

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

show

INSANELY EFFECTIVE
MARKETING

Episode #481

The rights to the
Hollywood sign are
owned by an
Australian

“I GOT IT BECAUSE
NO-ONE HAD
EVER ASKED!”

SHANE YEEND,
IMAGINATION



www.SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com

Shane Yeend Interview Transcription

Tim

Shane Yeend. Welcome to the small business big marketing show.

Shane

How are you?

Tim

But I'm really good and I'm excited to speak to you. Because everyone that I have told that I'm speaking to this bloke from Adelaide who has bought the rights to the Hollywood sign gives me the same reaction. This is an audio program but the reaction is sort of like what how why. So maybe we can start with that Shane. How did you end up owning the trademark of the Hollywood sign?

Shane

It's a long story. I don't own the Hollywood sign. I licence the Hollywood sign but its interesting story. All the same. And I was living in Los Angeles. We just sold the assets of our company to a big Canadian firm actually. And I was packing up my house in Hollywood to move. And being a cinematographer back I actually tried to buy. It's kind of funny. I've got some pictures on my wall in my L.A. House. And so I wanted to go out and find a great shot that reminds me of Los Angeles and my seven years living here that I could stick on my wall in Australia. And that was it. And basically I looked and looked and looked and could never find something that was a piece of art for my wall like a big piece of art. So I took to the streets actually with a guy he was working out of an L.A. office and we went you know what let's go I'm going to go and shoot a picture. And the idea for Sunset Boulevard stuck in black and white with the palm trees and we worked out how we would basically climb up to the Hollywood sign. And now I know you're not supposed to do it and trip off alarms and the police are there in helicopters or whatever. So one morning at four o'clock in the morning in the dark walking up in rattlesnake infested territory up to the Hollywood sign and in the dark we were fine. And basically I set off a couple of exposure shots and we're running around to see the sun coming up in Los Angeles and there's the sun coming up in Los Angeles. It's always stirring it's not crystal clear sharp and this was just one of those crystal clear shot days I think it must have rained or something. And it was just beautiful watching this thing come up and I was snapping these shots and so I snapped a couple of hundred pictures and eight of those and we went back to the office and I show people at the office they're saying gee that's beautiful. And I went yeah that's pretty good pretty brown or so and you know people asking for prints and then a friend of mine in London who works for a bunch of A-listers said you know what I was telling someone about your Hollywood stuff. I showed them. Can they get a print and so I went cool A-listers want them most shots going everywhere. Then I had some time I had my assistant I was doing a deed back in Australia for a bit then I put together an exhibition and talk about marketing. I had an exhibition. There's a thing called Sala in Adelaide which is an artist's exhibition we've got 400 artists to come out and put this stuff all around town in different cafes and things.

I'm one of them and I went and have an exhibition because these Hollywood shots are fantastic. And so there was 8 or 12 of those and we put them at a winery we had a publicist on staff then looking after everything else here and we basically put a helicopter on from one of the companies involved in and took all the journalists. Hijacked all the journalists from writing about the 400 other companies to doing this story on Hollywood and got the front page of this exhibition thing on the Hollywood sign and sold a bunch of those. And this was just a hobby. And from there we were trying to go 80 shots or so we should load them up on one of these Shutterstock things. And so my assistant at the time was trying to load them up on there and they wouldn't take them because they were infringing trademarks and we were like that's strange everyone had like these shots. And so we couldn't do it. It's kind of funny because the Eiffel Tower and all these different landmarks are not owned by anybody. Whereas the Hollywood signs actually trademark owned by the Chamber of Commerce. And it's actually kind of funny I didn't realize all of this and you walk up and down Hollywood Boulevard you can almost can't buy a souvenir with the Hollywood sign on it. You've got things with Hollywood written on it but you don't have the Hollywood sign as in the trademark. Everyone's got their own version of it because they want to pay royalties. Million people a year walk up and down there and so I rang the Chamber of Commerce. And you know they like doing big deals where someone's come and take a picture for Chanel outdoor something and charge them a million dollars. And I said you know I'd like to licence these rights. And they went no we don't do photographers. And I went well I'm not really a photographer I'm some guy sell stuff to 85000 retail stores. And I eventually got them to basically put a licencing deal together where our licence the Hollywood sign rights. So yes I have photography rights of the Hollywood sign. To commercialize those rights. And then that deal was done and that's been done since.

Tim

What an amazing story so just to understand the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce up until you approach them were the ones saying to anyone that wanted to use an image of the Hollywood sign. Give us some money. However, you've now bought those rights off the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce and you're the guy who puts his hand out. Is that right?

Shane

Well sort of. I licence those rights from the Chamber of Commerce so we pay royalties.

Tim

So they're still making a quid?

Shane

Yes, it's their trademarks it's no different to me licencing the Disney portfolio to put out products with Disney on it. But we wrap ourselves around those things. It's not my speed to sit down at the local markets and try and get pictures of Hollywood sign. I've been over the time looking at bigger plans and it was just one of those things. The lesson from that is no one had ever asked and the people who did ask didn't push hard enough and it was a turning no into yes. And they're all sort of missions in my life and you go from can't buy a shot for my wall to having some fantastic shots in my wall to to hijacking the exhibition

from 400 other artists by getting the journalist to write about you which is free marketing to trying to upload these things on Shutterstock to finding out someone owns the rights to try to get the rights to get a licencing deal done and eight years later we're here.

Tim

What did you pay for it, Shane?

Shane

Undisclosed.

Tim

Come on I have read 8 figure which I will share with you. You're not going to share?

Shane

No.

Tim

I heard 20 grand plus eight per cent of sales. Am I close?

Shane

To be honest. I actually can't remember the original amount. I know it goes on consistently. It's more than eight per cent of sales. I'm sure most licensees have said around 12 to 15. So you know what. I wasn't prepared for this interview I have to check

Tim

Is it fair to say that it was surprisingly inexpensive?

Shane

Yes.

Tim

That's the amazing part.

Shane

Long-time ago that when we have hundreds and hundreds of licencing agreements through this. Otherwise, I'd be on top of it.

Tim

Yeah. True. We'll get to what those other licencing agreements are in a minute. Having the licence to the Hollywood sign. What does that allow you to do and give us an example or two of people who have approached you and said here's some dough we want to use the sign?

Shane

It's more about commercializing. Putting the brand on commercial products. People go and take a picture of the sign and do whatever they want. If we took those pictures that we take we now have the biggest library in the Hollywood sign on the planet.

Tim

Where does that live on Getty images or your own?

Shane

Yeah on a private site. But we share that with L.A. Tourist Bureau. We share that with the Hollywood sign society. Hugh Hefner rang up and wanted a picture on his wall and we shipped him one from Australia because it was a special print one. So it's all different. We dipped our toe in the water.

Tim

I just got to stop you there Hugh Hefner. Tell me about that call. Who does Hugh Hefner call? Do you pick up the phone?

Shane

Hugh Hefner didn't call us but it's sort of like his people talk to our people. He wants one of these in the mansion. Can you organize it? The answer's yes. It's on its way.

Tim

Shane, please tell me that part of the deal you negotiated maybe a membership to the mansion?

Shane

I've actually been there a couple of times.

Tim

Course you have

Shane

The different things actually.

Tim

But what are the different things, Shane?

Shane

I went to one of those summer night party

Tim

Sounds like something out of Grease. Very innocent.

Shane

Interesting. You sort of walk around and one of the youngsters from work with me. We're like let's go to the mansion we've been invited. It's like cool gazillion people there. You like walking around and geez if these walls could talk. The place is a bit of a dive actually and you're sort of walking around and then upfront stairs and you're in the room there's a pool. Kind of really interesting. It only equals that to having to go to Michael Jackson's 40th birthday party and hanging out at Neverland.

Tim

You did that?

Shane

I did.

Tim

How?

Shane

That's a long story.

Tim

Feel free to tell me how you got to Michael Jackson's 40th birthday party at his Neverland in 3 minutes. Go.

Shane

I've been there twice.

Tim

Mick Jagger once said to me never drop names.

Shane

Yeah, but the idea gets us back to marketing again. I started in the gaming business doing a game called Battle of the sexes. Battle of the sexes was promoted on the five radio capital cities in Australia. They played the game every day for three minutes. Then they told you to go to Kmart and buy it. Within one year it was the highest-selling game in the country the number three selling toy in the country. That year I got an American Express card went to America. I stayed in the Wyndham Belhaj which is now the London the largest radio network in America at the time was Clear Channel. Their number one station was Kiss FM and Rick Dees in the morning. Rick Dees Weekly Top 40 you remember from that we went to Rick Dee's to play battle sexes. I took this thing over to a guy called Von Freeman. It was the marketing director who hired everyone from Ryan Seacrest back and worked with Rick Dee. And I went over to see if he'd promote them on all of his radio stations the same way we did in Australia to monetize Battle of sexes. I got there for the meeting. He didn't turn up. I went back to the hotel. Someone got back to the hotel with me and said can you come back again. Got all the way back to Burbank become good friends with him over the years still talking to him now.

Tim

Is this the story that leads us to Neverland?

Shane

Yeah. So we are now promoting 800 radio stations battle of the sexes every day in America. This now numbers six in America. Von Freeman rings me up at a Saturday afternoon and says we're taking a helicopter up with Rick Dee's to Michael Jackson's house for his birthday. Do you want to come and I went.

Tim

Hell yeah.

Shane

Why not. That was it. So Von Freeman myself and a guy called Shane Pyke or also an Adelaide guy are at Michael Jackson's 40th birthday party.

Tim

This is crazy. You come in on a chopper led in the backyard. If there is one of Neverland does Michael do the moonwalk out to greet you?

Shane

No. I met him in his lounge room actually.

Tim

Tell me about that. You walk in there and he's there or are you seated like the Oval Office and he walks in?

Shane

He was standing and I was with Von and he was inside. There was a bunch of people outside

Tim

Hi Shane.

Shane

Hello Michael

Tim

It's amazing what a great story

Shane

I met him a second time and then I went to neverland a second time without him being there.

Tim

Did you have a sleepover?

Shane

No in fact it was all a bit pre thing. We're lucky you know the old cinema walking to the cinema where we got that Disney and the cinema with the bedroom suites and it's all just a bit it was Neverland right?

Tim

Isn't it amazing Shane I do have one final question about the Hollywood sign but I'll climb out of this rabbit hole in the minute. But isn't it amazing where business takes us? I mean you're a bloke from Adelaide. You've got some great stories but clearly you've had a very very interesting life at the ripe old age of 52. It's a wonderful thing about running your own business don't you think?

Shane

You know what I look at my LinkedIn it's sad I've been in the same place for 34 years. Has it been tough lots of times? Sure. But I wouldn't trade it for the world. The number of things and deals and bits and pieces I've been involved in. I wouldn't trade my life for the world.

Tim

I want to pick that up. I just want to finish on the Hollywood sign because my OCD is forcing me to. I haven't spoken to a licencing person before. So you are making money by creating your own products and photography and selling and as opposed to having a whole lot of people coming to you and saying can we licence it. Is that right? Like, say what you got snow domes and stickers and T-shirts?

Shane

The souvenir market.

Tim

Is huge?

Shane

Yeah. Interesting. I've been working on some bigger. You go in and how do we sell. How you go to Ikea and do a political deal around a theme of Hollywood for three months around cushions paintings frame pictures themes. Stories around merchandise.

Tim

Is that a deal you on?

Shane

Yeah.

Tim

That's awesome.

Shane

But they're big deal. And then if the thing costs 100 dollars they sell on 200 dollars retail you're paying the licence fee on a hundred dollars.

Tim

Those kinds of partnerships like an Ikea. I mean that's a great lesson for any business owner listening striking partnerships that give you a sort of amplification. Any particular trick or secret to ensuring they work or you get them?

Shane

Just clarify that Ikea one is actually a different retailer. That was a good example. But you know what I used to be a cameraman producer then television executive producer. And from there I basically I don't know if you remember the Channel Ten went bust or about to go bust or put across the test patent. And they gave us the weekends to play with and we basically were a couple of young punks that you know I'd been a cameraman and built up a small production company and we basically so the price of three ads on a Saturday. If we took those three ads I really couldn't remember the numbers for it. Say they cost five hundred bucks each. Fifteen hundred bucks of ads. We can go and sell them to Coca-Cola for 15 grand and make a show that's 30 minutes represented. Which is what they call brand funded TV these days. We were like the precursor to that.

Tim

Was like Gillette Wide World of Sports.

Shane

Correct. But even more than that deeper into the brand values. If Coke was going to wrap themselves around surfing for the world. How would we market to those surfers? Okay, let's spend 10 per cent of our whole media budget on owning surfing. How does this TV and TV stuff from around the world an attachment to all the heroes in surfing? I grew up doing all that stuff. So we basically went in. We were one of the only companies at the time a company called Beyond imagination which beyond was beyond 2000 networked on. We became a joint venture in there to do brand funded stuff.

Tim

Am I right in thinking that one of the last supers you would see on some TV shows was produced by beyond imagination?

Shane

Yes.

Tim

I'll get what you do. So I'm answering my own question here going back to how do you strike those deals but what you're saying is it's the idea. When you go to an IKEA with the

Hollywood sign idea or you go to coke with a surfing idea whatever it is it's all about the idea and the rest should fall into place?

Shane

Yes. And you know track record helps you over time. I mean you look back in the game business, for instance, you look back last year in block monopoly was a house that was the second-largest prize in television history in the world. Then it outsold the whole game business here in 12 14 weeks. Again that was a great idea. But it's all execution. But given how these things started I guess we make on TV we couldn't afford to make then so we'd lose money. So I started working on in surfing we ended up getting money from making T-shirts and surfing merchandise and selling merchandise. I learned about retail and buying things and getting licence fees being the licensor and licencing that to do T-shirts for instance. So I learned to do that. Then got into a sort of games and bits pieces. But with games, for instance, I rang the guy at Kmart and I still talked to him today and I said I got an idea for a game around this battle of the sexes concept and will promote it on five caps season he goes yeah get lost and hung up. And I went that didn't work. And so I rang his boss the next day and went Bernie who may be listening to this on a Virgin jet somewhere and said hey I don't know why he hung up on me. This is a really good idea and got someone to Melbourne the next day went to Melbourne at Battlestar Galactica and walked in and got taken to the cafe and went Oh dear this is all gone bad and I walked out of there was Bernie going we'll take 10000 of them and that year it was the highest-selling game in the country. Outsold monopoly.

Tim

Wow. So that's what you do.

Shane

Offers three minutes of the radio playing both sexes with one giveaway saying go to Kmart and buy it. Marketing.

Tim

You love marketing. Hey, listen I'm talking to Shane Yeend who I really don't know how to describe you, man. This whole interview Shane came around by the fact that someone said to me at a conference recently hey did you know there's an Adelaide guy who owns the licence to Hollywood's sign. I'm going well I need to talk to him. You are clearly an entrepreneurial spirit. How would you describe yourself in business?

Shane

Serial entrepreneur.

Tim

Hustler?

Shane

I guess. You know what basically just a serial entrepreneur. I find value in the grey areas. Joining the dots.

Tim

You find value in the grey areas. Give me an example. What do you mean the grey areas?

Shane

Well, it's usually in between something. Values not doing what everybody else does. One of my favourite sayings is you only get sore arms by trying to catch other people's waves. And so when you're joining the dots together and making an engine work right. You get all the cylinders firing together the hole is big. You get a lot of power. One of the cylinders working and working and then if you think about what we did in the early days you know we had the battle of sexes was a radio contest which was a number one mobile game which was the number one website in Australia for two and a half years which was a TV show. That's 360 right. That's what everybody calls 360 across all these platforms. We've done that 25 years ago. It was basically using all the sidelines of the business in sync to deliver an outcome.

Tim

Got it. When you look at other businesses Shane and other small businesses who are trying to have a crack. What comes to mind where you say oh they're just not finished this sentence for me they're just not getting blank right.

Shane

I think it's understanding your customer listening to start with and understanding the proposition of what you've got. If they're not getting their marketing right. You know I mentor a lot of young entrepreneurs and a lot of the times what you don't know right. You don't know what you don't know. And I look at someone who's doing skincare products and you look at it and go. I've got 30 stores. You know you're marketable for 30 odd years. Good looking healthy great products. You should be on fire and you sit there and go. They just don't know what they don't know. You go. How about we do this. How about we attach it to this story to that you know we need this celebrity we need this brand. We need to do X and suddenly from 30 stores to eighty-eight hundred stores that businesses just change itself right. It's growing up so I guess it's really about finding yourself a mentor and people that have done these things before because there are people out there. I say that to my staff every day is what we're doing is not brain surgery. It's just a process and I think I look back and go yeah I've done things out of the box and I was dogged and I didn't give up and have some days I wish I had. But most of the time just pushing it against the grain. So I think there are a lot of people out there that have the answers and I should have done it earlier. From the day I tried to work out what a barcode was. There are thousands of products in stores and people know the answers to all these things just reach out and find yourself a really good group of people that can help you.

Tim

So many people like you that I've spoken to who have in order to grow have gone I don't know about barcodes or I don't know about marketing or I don't know about something

you know human resources. Go and find someone who does. I was talking to Andrew Banks one of the sharks on Shark Tank and he said exactly that don't try and recreate the wheel when others have already created it.

Shane

We all have battle scars. I can sit there and have a discussion about what didn't work here 21 years ago and why we tried this and that price point didn't work and that communication didn't work and I know what works and what doesn't. It's just battle scars right. And you know Banks is an unbelievable great Australian success story. I've caught up with him a couple of times. And you're right there are people out there that know all the answers it's really when you get to people like myself I have a playbook which is that person for publicity. That person for the photograph. That person for sound. That person for interactive stuff. That person set thing and you basically get your own kit of people around you that are. Like if you're making movies. You work with that lighting guy that makeup person that comes with you gather those people on your bus a long long journey. And so if you find someone that's been on that journey they got a bus full of contacts.

Tim

I think the Hollywood sign story even though it's only a component part of your business is a great story.

Shane

It is a good story.

Tim

And it's great that it's owned by an Australian which I think is particularly funny. I did want to ask you before we left the Hollywood sign story when you heard that Tarantino was coming out with a film called Once Upon a Time in Hollywood. Did you at some point go he's going to call he'll want to use the sign. I don't think he ever did he?

Shane

No calls on his end.

Tim

That would've been nice. Hey, buddy thank you. You're a hard man to track down in terms of you know where can I direct people for further information they could go to imagination.com.au. That is a one-page website that details what you do anywhere else we can send listeners who are interested in finding out more?

Shane

I'll make them contact you and you can pass them on the details.

Tim

A man of mystery Shane Yeend

Shane

I just have a publicist and basically tell everybody what I'm doing and it's fantastic. And unfortunately Australia lost in the cracks sometimes and you sort of go it's sometimes easier just to stay under the radar if people only knew some of the stuff we were up to and you know work across about 28 different entities. You wouldn't know that I was a holder and a director of nine aviation companies.

Tim

Hey, Shane thanks for sharing buddy. Really appreciate it.

Shane

No worries.