

THE **small** BUSINESS BIG **MARKETING**

show

INSANELY EFFECTIVE
MARKETING

Episode #450

How to ignore your
competition ...
even when you're
completely surrounded
by them | #450



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Stuart Stanley Interview Transcription

Tim

I started off by asking him how he became a jeweler in the first place.

Stuart

A really bit of a random story I'll try to keep it short for you but I had a background in the design at University. I didn't really think of jewelry but I got a really awful sort of door to door sales job just to pay off the old student debts and just knocked on the door of this crazy fellow. And he was like How can you knock on my door and say these things. At first I thought it was going to have a real moan at me so that ended up cutting a long story short he said you want to run a company for me. It was selling season tickets for a golf course. Door to door. But it was one of those nasty sort of pyramid schemes I later found out and yeah he said how many of these tickets to be sold today and I sort of made up a little white lie and said it's so low to them. It was hard I like you do you want to run a company for me. So I ended up running a discount card for Brighton for the area where I live. And after I'd assess that he just said Look I'm really happy you've been really honest you want to work on my jewelry stores and run that instead. And that's how I fell into it.

Tim

How bizarre.

Stuart

Really bizarre.

Tim

You'd come from a design background. So what appealed to you about running a jewelry store the fact that you would be a jewelry designer?

Stuart

No to be totally honest originally was just to pay off student debts and it was more like an antique store. But as time went on I saw the potential to link the two and design jewelry because where I worked for this guy he was just like genuine antiques and nice old bits. It wasn't really my thing but then as time went on I thought basically you can introduce design into this so start taking on commissions then work for a more contemporary store before opening my own shop.

Tim

Are you a creative individual at heart or more business driven?

Stuart

No, definitely creative yeah. The business was almost like it sounds silly but it's almost secondary sort of thing so it's like do something you love and hope it pays the bills.

Tim

Well I hear that all the time I spoke to a lady only last week from Bali Janet DeNeefe. She is very much an artist at heart but manages to find the ability to also run a business if you can combine the two then you will generally create something pretty special that you love.

Stuart

Yeah definitely definitely. If you were channeling and doing the things you really love it does genuinely come try and look after customers and you just do it in a way that you're passionate about rather than just trying to sort of trick people into buying from you

Tim

Never trick Stuart. That's why marketing got a bad name. Some people try to trick you get caught. So this fellow gets you to run his jewelry business you're running it for a period of time where's the cross over to you starting your own small business in ring jewelry?

Stuart

Yeah there was one other small stepping stone. One of his managers left to open a store and after having that for a little while he basically said to me can you help me run my shop and modernize it for me. So I'm now ready to take on staff. So it was a manager from the old store I followed him and worked there for a couple of years as well and before opening my shop. But what's really unusual about the area is called the lanes in Brighton and it's on the south coast of England. All the jewelry stores are pretty much next door to each other. So from the first shop I worked in to working for the other guy a friend of mine and then opening my store was literally within a few metres. Not even sort of miles. So it's a really unusual area in that regard.

Tim

So you literally just painted a picture that this street in which your shop is there are another. There is another 30 or so jewelers like alongside each other.

Stuart

Exactly. Probably a better description it's more of a maze because customers are a ways to get lost in the area but yeah it's very very small area.

Tim

How does that come about. At what point I just try to understand did the council say that street in Brighton is allocated to jewelers. If you've got another street that's allocated to men's tie shops the one that's allocated to you know women's shoes. I mean that just seems bizarre. Why would one jeweler start a shop next to another next to another next to another. Did the idea of competition not enter anyone's mind?

Stuart

I think I don't know the original shop. I know its transition from antique store. So before I was working in the lanes it was the same sort of thing. Every other shop was an antique store. And apparently back in those days it was so sought after that you almost couldn't

have enough competition. There were people queuing around the block to sell antiques to the shops and then the same with customers buying from the stores as well. And then what happened is a lot of the antiques but I'm talking furniture and things I say fell out favor and I guess interior styles changed gradually the odd couple of jewelers. They stayed there and the antique shops closed and then it changed into jewelry stores. And the other thing that I must say it's really really tough having the competition but the flip side is you get visitors from all over the UK because they know if they're buying an engagement ring or a wedding ring they can come and see 30 shops in literally in half an hour's thing rather than going to a village with one or two.

Tim

It becomes a destination. If you are drawn into wanting to get a nice piece of jewelry when you got 30 jewelry shops in a row. I mean that's something you take off for a weekend with your partner and go well let's spend the weekend looking at jewelry.

Stuart

Yeah. Very much. And that is exactly what happens and you get people that come to the end of day like say it doesn't make it any less scary but they come to you. It's like a pack of playing cards the amount of business comes you've got from other people that looked at this and looks at this thing so it's tough. But yeah the flip side is as you say definitely a destination.

Tim

My first question is how does it not become a race to the bottom in terms of discounting? How do you not just all try to be the cheapest? Or is there a bit of a cartel happening there?

Stuart

You've hit the nail on the head a lot of people do and that's why I always try to avoid. But there are people that are just like really let's say fish and trip people there's shops that elevate the original price to do a huge discount. There's people that are not quite as honest when it comes to migrating diamonds and things like that and a lot a big percentage do exactly that race to the bottom. And people sample this because it was a bargain. And so what I've tried to do is set myself apart and become more of like an educator for want of a better word. So I try and educate the public. Tell them about diamond grading that's something to try and not become part of that race to the bottom price wise because that's what a lot of the shops actually do.

Tim

Okay so that starts to answer my next question which is how do you differentiate yourself from the other 30 jewellers. You become an educator. You're addressing when you're buying jewelry I imagine a key insight into your buyers is they are full of fear. They're fearful of buying the wrong diamond they're getting the wrong design paying too much not liking it when they get it and what do you do. So there's all these questions these outstanding questions that if you the jeweler one of 30 jewelers in that street put your hand up and say I'm going to be the guy who answers them then you're going to build the

trust?

Stuart

Yeah exactly right. I mean so much so that I do little things like my business cards have a fold out. So they're sort of almost like three cards in one to one section is literally don't be afraid to ask these questions. And it gives people tips about what they're looking for. And it basically I'll put my money where my mouth it proves I'm not telling the lie sort of thing and I'm being honest with them. Then they can come to their own conclusions. And when the shop around the corner says I'll buy this it's a bargain blah blah blah and they contradict themselves. The customers know that something's not right. So yeah that's one little trick I do is put a guide on my business cards.

Tim

You know one of the challenges the educational strategy in marketing I love. But you've got to get the prospect in the door first in order for them to then realize hey here's a jeweler that's going to actually educate me help me make an informed decision. So let's take a step back. How are you getting them to walk into your door and not the other 30 in the street?

Stuart

Well it goes right. I'm such a big believer. It goes right through to the window display. So instead of having tickets of like it was this price and now it's this price. I've got a little stands tell people that the properties of the different metals so what the difference is between nine karat gold and 18 karat gold. And one thing it's really odd in the jewelry trade is when customers buy white gold. Most shops plate it coating rub so it changes color and you've got to keep paying that shop to redeploy it. Which I just think is bizarre. So we use different alloys and we don't play to white gold and I've got a little signs and this black gold won't change color very mind it will elsewhere. So that thing about being an educator is right across the board. It's sort of simple window displays signs telling people about diamonds about the metals and that sort of thing. So it's not just the chat once they come in it's right across the board and even at. That's all they see people walking past but the same thing goes for the website there's a guide section that tells people about things as well. So yeah I try and run that right through to bring them in before they even get to talk to us.

Tim

Window displays fascinate me. I think I've had a discussion about window displays on this show 450 or so episodes later. Okay so you're educating in your window by talking about the different quality of metals on little white counter cards or something do you change your window display every week every day? Never?

Stuart

Now rarely do. I'll do minor changes pretty much daily but not a great big overhaul thing because I tend to have I'm really lucky that I've got a lot of window space for the side size of the shop. So there's sort of engage a ring section wedding ring section so it's rare I would do a huge overhaul but it's more about keeping the window display a lot more minimal. Like again most of the done thing in the jewelry trade is believe it or not to make it look like a funeral parlor to shoot crushed velvet very dark or morbid colors whereas I've gone for sort of little perspex stands on wood and that sort of thing. So keep it minimal and yeah just

just educate people with the signs.

Tim

One of the things you do as well which I've seen in order to get people into your store besides the window display even before that is you spend a lot of time. You've got 113 Google reviews I think from memory plus you've got about 20 or 25 videos on YouTube some have 50 or 60 views. I think there's one that has correct me if I'm wrong Stu but 71000 views is that right?

Stuart

Yeah that's right.

Tim

So you're working hard there I mean in all these videos that I've seen of yours are simply educating people so that they make a more informed purchase decision. This is not hard is it like this is obvious stuff. Tell us about how you're going about the whole YouTube video strategies. Simply on your iPhone or you're doing them professionally.

Stuart

Yeah I was a bit sort of trying to get things a bit too right. And I was not I was dragging my heels basically not preparing the videos then. And funny enough listening to your podcast and everything that idea of like you can just get something really nice out there was just an iPhone. So they were all with my iPhone but the one you mentioned with a lot more views I noticed that was getting some traction with the one I did so then I did get a company to help me film a second version of that and that's simply telling people about the difference between the white metal used in jewelry. So most of them are literally sort of five minute job with the iPhone. But that one video I got somebody that it did make a difference it looks more professional.

Tim

What's the balance of between selling and educating in a video by ring jewelers?

Stuart

Oh in me. And you can genuinely say it's like 95. Obviously I want people to buy but it's 95 percent educational at the end. I mentioned the shop it's literally that there's no sort of buy this buy that sort of thing.

Tim

It's a great old quote which says Tell don't sell. And that's exactly what you're doing. You are just telling stories educating teaching and the sale happens. Right. You know you don't have to hold it up in front of people's noses. What can you see from a return on investment from creating these videos through to someone walking into a shop inquiring. Can you draw a straight line?

Stuart

To be honest the one thing I'm bad at. It is literally measuring it. I literally go by people mentioning it so that I'll explain something in the shop. Customers will often say Oh yeah I saw your video. I know about that. That's why I came in so literally just people saying it. And obviously when they see a video they don't always mention it so it's not the greatest measuring but literally I go by word of mouth sort of thing. Yeah.

Tim

Yeah. I don't think it's such a bad thing I mean. Maybe you could be more actively asking people how did you find out about us. And if they say ah you know whether your YouTube channel or your window display or a referral from a friend. But I think knowing that as a business owner is kind of important. And then you know as a trend develops which it will you do more of that right.

Stuart

Yeah.

Tim

Describe to me again. I must paint a picture of the shop. We should've done that earlier on but a small jewelry shop. How many staff?

Stuart

So I've got two full timers and two part timers and my wife so she helped here as well. So yeah. Not a huge staff but I'm really lucky I've got a good a great bunch.

Tim

Paint a picture then of being a client of your business. I walk into the shop what's the customer experience going to feel like and look like?

Stuart

Yeah so just pretty relaxed let them have a look around the area. There is jewelry inside as well so have a look round and just say how can we help you. And sometimes it's something you've seen in the window. We start with that. Other times it's very early days cause things like engagement rings and wedding rings which we sell a lot of can be quite so daunting. So often it's like just help me sort of thing so they come in because it displays and things and we've got little things like we've got stands in the shop that got a plain wedding ring in different shapes and different widths for both ladies and gentlemen as well so they can start to sort of narrow down their design almost immediately sort of thing and the same goes for the stands of metals and things of that. So you can often start by giving them a blank canvas instead. Have you thought that having diamonds in that ring would you like it engraved and it's all about a step by step because it can be so daunting if you jump from one design to an entirely different one you can just see people glaze over.

Tim

How do you manage that with it with a client where I mean there are a number of different

businesses that where the purchase decision is daunting and it generally happens because what you're buying costs a lot of money could be a house could be a car piece of jewelry. How do you help someone feel less daunted? I know you talk about educating but is there anything else you do to kind of relieve that pressure so they can have a clear mind and make the right decision?

Stuart

I think the biggest keys let take the lead because as well as everything you've said it's a big financial commitment. You've got the emotional attachment so if it's an engagement ring obviously they don't want to mess up this decision. So let them take the lead and sometimes with engagement rings it might be a guy that I think diamonds bring out the inner geek in us men. So they've come in and they've done their sort of research and they really want to take off with that and learn about the stones so we let them take the lead and do that. Other people it's just it might be a guy that's really reluctant to wear a wedding ring and he's kind of got to so I don't want it to really be too chunky and really let them take the lead. I think if you try and give too much of formula and serve everyone the same way it just won't work. It'll only work for a small percentage so I think it's a matter of let them take the lead. Then once you know what their fears are or they're sort of their background knowledge is you can just sort of take it from there and try and help narrow it down.

Tim

So another thing it's a bloke who's got no idea about jewellery. Me. How do you then lead them? We want to say take the lead but what if you've got no idea. Or if I want to get a ring designed or a bracelet designed for my partner and I'm like I don't even know where to start and I'm a bit scared of handing it over to you because you're going to put you know 48 carat diamonds. That's probably not even a thing. But you know like how do you lead someone in order to get a creative outcome that they're going to absolutely love and you know be very proud of?

Stuart

It's just really is hard to answer because it is almost like every customer is different but you could ask about sort of your partner's other jewellery just even simple like sometimes just so undaunted they think they could not do anything but simple things like you think it will be yellow gold white gold. And then once you've answered a couple and then like what other jewellery do they wear. Is it significant day you could do things like lay out the gemstones so they sort form a date in a bracelet or something like that. So it literally is everybody's different but it's just put it in and gradually gradually finding out their fears are just as important as knowing what they want. If they sound she definitely doesn't want such and such. Sometimes it's a bad experience. You might sell. I'm buying this because she had something broken and obviously that's a bad thing. But you can alleviate those fears by saying well if we make in this way that won't happen so don't worry. It's just answering their questions and fears as well.

Tim

Stu I'm imagining every now and then you hand over the bespoke piece of jewelry that

you've created for your client and they go Oh it's not really what I was thinking don't want it. What happens there?

Stuart

Well believe it or not that does happen but it is literally about once a month a rate or about once every two years.

Tim

That's a good rate.

Stuart

Yeah. Not too bad. And so I've got a guarantee that I even put on the homepage of the website that if they didn't like it even if we've not made an error they're just not keen on the end result. We'd remake it free of charge as long as it's the same value of the currency. If it's the same sort of stone and we genuinely do and I take the hit on that and worst case that goes in the window somebody buys it another day. But I just wanted to come up with something that basically got over that fear of what if I don't like this because a lot of people are not creative they're not designers they certainly different and they've got this massive fear that I get asked literally sort of a dozen times a week. I think people always ask if I don't like it. And normally with bespoke things there's a nasty list of small print which I really didn't want to do. So yeah. We'd say don't worry we'll remake it and we say upfront.

Tim

You know Stu as a small business owner which you are with a staff of four or five. I love your respect for marketing. I love the fact that you're willing to have a crack and try different things and in a competitive environment like 30 jewelers in the same street. You've kind of competitive anxiety almost doesn't exist. From what I can tell and you go ahead and you tell your own story and you create your own marketing and and let that unfold and clearly it's working for you. I'm interested to understand whether there's any marketing that you kind of would love to try or you've got a big idea that kind of scares the pants off you but you'd love to take to market is there anything that comes to mind?

Stuart

I've always tempted with something more in like you mentioned video but rather than just youtube maybe doing something on like a local station or something like that I think a jewel is quite a visual medium anyway. But yeah that would be really tempting. And something along those lines. But yes it's tricky because I was almost put off print ads and things when I opened the store because they were never great. Times are changing so it's hard to say. Yeah something in video it would be would be amazing yeah.

Tim

I say do you mean running TV ads or you being becoming a bit of a spokesperson around jewelry in the area and appearing on like a local today show is that what you mean?

Stuart

Funny enough I meant like TV but it's just on a local form. But the second option you said sounds great as well. Yeah just become a little bit more of an authority figure.

Tim

Why don't you?

Stuart

Yeah I probably should yeah because it's in line with how I'm trying to create a brand. So yeah it would be good to get a regular column on something.

Tim

Well I think it's a great idea. I think you know go for it and it is such an interesting industry in category in which you operate because you're selling. What are you selling you selling love really

Stuart

Yeah I was talking to a customer the other day and it is an amazing trade because you're either going to pop the question to buy an engagement ring or you get married or it's an anniversary or a big birthday so you're not trying to do a hard sell off of something that people don't really know.

Tim

No one's coming and go I got to get a gold ring. I got to give me gold. No one's doing that. I want to ring. I want to make him happy. You want to make him happy. It's an awesome space that you operate in. So yeah it's to be celebrated I would imagine.

Stuart

Definitely. Yeah it's great.

Tim

Well I think it's a great story Stuart. I think the fact that you have you know you refuse to get caught up in the competition is something that many business owners can learn from. I hope that those sometimes with the podcast I don't know. You've been a longtime listener of the show I don't know whether you do it sometimes but you see a topic or a guest or that the headline for the episode you go that's not relevant to me but so often it is and you know what you've just shared is relevant to absolutely anyone who is competing with another business and I think the lesson here is stop competing and just getting on with telling your own story.

Stuart

Yeah I think probably one other tip is keep an eye on your industry rather than the guy next door because if something new is happening and exciting and get to be a part of it don't worry about what the guy next door is doing because you might not even be doing it very well.

Tim

A great example of that I've spoke to a local jeweler in Australia a few years ago at a conference and he was one of the first to get Pandora in his shop and he it saved his business. So I guess that's it. Have you fallen to the Pandora phase or you've avoided that whole brand?

Stuart

No I didn't like it. There was a company doing a version of but just a very small section of the window. I didn't really see it probably to prove me wrong but I didn't see the longevity in it because like a charm bracelet has been around a long while but doing it in a different way.

Tim

It's a family business isn't a Pandora.

Stuart

I've been reading about some recent changes with them they've seen a little bit of a downturn.

Tim

No doubt. I mean the race is run. It was just a genius. It's like buy the hardware and the bracelet and then keep coming back and buy more software in the little charms and things I mean I know they've been around for a long time but they somehow packaged it up in a very clever way maybe in a bit of downtime when you're thinking about your next little bespoke piece you could come up with an idea like Pandora and you know come back on the show when you're a billionaire.

Stuart

Yeah with that. Oh yeah definitely.

Tim

Hey Stuart Well done mate I thank you for being a longtime listener and also thanks for sharing. What is a great little story about don't worry about the competition best of luck in the future.