

## How a Mechanic Changed the Campervan Hire Business



**Tim:** Hello and welcome to the very first episode of Small Business Big Marketing. I'm your host Tim Reid.

**Luke:** And I'm your co-host Luke Moulton.  
**Tim:** Hello, Luke.

**Luke:** How are you, Tim?

**Tim:** Very very good. We're excited about being here because we have been planning this for a long time and the spirit of this show is simply to inspire small business owners around the globe with marketing ideas and tips and tricks and inspirations that just get you thinking about how to promote your business more effectively. And how are we going to do that, Luke?

**Luke:** We're going to do that by inspiring you, by talking to some really interesting people, some other fellow small business owners as well as some other service providers that will hopefully give you a few ideas that you haven't come across before to help you market your business.

**Tim:** Yeah. So what we want to do is we're out there looking for small business marketing ideas that we think are great and then approaching the people that do them and seeing whether they want to come and talk to us and...

**Luke:** That's right. Sometimes...

**Tim:** ...share their ideas.

**Luke:** Sometimes it's a little bit lonely when you're a small business owner so we want to try and bridge that gap and help inspire you about your marketing.

**Tim:** Yep. So hello, listeners, we hope you are small business owners, if you're not, go and start a business. If you are, hope you're doing well. You can contact us via our website which is [SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com](http://SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com) and if you do have any questions or think of someone that you think would be worthy of being interviewed, then you can contact us at...

**Luke:** [Questions@SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com](mailto:Questions@SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com).

**Tim:** Very good. So we're going to get straight into our first interview, Luke, because that's why we're here. And we are speaking to the owner of a business called Wicked Campers and this fellow's name is John Webb and John is an interesting character, to say the least.

**Luke:** Certainly is.

Tim: Yeah. He's got a lot of good stuff to say. We have been seeing his product on the road for the last few months. These old vans with graffitied all over them...graffitied the word "Wicked" all over them. And they're starting to grow and they're doing some good marketing online and offline.

Luke: Yes, he's got a fantastic little business there and it seems to be just growing. So it's going to be interesting talking to John, so without further ado let's hand it over to John.

Tim: Further ado or do, further ado, yeah. But anyway we're going to go to John. That's good.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: Bye.

Luke: Bye.

Tim: Tell us a bit about how you've developed the Wicked Camper brand?

John: It's more about just a reflection of myself in some ways and just having fun and just looking into how we can serve. Better but it's always...I think it comes from reaction, looking for reaction sometimes. That's why we do some things that we think we can't do that and all of a sudden, stuff it, let's do it.

Luke: John, for our listeners, perhaps if you could give us a bit of a background about the business and how it started and how you've got to where you are now.

John: It originally started from getting my wife to paint her car to make it look a bit more...a bit special. Then the...the hirers that took that had a good time and met a lot of people. And then the next one was the painting a van, rather than fix dints. Because they're always getting dented, so I'd rather paint them up than fix dints. Because as soon as we fix it up it'll be dented again and customers won't want to pay for any dints.

Luke: Yep.

John: So I'd rather keep it nice and loose. So we've kept it that way. So we don't probably should it loud enough that we don't charge for small dints and scratches, as long as the car is pretty square it's good.

Luke: So how many campers do you have Australia-wide and worldwide?

John: The biggest number's in Australia. Probably worldwide is only probably about 1200, that's all.

Tim: So you recognised a market need, did you, in that backpackers were being charged a fortune for something that they might not have needed or was it simply a love that you had, how did it come about?

John: I used to...I went from being a mechanic to renting cars, so I earned money without having to work so hard, but I worked harder. Then I saw that...when I was renting cars I discovered travellers. Then I discovered that travellers needed to sleep in something, so needed accommodation. And that's where I come with the idea of the cheapy vans and just went from there. So we found that for the capital outlay a van wasn't much dearer than a car but you got bigger hires and a little bit more value out of it.

Tim: Do you have any marketing background?

John: No. Just gut.

Tim: Yeah, that's what I love about it. Gut, correct.

John: Yeah.

Tim: You'd know exactly...you're one of these guys and it's one of these brands that I look at and go, these guys understand exactly who they're trying to appeal to.

John: I was thinking about it the other day and I think that the two pluses to the business was the name Wicked, and I've always gone with reflected stickers so it sticks out like dogs' balls. And the other one is one line, you know, bumper stickers, everyone wants to read bumper stickers. So I think the one liners on the backdoor, that's what usually everyone makes a comment on. Not the graphics on the side so much.

Tim: Do you talk to your people within the company to adopt the kind of personality and values that you yourself have? Because I've spoken to the guys at the call centre and they too talk in a certain way and everything is pretty relaxed and...

John: I think it's always developing. You know, like my wife the other day did...she wasn't too impressed with it, but we called it Mrs Wicked's wisdom. So there was good words for the kids, so they had some good stuff to work with. So it was just simple rules in keeping everything, I forget with the rules are. One of them was to speak what you...you know, mean what you say and don't speak what you don't mean.

Tim: So these are internal rules for...

John: Internal rules, yeah.

Tim: ...Wicked people?

John: Yep.

Tim: Going back to that notion of courage, you got a special on your website at the moment, the naked special.

John: Yeah, that's going good.

Tim: Is it?

John: It's a lot of fun.

Tim: Is it?

John: Yeah.

Tim: Is that why you're naked?

John: The guys wish they had more girls come in naked, but they get a few so I think...he was complaining today in Melbourne, he's had more...he didn't have his camera when he had girls come in. But he's got his camera now. But even if you'd see, you know, nine naked guys and one naked girl, it'd be worth it for them.

Tim: Tell us about, for those who don't know what we're talking about, what's the naked special?

John: Well what I did, we were just thinking one day and I thought that would be a little bit crazy and I thought, hey, anyone that turns up...I think we had vans sitting in Broome and Sydney at the time, so we put up a special if you turn...get...turn up naked and you get your first day free. But it just took off in all the other cities so we thought we'd just open it up to all the cities.

Tim: Yeah.

John: Yeah. But it's the staff that really like it, have a lot of fun with it.

Luke: I bet they do.

Tim: I'm actually interested in the logistics of it. So at what point does the person de?robe and walk into the Wicked shop?

John: A lot of them just walk in naked.

Tim: Great. Oh, that was a good idea, wasn't it, Lukey, as a way...

Luke: It was a fantastic idea.

Tim: Yeah. So we're just going to pause John there for a minute.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: And it's a good idea because he's got the courage to do something beyond what people would expect. So it's not a coupon offer or it's not a 10% discount offer, it's actually something that would really resonate with the people he's trying to appeal to.

Luke: Absolutely. I think it's novel, it's a little bit crazy, it's a bit unusual and it does appeal to his audience for sure.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. He's a crazy guy.

Luke: He is a funny guy.

Tim: We'll go back and keep listening to him.

Luke: Let's.

Tim: Okay. So, John, those marketing ideas, how do they come to you? Do they...is it sort of middle of the night or do you actually have brainstorming sessions in the office or?

John: I think you get bright ideas I think come, just recognising them and just implementing them is the problem. Usually I'll call someone straight away if I think of something smart because I'll forget it...

Tim: Yeah.

John: ...you know, ten minutes later. So I'll call someone up and say, hey. So I've got a few of those and now they've...they've left me now but I've got a few there for it.

Tim: Golden rule to act on impulses.

John: I think that's a lot of...that's probably a lot of people's rules. Once you don't act on it it's gone.

Luke: Yeah, absolutely.

Tim: So, John, tell us, how have you managed to get the business to where it is today?

John: I think if I was...I don't consider myself a businessman, I'm learning that, I think if I'd learnt more about the leverage of borrowed money and in business probably twice as big, but slow learner. But the...we're looking for a good growth spurt this year in...as I travel around the country I see a lot of opportunities that we can capitalise on with the tourists. So it will be an interesting year this year. Should be good.

Luke: How do you go about marketing to tourists?

John: Well one, I think the vans are the biggest marketing on the road.

Tim: Yeah, agreed. It's agreed.

John: So it would be...it'd be...it would take guts, but if I stopped all my advertising and just relied on the vans, it'd be fascinating.

Luke: Yeah.

John: And just see how well it went. It'd be only fear holding me back. But if my gut was...is stop all my advertising, just rely on the vans and word of mouth, and then when you've got customers that are a bit pissed off or unhappy just give them their money back. And that'd probably be the better money spent than spending it on magazines and advertising company.

Tim: All right, we're just going to pause John right there for one second. So, John, stop what you're doing. Luke and I are back live in the studio. What John was saying there is a really key learning for small business owners, Luke.

Luke: Absolutely.

Tim: Yeah, because the fact is, and just listening to him speak about that, he should stop advertising. Because he knows that all his other little marketing elements are working for him, like having the trucks out on the road, the vans out on the road.

Luke: That's right. And he doesn't know how well his traditional marketing is working for him. And the only way quite often with traditional marketing is...to find out, is to test it.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: And in his case the only way of testing it is to turn it off.

Tim: He will never ever know, will he, unless he turns it off.

Luke: Exactly. He could be...

Tim: And he might be a lot richer if he does that.

Luke: He might be.

Tim: So I guess it's a question to the small business owners listening right now, is what are you doing that you know you probably shouldn't be doing in your marketing mix? Turn it off, see what happens. You can always turn it on again.

Luke: Correct.

Tim: Back to John. Website, do you...I mean it's a pretty...I looked at your website, it seems to have organically grown, I imagine, over the course of however many years. You've got some interesting stuff there. Some is out of date. The feedback, the last feedback was 2007.

John: Oh, yeah, that's terrible. It's keeping on top...keeping on top of, it's about...you employ people in IT, they only care about their job, so it's about not driving the IT enough.

Tim: Do you think it's IT that should be responsible for what's on the website?

John: No, not necessarily. I think it's...I would say it's...I'm attracting more people into the business that care. So I think people that care about...care about the business make a difference. So that's slowly changing and getting better, yep.

Tim: Do you...so your marketing, your advertising and your website, do you do any other things like, you know, promote...well you do promotional themes, but do you have events or do you sponsor anything?

John: We've had a few sponsors. I don't think they're very successful as far as bringing in business. I changed my idea. Everyone has to pay. If we like your content we'll give your money back. But when we've gone and done things without taking money we always seem to get shafted. Because people, if you take their money first, they don't get back to you with their material anyhow, because everyone's lazy.

Tim: Guarantees. You've got the guarantee.

John: Yeah, money back guarantee, yeah.

Tim: Full stop, any fine print?

John: Yeah, it's on the...it's on the terms and conditions. So if you need the...my view is if you want...you want to come and get a van and if for any reason you don't want it anymore, you can have your money back except the 20% and your deposit, that's all. Because people sometimes change their mind about what they want to do. So we just do that rather than...all the companies are no money back whatsoever. So we thought we'd just put it in. That way it gives people an option too.

Tim: Well it removes kind of any risk, doesn't it? I mean, if you...

John: Yeah, it takes away the risk, yeah.

Luke: Let's take a break from John for a second. I just want to have a bit of a chat about that guarantee point, Timmy.

Tim: Yeah. Love guarantees.

Luke: What did you think of John's take on the guarantee?

Tim: Look, I just...I just like businesses that have the courage to offer guarantees that are really simple. So, for example, if I see a business that has, you know, money back guarantee, no fine print, I reckon that's gold. John's is almost there.

Wicked Campers is almost there, where he's, you know, he's going to give you 80% of your money back, no questions asked, and keeping 20% for reasons of obviously to cover maybe some costs or whatever. What guarantees do is remove another blockage or any fear that you may have in doing business with someone.

Luke: I think once again he's really appealing to his audience. He's thinking of, you know, the backpacker type, the young...

Tim: The kids.

Luke: The kids.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: The young travellers. And, you know, things change.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: People might meet other people on the road. they decide they're going to stay somewhere...

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: ...and that's sort of...that's a fair enough deal.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. He has managed...he's got inside the heads and understood how they live.

Luke: That's right.

Tim: And provided a business solution that kind of recognises that. Okay.

Luke: All right. Let's...that's some good points, let's head back to John. What's been the most difficult part about owning Wicked Campers over the last eight years? Or let me rephrase that, challenging, what's been the most challenging aspect of...

John: Challenging, I think...

Luke: ...developing the business?

John: I think my mind growing. And just feeding my mind to go with the growth and to go with all the stuff the business throws at you, yep. I'm enjoying the challenge, it's like the business is a leverage for me to improve myself. So without the business...say you had lots of money and you didn't have the business, how would you develop? So having to need to serve people and to keep, you know, bills paid and people employed and everything, I think helps you with your self development.

Tim: Do you...you know, the thing I...I look at Wicked and sort of think it's an experience, you know? And it sounds as though you haven't really formally plotted that but as a marketing person you've really created this kind of Wicked world where once you're in it and immersed in it, it's very unique and very original and could actually go anywhere.

John: Well I've got a slogan put up in all the depots, which I haven't done yet, this is one of the ideas I had, and it was to say make sure you ask for the worst possible van so you can have the greatest adventure.

Tim: Nice.

Luke: Nice.

Tim: Nice.

Luke: That's great.

John: And I...

Tim: Get that up.

John: And I'll have it up this week or next week probably, or maybe this week. The...and I think that's what it's about, it's out there going and having an adventure and if anything goes wrong, we've always got roadside help. I think the people you meet and the experience you have, all those memories and feelings, that's what makes life.

Luke: It's about coming home and having a good story to tell.

John: I think so. Because I come down here and went up to the border, Swan Hill, and my memory is hitting a bird, the windscreen, that was my...didn't smash my windscreen, thank goodness, but that's my memory. And the other one is the orange light came on for fuel because we were too busy talking and then go, oh. So we did 50 ks at about 50 ks an hour, idling along, just to make the service station. That's what I remember out it. Don't remember much else, you know.

Tim: And you seem to capture those, I don't know how many videos you've got on your website but I was watching...when I first came across it a couple of months ago you had a great video to some Cold Chisel song and then I went and had a look on it yesterday and there was something maybe from the Falls Festival.

John: Yeah, that's it, yeah.

Tim: Someone had put together a Falls Festival...and once again it's like the experience, it's like...I mean, I'm not sure whether there was actually a Wicked Camper in the video, which...I love that because you're kind of willing to let the

experience sell without, you know, a big logo or a domain name or whatever it is. And if people, you know, buy into the emotion...

John: I find that...I find if you do a video showing lots of vans, how boring. That's a life you're having out there without the van, you know with...that's your wheels, but it's the life. It's like it's a...you're selling that dream, that's what you want to sell.

Tim: Yep. John, we're just going to pause there for a minute. Back in the studio with Cool Hand Luke, my co-host. What I love about what John is talking about there, Luke, is the fact that he's all about selling the experience of Wicked Campers. You know, the fact that he doesn't care whether there's a Wicked Campervan in the videos that are promoting his business, I think is brilliant. Because he's much more interested in selling the experience of what his business is all about and not interested in whether there's a logo in there.

Luke: Yep.

Tim: I can't tell you how many arguments I've had with clients over the years about whether the logo should be this big or that big.

Luke: That's right, yeah. I mean, exactly, he's...what he's selling is the experience that his van gives to people, that's exactly what he's selling.

Tim: Yeah. So therefore the learning for our listeners is about focusing on what people are doing with your brand out there in their lives as opposed to how it's looking, you know.

Luke: Yeah. What's the essence of your brand.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: Yeah.

Tim: Nice. All right, well back to John.

Luke: John, is there a businessman or entrepreneur that you find inspiring?

John: Yeah, I read a few...a bit about Branson.

Luke: Yep.

John: Yeah. I'm just discovering he's just a good organiser.

Tim: You're waiting for him to call and get the chequebook out?

John: No, I just want to move along with those skills, you know?

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

John: Yeah. So I'm just...

Tim: You look a bit like him.

John: No. I had a shave today so...

Tim: Did you? Thank you. Just for us. Can you see Wicked going beyond campus?

John: That's where I'm reading the Richard Branson stuff, to get my head screwed around to doing other stuff so I can, how do I say, walk away from this business with it running well enough to be able to put my head...and leave someone in it. So it's a...I had a guy running it for a year, he tried to make the business more a reflection of him, so it didn't work. But what I realise now, if I'd taken him on, say, for six months and said don't change anything, don't touch anything, just hang out with me for six months to see what I do, it probably would have been a better result.

Tim: Lukey.

Luke: Tim.

Tim: What else have you got for John?

Luke: Uh...

Tim: Nah, you haven't, you've got nothing.

Luke: That's it, that's all...

Tim: You're making it up.

Luke: That's all I've got for John.

Tim: Thanks, mate, for coming in. I reckon if we had you back in five years' time there'll be many many more Wicked Campers out on the road. Be my guest...

Luke: Definitely.

John: Hope there's some better stories too.

Tim: Don't...please don't let me drive past a Wicked Camper in five years' time and it's really flash, you know, like a Winnebago Wicked. Because then I'll go John's lost it.

John: Yeah, that'd be boring.

Tim: Good on you, John. Thanks for coming in.

Luke: Thanks, John.

John: Thanks for your time.

Luke: Cheers.

John: Yeah, bye.

Luke: All right, that takes us to the end of our first podcast...

Tim: Yes.

Luke: ...with John from Wicked Campers.

Tim: Yeah, and what a podcast.

Luke: It was pretty good. Timmy, what did you take away from it?

Tim: You know, I loved John's ability to do some sort of courageous things. The naked promotion, in particular, kind of...not only because it was around nudity but also because it just was a courageous promotion and something that many other businesses maybe wouldn't try.

Luke: Yeah, that was definitely a good one, definitely a good one.

Tim: Yep.

Luke: I liked the way that he referred to his clients as "the kids".

Tim: Yeah, yeah, great. He's really got like...and that's not condescending at all, is it?

Luke: No, not at all.

Tim: Like he really kind of...when he says the kids, he has got a complete understanding of those guys, hasn't he?

Luke: Yeah. And it's like he's actually...he's feeling and connecting with his clients.

Tim: Yeah.

Luke: And he cares for them.

Tim: Yeah. I think as a youth brand, I think he could do a lot of work on his website. If our listeners, if you do go to [wickedcampers.com.au](http://wickedcampers.com.au) have a look. It is a fun website, but there's a lot of stuff that's outdated. And I just think you can't afford to do that. And if...that's not therefore to say don't have a website or anything but...

Luke: Yep.

Tim: Just...because it can put a bit of pressure on businesses to keep it updated.

Luke: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, I think it's very important, keep your website updated. You know, once again show people that you're being proactive about your business.

Tim: Correct, Luke. Okay. So that's the end of show number one. And we hope everyone enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed making it for you. We've got plenty more to come. We hope to do these weekly. A freshly brewed podcast each week. But in order for us to do that, Luke, what do our listeners need to do?

Luke: They need to submit some questions and some feedback and they can do that at our email address...

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Luke: Questions@SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com. Or by checking out our website [www.SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com](http://www.SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com).

Tim: Yeah, and feedback is critical. Because we want to know...not...we don't want, you know, oh, you guys are really good. Although that would be kind of nice, wouldn't it?

Luke: That would be great.

Tim: But we'd just like to hear whether we're doing things right or wrong. And, you know, like if you've got someone who you'd like us to interview, some small business somewhere in the world that you think is doing great marketing then let us know. And don't forget to buy the book that is on our website which is called Cha-Ching!, that's the name of the book, and Cha-Ching is the sweet sweet sound of small business marketing that works. So until next time it's bye from him.

Luke: And it's bye from him.

Tim: That's both of us. Goodnight. Bye.

Luke: Bye.