in a way that it makes it as beneficial as possible for the writer, for you, and especially for your audience?

**MICHAEL:** It's a wonderful question. I'm going through this process right now because we're about to launch a brand new magazine called [MyKidsAdventures.com](http://MyKidsAdventures.com), and I'm reassessing all

these stuff right now because I'm getting into yet another space I have very little knowledge about which is family activities.

At the end of the day, if you don't give prospective contributors a guide then, they will write to whatever their standard is and one thing you know, Leslie is that there's a variation in standards amongst blog posts that is as wide and as deep as there are people in the world.

**LESLIE:** Definitely.

**MICHAEL:** But, if you do give someone a standard upon which to reach for, they will try to reach for it. And, one of the things that we do in our editorial guide is we say that we have very high standards and we say, we let everyone know, that's part of the reason we're successful and we tell people essentially what we expect.

We layout what a good article should look like. We give examples. We talk about what to do, what not to do, how to write headlines, how to write introductions, how to do subheads, the standards for pictures, video, everything.

Literally, and it's written in a very conversational style so that, when someone actually wants to write, they can just look at this and this increases the opportunity that you will get a really high quality article. But, the bigger challenge, Leslie, is recruiting people.

If you just want to back up for a second, if you're just beginning with the blog, it's very hard to find people who want to write for you but, let's just say, in your case, Leslie, that you had been blogging for a while and you got a bit of a fan base, there are probably some people amongst that fan base that are thinking, "I would love an opportunity to work with Leslie."

So, you could just start by getting the word out there that says, "Hey, I'm looking for a guest contributor," and just see if anyone emerges from your audience.

In the case of Social Media Examiner, we did this for the My Kids' Adventure Project and we have actually over a hundred people, Les said they wanted to participate but, we had to use platform.

But, you first have to ask and then, you have to set the standards in place and then, you have to ask people to submit topical ideas and then, essentially, you say, "Okay, this is the topic I would like you to write on." You let people know that the article may not be approved so that way, they're going to try their best to deliver the best quality content. If you want, I could talk about our editorial process.

We actually have five editors that actually work on every single article now. That is not something you or your audience likely would strive for in the beginning.

But, one key message here is that when you are a solo blogger, and then, all of a sudden you ask someone to guest blog, you become an editor. That forces you to put on a different hat.

**LESLIE:** I do want to talk a little bit about that editorial process. What does that look like?

**MICHAEL:** Well –

**LESLIE:** Well, actually no. Let's talk about what it looked like in the beginning first and what it looks like now.

**MICHAEL:** You mean in the case of Social Media Examiner?

**LESLIE:** Yes.

**MICHAEL:** Okay, if you go to [SocialMediaExaminer.com/writers](http://SocialMediaExaminer.com/writers), step number one is for them to fill out a form and to prove to you that they have what it takes. It usually involves asking them to submit links to their best writing. It asks them to submit a couple of topical ideas and then, you know, that's just the standard web form and it's emailed to you.

The next step is for you to review the writing quality and see whether or not this person really is up to snuff or not and then, if they are, then you go back and you say something along in the lines of, "If you don't already know this, what are some things you think you could write about?"

They'll come back with a couple of topics. You choose one and then, you say to them, "Are you willing to commit to writing this topic and if so, by what day?" You ask them to give you the deadline.

Once they self-imposed the deadline on themselves, and you hold on to it and then, you give them that guide. They submit hopefully, the writing to you and then, all of a sudden, you have to put on this critical hat as an editor and likely, every blog post has to go through some sort of a beautification process.

What that means is oftentimes, there'll be great content in there but, there's no pictures so, you'd have to go back to them and ask for pictures or screenshots or to take photographs or perhaps, there's not a lot of logic to the way to organize so, you might have to re-write it yourself.

Other issues are you're going to have writers aren't going to come through for you because they are going to have other obligations so, you also have to have a plentiful stream of possible writers that you could rely on so that, you can get to the point where you have a couple of writers.

Like in the beginning of Social Media Examiner, it was me publishing once a week and then, it was two other times a week that we were publishing. That's me contributing one-third of the content and two-thirds of the content being contributed by others. Each person I asked only write one article a month so, if you do the math on that, that's two a week. That's eight contributors a month.

I knew that I needed eight different people to be able to contribute content in order for me to publish three days a week. But, I also knew that a lot of these people were going to end up not being very reliable or they are going to select content that didn't meet the standards. So, really, I needed a lot more than eight.

You just have to do the math on this and just know how people get busy, they get side-tracked during certain seasons of the year like summer and holidays and you just have to think through all of that when you're beginning the process of growing essentially a list of folks who are going to contribute content.

**LESLIE:** And, how long did you continue with this three articles a week?

**MICHAEL:** We did it until we got to the point where we had more articles than we needed. Then, we began to go to four articles a week.

**LESLIE:** Got you.

**MICHAEL:** And then, once we got more articles than we needed, we went to five a week and then, eventually to six.

**LESLIE:** So, you let the growth happen organically?

**MICHAEL:** Correct.

**LESLIE:** I like that. Okay, I'm feeling that.

**MICHAEL:** Yes, because it gets complicated. When you're doing what we're doing, we have over a hundred writers that we work with right now because we're publishing six days a week. And, some of them are writing once a month. Some are writing twice a month. Some are writing once a quarter. Some are writing once ever.

They're all over the map with different topical expertise and sometimes, we recruit people when special stuff happens in the industry. It's just all over the map and you need eventually, as you grow, a team to help manage all that stuff because as you know, Leslie, part of the process is writing but, the other part of the process is prepping the articles in Wordpress, getting the images, getting the SEO stuff together... all that stuff.

All requires a heck of a lot of work and eventually, you as the sole person on your blog will get to the point where you cannot do it all yourself and you'll stop writing because you have to manage all the other stuff which is what happened for me.

Eventually, the podcast came in and that allowed me to [re-get] my voice back in. But, even with the podcast, I have someone else on my team that is essentially taking content out of the content and prepping the blog post.

**LESLIE:** Nice. In terms of your team right now, what does it look like fully? You guys are publishing six times a week. You have editors. You have a number of different people...

**MICHAEL:** Yes, we have a Director of Editorial whose job is to recruit new writers and review the writers and look at the substance of their articles. We have an Associate Editor who is involved with essentially, once the article writers come in, getting them through the process then, we have a copy editor who looks at the English language and then, after that, it comes to me and I look at it and I write the headline and introductions so, I'm the Executive Editor.

Then, we have an SEO editor who does all the SEO stuff and then, we also have a final proofing editor which goes through the articles and just make sure there's absolutely nothing wrong.

Then, we have someone else is monitoring comments. The biggest part of our organization is really this big old and editorial team.

And then, of course, we have community managers, too which is an entirely different type of equation.

**LESLIE:** [*Laughs*] I love this! This is once again, according to what --

**MICHAEL:** We run like Forbes or something. We run like a real magazine. You know what I'm saying?

**LESLIE:** Yes. At the beginning, I said, I brought you on to talk about how to build something bigger than a blog because this, what you are talking about is not just a blog. This is an online

magazine but, not just what you think of when you say, "Hey, I want to have a number of writers writing for me."

This is some serious structure but, what I am noticing is all of these structure here, everything that you said just now is to focus on making sure that the content is as high of a quality as humanly possible.

**MICHAEL:** And, it doesn't generate a penny for us and all the money that we make on this organization is directly related to it yet. You understand what I'm saying? Because, the spectacular quality of content that we produce everyday is our marketing message. That content is what pulls people in everyday. That content is what gets people to click on our ads for events. That content is what gets people to subscribe to our newsletter and ultimately attend our conferences. That content is what allowed us to become a multi-million dollar company.

**LESLIE:** Okay, so [*laughs*] I'm sorry, I'm getting too excited.

**MICHAEL:** [*Laughs*]

## Building Something Bigger than a Blog

**LESLIE:** I'm getting excited because you don't hear people talking about these types of things very often. At least, I don't hear people talking about these types of things very often. I typically associate with people that like me, have been running solo blogs, creating great content, getting it out there so that, people can find value in it, established their brand and build from there.

But, this takes it to another level and I love to get that other side of the equation where you see that blogging is great. But, there's so much more that can be done around this whole concept of blogging. They're so much bigger that it can get if you were to know how to do these things and then, go out there and put it into action.

**MICHAEL:** Well, one of the interesting side effects that we learned very early in Social Media Examiner was that people are reading our content really actually wanted to communicate with each other. And, it wasn't until about five months after we launched that we decided to put our Facebook page together.

When we did that, almost overnight, ten thousand people became fans of our Facebook page and started interacting with one another and supporting one another, answering each other's questions on our Facebook wall. It was crazy! That really opened my eyes to that content can also have a very strong community component that transcends just a comment box. You know what I mean?

**LESLIE:** Yes.

**MICHAEL:** Eventually, we built our very own community called, [The Networking Club](#) and there's thirteen thousand people on there. We own our own social network at [socialmediaexaminer.com/clubs](#).

We got these four different clubs and people come now and interact. They are essentially forums if I want to dumb it down but, they are a lot more than that.

Once you have great content and you draw an audience to you and you begin growing a list, you also can empower them to connect with each other. That's where that whole community aspect come in.

Then, when they start connecting with each other is when a lot of magic happens because certain individuals start emerging from the masses. Those people maybe should write for you down the road or maybe they'll end up being on your podcast, or maybe they'll end up speaking at your conferences, if you decide to have conferences.

And, when you do have conferences, they'll come in mass. We had our first physical conference this year and we had 1100 people from 32 countries around the world --

**LESLIE:** Wow!

**MICHAEL:** -- come to San Diego for Social Media Marketing World. Now, of course, we built a mass of audience but, I didn't expect that kind of response. It's just kind of great because we've essentially become this hub of the community by just developing and producing spectacular quality content that is almost 100% written by other people.

## Social Media Marketing Podcast – a Vehicle for Recruitment

**LESLIE:** Awesome, awesome. Let's talk really quick about the podcast. You said the fact, the report that so many people are thinking about getting into podcasting. What do the podcast do for you?

You already had a brand that was established, why podcast and how did that help anything?

**MICHAEL:** Well, the podcast has been really spectacular. I've told a lot of people this but, the feedback that I get from the podcast has been greater than everything that I have ever done all combined in my entire career, greater than Social Media Examiner, greater than my white paper stuff all combined.

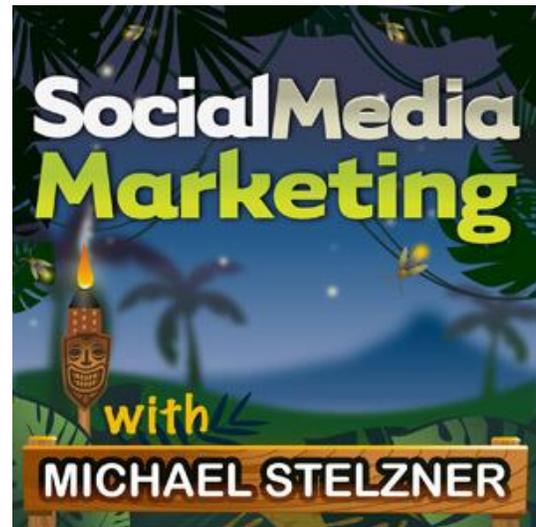
I think it's because I didn't realize how important it was to allow my voice to be shared and received by a lot of people. I also didn't full realize the gift that I had of interviewing people and extracting knowledge from them in a longer format.

I've done in ten minutes behind the camera. But, never really in this longer forty-minute interviews. And, it turned out people loved it. And, it actually changed my perceived value in the community and the perceived value of Social Media Examiner in a massive way.

Because, think about this, we got the biggest blog in the world of Social Media. Now, all of a sudden, we came out with this podcast and out of nowhere, everybody and their mother in the [unclear] followed us.

**LESLIE:** *[Laughs]*.

**MICHAEL:** Chris Brogan came out with one set. Godin came out with one... All these people literally within weeks after we launched our podcasts started also launching podcasts and then, I think the podcast allowed us to also have the biggest conference in our space because what I ended up doing in the podcast was sharing the voices of the very people that were going to be presenting at our conference so that, people could listen and get to know these people on the podcast and then, want to come meet them in person.



But, the podcast has been a great recruitment vehicle where we can find talents to write on our blog, speak at our conferences, and so on and so forth. It's all interconnected. It's been like that third leg in the stool. We've got the community. We've got the blog and now, we've got the podcast. And, because of that, we're strong.

**LESLIE:** Awesome. This is going to be the last question. For someone that's listening to this right now that is inspired but, is wondering, Social Media Examiner has been going now for four years --

**MICHAEL:** Coming up on four years on October.

**LESLIE:** Coming up on four years. Is it too late to get in to this game in terms of you building a platform? Talk to that person.

**MICHAEL:** All you got to do is look around at a lot of this people that no one has ever heard of today but, everyone is talking about like who the heck knew who Pat Flynn was from Start Passive Income? Or, John Dumas from Entrepreneur on Fire who is not even podcasting for a year. You can totally build a platform right now because everybody else sucks at it. I want you to think about this.

**LESLIE:** [*Laughs*]

**MICHAEL:** In whatever niche you're in, the chances are that you are consuming content in a podcast or in a blog or in video format and you know, that there are very few in that space that do it well. Very, very few.

**LESLIE:** Yes.

**MICHAEL:** This means incredible opportunity because it's not that you're late to the game. It's that you can do it better. And, it's because I did it better and a lot better than everyone else that I came in to a highly saturated, over-saturated marketplace, very late that I was able to grow.

I'm telling you, you can do it and I am seeing people do it every single day.

So, throw that thought out of your mind. You'll never be able to do it if you don't think you can.

**LESLIE:** On that note --

**MICHAEL:** You think you can and you go for it you'll thank me and Leslie later.

**LESLIE:** Awesome, on that note thank you so much Michael for sharing so much value with my audience. I really appreciate it.

**MICHAEL:** It's been my pleasure.

**LESLIE:** So guys, hey, if you don't go to Social Media Examiner, if you haven't been doing it, head on to the Social Media Examiner.com, check out what they are doing there especially if you're a blogger. You're into social media. You want to get your voice out there.

Just go. Yes, that's it. Check it out. Listen to the podcast and maybe I will see you at the conference next year because I'm going to the next one.

Anyhow, as usual I want to let you know that this episode was brought to you by my ten free videos on how to become a blogger over at [freebloggingvideos.com](http://freebloggingvideos.com). Head on over there. You get to avoid the hassle and stress of not knowing how to get your blog up and running fast.

Check it out [freebloggingvideos.com](http://freebloggingvideos.com). But, that's pretty much it for this episode. I hope you got tons of value from it. If you got something to say, come back to the blog at [becomeablogger.com/episode116](http://becomeablogger.com/episode116) and leave your feedback in the comments' area.

Of course, I'll play the numbers at the end. If you have a question, go ahead and call and leave that message. Until next time, take care and God bless.