**SPI 245**

# How Sol Orwell Builds Successful Businesses by Solving His Own Problems

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Pat: This is the Smart Passive Income podcast with Pat Flynn, session number 245.

(Singing)

Announcer: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income podcast, where it's all about working hard now, so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. And now your host, it was Mavis Beacon who taught him how to type, Pat Flynn.

Pat: Hey, what's up everybody, Pat Flynn here, thank you so much for joining me in the second to last episode of the year, and I'll hope you stick with me because next week we have a special episode where we're going to be combining some of my favorite moments from SPI podcast episodes of 2016, but today, I'm really excited because we have a guest on the show who I've recently been introduced to by a number of different people, a number of my colleagues have been saying, "Pat, you gotta get this guy on the show, he's awesome, he's just like you, very transparent, very much just telling it all, and very much a person who really cares about his audience." And so I'm very happy to welcome Sol Orwell, hence the Blues Brothers song at the beginning, but it's spelled S-O-L, not S-O-U-L, but anyway I thought that'd be fun, and you know how corny I get sometimes.

But anyway, Sol Orwell is the founder of Examine.com, he also blogs at SJO.com, he's also a gamer like I was, and just an all around great guy, and just in this time that I've gotten to speak with him here on this episode, I've really gotten to take a liking to him and his content on his website. I think you're going to be very pleased because he's got a lot of great things to share, he's built massive businesses, but has done it in a very transparent way, and what also is really cool, and the thing I love about him is that you'll hear him tell a story about cookies, and I can definitely relate to that, so look out for that at the end, or near the end of this episode.

Anyway, there's one more thing I'm going to mention before we get right into the episode, and this is an apology, and that is where we

actually had some trouble on Skype, in recording this episode and we had to switch to Zoom, Zoom.us, but in switching to Zoom.us to record this episode, I forgot to change my input from the computer hardware microphone to my good microphone, the Heil that I use, to record the podcast. So you're going to hear it, it's going to sound like I'm in a room, and there's a little bit of echo, and that's because it's using my computer's microphone not my good microphone, but the conversation was just so great and you can still hear it, it still sounds fine, but it just doesn't sound like it normally does, and that's because I just made the mistake of not switching over, so: big lesson to all you podcasters out there, before you record, especially if you switch up platforms mid-conversation, make sure you use the right microphone and input for your computer and show. Anyway, thanks so much guys, I appreciate you still listening through, so yeah, here we go. This is Sol Orwell, founder of Examine.com, number of other websites as well, and blogger over at SJO.com. Here we go.

Pat:        What's up guys, Pat here with Sol Orwell, I'm so happy to be talking with him here today, he's got a ton of information to share. But before we get to that, Sol, welcome to the podcast, thanks for being here.

Sol:        Dude, thanks for having me.

Pat:        So, I'm so happy that our good buddy, Maneesh, who was on the previous episode of the SPI podcast connected us, because I'm just so thankful for a lot of what you've done, and a lot of what you're putting out there, I'm actually very inspired by it all. You've created Examine.com, you blog at SJO.com, and you have a lot of experience and I want to dig in to all of that. Before we get into that, why don't we just kind of have you introduce yourself to everybody and share kind of how you got to where you're at today?

Sol:        For sure. So, I basically tell everybody that I'm living the immigrant dream. The quick version of it is that I'm ethnically Kashmiri, which is what Pakistan and India keep fighting over, it's where cashmere comes from, so I was born in Pakistan, at two, we moved to Saudi Arabia, spent a few years in Japan, back to Saudi Arabia, and then I

did my Eighth grade in Houston, before we properly immigrated to Canada. Part of my entire youth was always been that I incredibly independent, for example I was not born Sol Orwell, I completely changed my name because the idea that someone else named me, even if it was my parents, was just absolutely unacceptable to me.

My entire thing has always been that I build businesses around things I'm interested in. You and I both know that there's a lot of money online, you don't need to be this giant company, right? It depends on what your motivations are, mine have been more towards how can I have fun while still making money at the same time? In '99 is when I got serious about it, I got into virtual currency, in games like Everquest, World of Warcraft, and then since then I've had success in Local Search, I had a five year hiatus, I was in the States and Argentina. And then five and a half years ago I started Examine.com.

So again, it's always been more for me about enjoying my life, more than just let's grit and grind and work more than 30 hours a day or whatever, just so we can make a few extra dollars or whatnot.

Pat:        So really quick, the name change thing, I think people are going to be very curious about that, because that's something we don't hear very often. What made you choose Sol Orwell?

Sol:        So, Orwell is pretty easy, my background on my family, had a bit of a political side, and Orwell's writings actually really opened it up for me. If we take a little caveat, especially with the political season right now, 1984 was more about government control, and I'd argue that Brave New World was a little bit more accurate because it talked about that we were overwhelmed with information, it's kind of how we are. What Orwell really hit me with was Animal Farm, I'm not big on quotes but his quote from that book was, "All animals are created equally, except some animals are created more equal than others." I thought that was a very pressing comment about kind of how things are and how everyone sometimes gives lip service to equality but sometimes you need to kind of fight for it.

And then Sol, honestly enough, it was just something that was short and easy to remember, I spent about a year going to parties or events, picking a new name, it was almost like an A/B test of a first name, it was funny, inevitably people would find out it wasn't my real name, and then a circle would form and people would throw name suggestions at me, the worst one I got was Nigel. To me it just sounds like an old British dude, but at the end of the day Sol won out, and I kind of really like it now.

Pat:    Very cool, I think it means 'Sun', also.

Sol:    It's 'Sun' in Spanish, it's a Peruvian currency, it's a salutation in Scandinavia, it has ... Even in actually Latin America, 'Sol' is short for 'Soledad', which is a female's name. There's always sometimes a bit of an odd look when I meet some people from Latin America where they were expecting a woman, and instead they get me.

Pat:    Very cool, thanks for sharing that. Let's go back to ... there's so many things I want to go back to, you mentioned World of Warcraft and that was something I was huge into, I'm curious, that being around the first time you started doing your own business stuff. What was your business related to kind of virtual currency, like what was that like?

Sol:    Honestly man, those were the good old days when things were a lot easier. In fact, it was easy before World of Warcraft came out. So, just to give a sense of scale for people who didn't follow MMO's, before World of Warcraft came out, the largest one in North America was Everquest, with 450,000 paying members, and this is like 15 to 20 dollars a month. World of Warcraft took that 450,000 and they peaked at 14 and a half million people. Like, it was a level of logarithmic scale, right, that people weren't used to.

So back in those days of like, Everquest, it's pretty simple. You're a busy professional, you've got 10 hours a week, maybe to play online, you don't have 50 hours to go get the Sword of Doom, so people go to kids that are playing for too long, and they've got 10 of these Sword of Dooms and were like, "Hey, you know we'll pay you

five bucks per Sword of Doom." In their mind, they're like, "That's awesome, I'm making some money and I'm playing a video game." And then professionals would come to us and they're saying, "Hey I want to buy this Sword of Doom," and we say, "Sure, here's 500 bucks, it's for 500 bucks." The cost-benefit analysis in your head is, "Should I spend 50 hours, or should I just spend the 500 bucks and get the damn Sword of Doom, so I can enjoy the end game stuff?" The marketplace dictated that it was needed and we were more than happy to do it.

But what we did was we basically built the largest content websites around. We were getting, I think at its peak we're at about like 300,000 visitors a day across our content sites, we had the largest databases, we had fan sites across the entire spectrum of whatever that little niche of online gaming that people enjoyed so that no matter where they went, they knew that if they wanted to buy virtual items, virtual currency, we were the source for it. It was kind of an original play on content marketing way back then.

Pat:     I actually, and I am not afraid to admit this, I have purchased stuff on eBay related to virtual currency, virtual goods for World of Warcraft back in the day, and I miss those days.

Sol:     It's funny though, it's also evolved where the game companies finally were like, "Why are we letting these other people profit from it," when it literally costs them one millionth of a cent to generate a new Sword of Doom and sell it for half the price. The market kind of got crushed out of it, but at its peak we had Diablo2.com, we had all the acronyms, FFXI for Final Fantasy XI, MXO for Matrix Online, DAOC for Dark Ages of Camelot, WildGold, EQPlatinum, EverquestPlatinum, whatever. It was a bit of a wild west back then, and it was a lot of fun to be honest.

Pat:     Then you're creating content around it, that's awesome. Where do you think gaming is going now and are there still ways to take advantage of sort of where gaming is going, I think virtual reality is going to be really important. I don't know, what are your thoughts on that?

Sol: Honestly, it's kind of crazy, I don't know if you've experienced the 3D movies that they're doing where you can swivel 360 round to see what's going around? I have honestly … No, I think creation, kind of like taking what Minecraft has done but bringing a professionalism to it and building your own world, I think there is a potential if you have a commonized engine and you're building that kind of stuff. But honestly man, it's … I'm saying this with all respect, it kind of blows my mind where things are going, and there's money in strategy and . . . It's eventually we morphed a little bit away from virtual currency and more towards guides, because that's always true, it doesn't matter if the gaming companies come into it, if we had good guides, people would buy it. Honestly, I'm more curious about how it goes, I honestly have no idea.

Pat: Me too. Have you seen Westworld yet?

Sol: Oh! Love Westworld, it's crazy, eh?

Pat: It's almost like wow, this could actually happen, and I feel like things are moving toward that model. Anyway, we're getting way off track here, but I would love to continue talking about this stuff with you. I also want to dig into Examine.com because that's become an incredible success for you. Where did the idea for Examine.com come from, and how did you scale and grow it?

Sol: So one of my favorite articles is from Jason Fried who created 37signals/Basecamp. The article is about how luck is really a function of observation, and the more you keep your eyes open the more luckier you are, right? The kind of … That's always been my approach to business is, "What is something frustrating me?"

So I used to be a lot heavier, I've lost about 60 pounds, there's too much ice cream in Argentina and too many cookies and pizza in New York. As I lost weight, I realized man, these supplement companies are ripping us off, right? They're misinterpreting research, they're selling garbage, for example, they'll say how glutamine increases muscle mass by 300%, that's true, if you can get into the muscle cells, right? If you're doing it in petri dishes. But

if you actually ingest glutamine, your small intestine sequestered it all for themselves, so it never actually gets to your muscles. They're technically not lying, but it's not actually practically true. I realized, there was no source that anyone could turn to for information on supplements. You could go to Wikipedia, but let's be honest, Wikipedia for all of its benefits, this is where some of the warts come in right? Where you need experts going through this bit by bit, slowly but surely.

It was just frustration, I was in Columbia, actually, hanging out with two of my post-doc friends, and I was complaining about how they're misreputing science, and they said, "Listen, you're doing nothing with your life, you bum, do something about it." I shook my fist at them, but that was it, right? I couldn't argue with them, and that's when I emailed my co-founder and I said, "Hey, there's an opportunity here, you know I've done this stuff before, you know I know my … Why don't we get this put together? You only have to focus on the research and I'll take care of everything else, be it web design, be it marketing, website, hosting, development, whatever, and we'll start from there." And that was it, I mean the original site didn't even have a logo, it just said Examine.com with text in the top left corner. It was just, let's put it out, let's see how people react to it and then we'll evolve over time with it.

Pat:    How were you able to get the right information for it? I mean I think a lot of people like you back then have pains that you want to solve, and I think that's where most people saw it, because they don't feel like they're either qualified to do that or wouldn't be able to figure out how to do that.

Sol:    You know what? Honestly, so before I did that, I'd read Ferriss's book on The 4-Hour Body, and I'd written notes on it, and I put it online, and I used to be on Reddit, I've been on Reddit now for about 10 years, so I put it up in the Reddit fitness section and there was a hugely positive response. I think if you're honest about what level you know and you're honestly saying, "Hey listen, I'm not an expert, I'm going through this process, I'm just telling you what I learned, what I'm learning, and I have no external agenda to that,"

people will respond very positively to it. I understand that fear that you know, you're not the expert, but I always tell people, "You're not here to impress your peers, right? You're not here to impress other people, you're here to get the message across to the lay person, or the common person." And for them, all of this stuff is too overwhelming, be it fitness, you know … You and I, we can talk about web development, we talk about hosting and all of that jazz, and how simple it seems, but I was talking to a trainer yesterday, and the idea of having a website almost made him shake. And this is like a guy who picks up massive amounts of weight as if it's no big deal.

I said, "Listen, all you need to do is get on Wordpress.com, create an account, and just start writing." And he didn't believe that it could be that easy. I think honestly making stuff accessible is the most important thing you can do, and if you go really deep into a topic and make it something that someone can read and learn from that, even though they may not learn everything, if they can learn something from it, you've kind of already started right there.

Pat:     Awesome. And your work on Examine.com actually landed you on the advisory board for Arnold Schwartzenegger, which is just kind of random but pretty cool fact.

Sol:     Yeah that's one of the things. I try to really make my guys famous. If you go on my "About" page, I'm the seventh person listed, all the emails come from other people on the team that have to do the research. Most people have no idea I own it. That the was the one thing I kept for myself. At the same time I'm on this digital advisory board, so I have access to his email list, and his website, stuff like that. My research guys wouldn't be able to . . .

Pat:     That's so cool. So you created Examine.com, you have this idea, you're helping out … How do you even get the word out there? Is it Reddit that helped you initially?

Sol:     Yeah, so Reddit helped, right? In the context of, people would come on Reddit and they'd say, "Hey, is creatine bad for your

kidneys?" And then people would answer the question and then one week later people would come back, ask the same question and obviously not search for it. People ask me a lot about Reddit, and part of what makes Reddit special is you have to be part of the community, and if you're part of the community, people are more than happy to link to your site. I don't know if you read how Sweethome/The Wirecutter was bought for 30 million by New York Times, but they get massive amounts of traffic from Reddit because people say, "Hey what's the best router I should buy?" Or, "What are the best speakers?" And people happily link to this site. So many people see Reddit as some kind of marketing opportunity, but really it's like, if there's Subreddits that have a problem, and you can help solve that problem for them, they'll be more than happy to link to you.

When I first started, Reddit fitness had maybe 5000 people, now it has I think, 5.5 million people, so that definitely helped. But at the other aspect of what really helped was when we put out the word or when we did networking, we were very particular that, "Listen, were not doing any coaching and we're not doing any consulting." So everyone else, be it personal trainers or registered dietitians, they loved us because they knew that if they linked to us, if they sent their customers or clients or patients our way, we wouldn't be taking it from them. We had a symbiotic relationship with them. They knew if they told one of the clients, "Hey, go to Examine.com to read if creatine works with whey protein," they know we wouldn't then on top, say, "Hey, you should join us, join our consultation." From the very start, we made this very clear distinction saying we're Switzerland, we're not going to do coaching, we're not going to do consulting, we're going to sell information down the road, but that's it, nothing more, nothing less. That brought us a lot of respect in the industry.

Pat:     I really like that. So when you were reaching out to others to share, were you tell them that exactly? "Hey, we're not competing with you, we're actually here to help you and make your life easier"?

Sol:     Absolutely, you know what, honestly, a lot of people ask me about

networking and all this kind of stuff, and if we kind of segue into that for a split second, too many people take networking as, "What can you do for me?" Or, "What is the problem that you're going to solve for me?" Whereas to me, networking is really more about building relationships and building ... And by relationships I mean like personal relationships, right? Building friends. If you go to somebody and you say, "Hey listen man, I've been reading your stuff for a while, I saw you've never written about creatine or you wrote about creatine recently, if you want we done the research here, but you don't need to worry about your customers or anything like that because that's not what we do, we don't do the coaching or consulting with clients or anything like that," they feel more comfortable with you. They know you're reading their stuff, they know you're a legitimate fan, or reader, or whatever you want to call it, and they know you're not trying to hijack their traffic for your own purposes. People are very, very, very responsive to us from the start.

From that, the amount of links we've got is almost mind-boggling. We're top ten or five for Official Creatine Garcinia Cambogia for example, which is what Dr. Oz recommends, if you look that up on a Google Webmaster tools and you see the impressions for our top hundred key words, I think the lowest one is about 40,000 impressions, and the highest one is at like 900,000. It kind of worked out well for everyone involved.

Pat:     At what point did you know this was going to be a success, after you started it?

Sol:     I think when we hit about a thousand visitors a day. I told my co-founder, I said, "Listen, we now actually have responsibility." It's a sobering thought that sometimes people don't consider this, where you are impacting - and I'm sure you can appreciate this - you're impacting a thousand people every single day. People are coming to your site to learn from you, and what you say many people will treat as gospel. For better or for worse, how the internet works, people will read it and they're like, "This sounds right." So now we're at about 2 million visitors a month and it's just something that it's always in the back of your head, that, "Hey I need to make sure I

do this right, because this has serious implications down the road."

Pat:     So how has that made an impact on how you approach the content that you create?

Sol:     Man, honestly, we've just got to be careful. Nothing we put out is half-assed, that's why we have a team, that's why we have about five to ten people that check everything, our primary source of revenue is something called "Examine.com Research Digest" which actually turns two years old tomorrow. We have about 2500 health professionals that trust us to analyze scientific studies for us. We have about a team of 20, that analyzes each study and makes infographics out of it or other information, so we have a lot of checks and balances that we've built in internally, to make sure we do it right.

So as an example of kind of what sets us apart, and why we can charge so much for our stuff is if we have something that has possible interactions in the brain, we have someone that's a Pharm.D, which is a doctor in pharmacy, who specialized in psychiatric medicine, which means that he is a specialist in drug interactions in the brain. So anytime we have a study that's based on that, we go to him and then he ensures that whatever we wrote is accurate. It's a serious thing, but it also is what sets us apart. It's much harder for someone to just come out of the woodwork and say, "We're going to compete with Examine.com," because we've slowly built up that brand and reputation that we take things very very seriously and it's not a one man show.

Pat:     I'm looking at your store here because I'm so curious, I'm not quite sure exactly what you're selling yet. You guys have all these visitors and stuff, I think a lot of people, even people who listen to this show, they have a lot of visitors, they're not making any money yet, and I'm very curious to know how ... What it is that you sell and when did that start?

Sol:     Right. So we didn't sell anything for the first two, two and a half years. I self-funded it, obviously I have a luxury for that because I

wanted to take the time, especially in something like supplements we have to be very careful. We sell three things. Firstly, we sell guides. So if you want your mom to ... If your mom is worried about anxiety, or she's worried about her health, general health, whatnot, we sell guides that basically say, "Listen, this is what the research says on these supplements." Should you take this or should you not take this? For example, one of our most popular ones is sleep. And we say, "Hey, lavender is great for sleep quality, but if you want to go to sleep you should take melatonin, but you should take melatonin 30 minutes before and you should take this much dosage, not that much dosage." It's very specific step-by-step instructions on what to take, and what not to take, and how to take it, and when to take it.

Our next thing is our Supplement Goals Reference, which is kind of like this giant 1200 page document of tables that says, "All right, we have a lot of evidence that shows vitamin D, for example, is good for bone health. These are the studies that show it and this is kind of what we've been able to analyze."

But the real bread and butter for us is the aforementioned Research Digest. We have about 2500 health professionals that pays us 30 bucks a month to learn and stay up to date from us, as to what the latest research is saying . . . What we've done is we have a massive consumer side to it, but it's the health professionals that are really our backbone, and that's part of ... Again, that symbiotic relationship, right? They know they can trust us, and we are not going after the consumer market.

Pat:     So cool. Congrats on Examine.com, that's amazing. You can all check it out, I'm actually going to be exploring it because I'm into health and fitness right now too. That started as a result of your experience with your own weight loss, and whatnot, sort of fulfilling a need there, a solution for one of your pains. What's another pain or problem that you had that you had built a business for?

Sol:     So, the previous one for example, the one that had done really well was Local Search, and honestly, I think this was in 2003, before

Yelp, or Foursquare, or any of the other ones existed, and my ex-wife and I, we moved into a new neighborhood in Toronto and it was like the first condo in that area, and there was no way to find out what other businesses were in that space. So we actually ... This is before iPhone or anything, so we got our digital camera out, we got a notebook out and we actually walked around the neighborhood and we indexed 70 different businesses, 69 different businesses, we took photos, we figured out what they were, and we just put that information online. It was called ... The neighborhood in Toronto was called Yorkville, and we were getting I think, maybe three to five hundred visitors a day, before we finally said, "There's an opportunity here, let's expand to Toronto."

And so to me, we go back and to it, and it kind of grew from there, we can get into the process of how all that worked out. I've been now speaking about entrepreneurship for about a year, I'm getting into the pet space, I've bought Pet.org already, honestly, the opportunity is vast, I think the problem is too many people go too broad off the beginning, whereas if we go back to even Examine.com, originally we were only bodybuilding supplements. Then we got into fitness supplements, then we got into general health supplements, then we got into nutrition. It's easy to see five and a half years later that, "Oh, look, they're so big, and they've got this huge team," if you start at that one little niche, and you dominate that niche, then as you expand it's kind of like a no-brainer, right? People already trust you for X, so they're going to relevant Y, they're going to follow you straight to Y, to Z, and then everything else you kind of go from there.

Pat:     I think a counter argument to that is well, "What if you go too small?" Is there some sort of way to know if you're at the right niche size? Or how would you go about understanding where you're at in a niche or sub-niche before it's time to pull the trigger?

Sol:     Honestly, I wouldn't worry too much about that, right? We read all these case studies of people of people with a thousand emails and been able to generate $50,000 or whatnot from it, right? So I think again, when you're kind of trying to figure how it works,

people overthink everything, they over-complicate everything, so if you want to focus on just Bichon poodle dogs, go for it, there's enough people out there, that if you can get them onboard, you can sell them nutrition books, you can sell them training books, you can do consultations, you can talk about actual real-life training, as you become better and better at it. There's so much stuff out there that once you establish a beachhead in one little niche, you might not make a lot of money from it, but then you can expand. It's so much easier to expand than it is to be like, "Oh, shit, now I've got to contract, and all this audience I had before don't really care about Bichon poodles," for example, they're going to leave me. I think people get too overwrought about thinking about the big picture right off the bat, but sometimes it's okay to just dive in and figure out what feels comfortable, figure out what kind of works in that space and then worry about, "How do I expand out of this one little spot?"

Pat:    Another thing to worry about when you're getting into a business is how do you know it's going to be one that people are going to pay money for exchange for something? Can you actually turn it into a business, when does it switch from a hobby just for fun, to you're actually making money from it? How do you approach the sort of vetting process of a business that you're starting, in terms of its buyability, in terms of revenue?

Sol:    In that case, if you just look at what other people are doing in the space. So if I enter the pet space next, right, my thought is, "Okay, I'm not just going to just enter the generic pet space, I want to enter one specific area." As I look over the pet space, I see pet treats are very huge. I talk ... You know what, honestly, if you just message people, and instead of saying something like, "I want to pick your brain," if you show that you know what you're talking about, and you're curious about how they operate things, people are really really friendly, and they're happy to talk. There's not a lot of people who are in this entrepreneurship world that think of it as a zero sum game. My entire process is seeing how are other people making revenue, and is it something relevant I can do?

On top of that though, education is huge. It's very popular these

days to do certifications and all that kind of stuff, but there's a reason for that. If you become an expert in your topic, people will pay you money, a decent amount of money to learn from you, and that kind of goes back to the sub-niche thing, if you dominate the Bichon poodle space, there's enough Bichon poodle owners that will come to you and say, "Okay, you know what, I've got a Bichon poodle, I could go to this guy who's got a massive dog site but I could go to the guy who's the expert at Bichon poodles."

I think to quote Kyle Newport's book, which is actually Steve Martin's quote, "Be so good they can't ignore you." And you can do that easily and in a small enough niche that you can start generating revenue … Everyone wants to make a hundred thousand or a million dollars, but if you can start generating ten thousand dollars, you can then go from there and figure out, "What do I do next?" Or "How do I expand?" Or "How do I bring in more people, how to make this more professional, how do I expand it?" Again, I think starting small is always the right way, the right approach to take.

Pat:        I agree. I always say focus on getting that first customer. If you can get one, then you can get ten.

Sol:        Plus, you can start talking to those customers, and you can … It's funny, there's all this lip service given these days that you need to talk to customers, you need to talk to customers, but I would wager maybe 1 or 2% actually talk to them on the phone. It's not the same thing via email, if there's a lag, you can't ask instantaneous questions, talk to them on the phone. If you talk to them, they will use the exact language that's frustrating them, and tell you exactly what they're really looking for, and your conversation may meander, but that's some of the best research you can do for whatever industry you are entering, is talking to these human beings, and they will literally tell you, "This is my problem, please solve it for me."

Pat:        I'm so happy you're saying this, this is something I say over and over and over again. I don't know if you know this, but I actually reach out to ten people on my email list … My email list is approaching 200,000 at this point, but I reach out to ten people a month, and I try to get them on a Skype call with me or a phone

call, to do exactly that, to have these conversations, and I tell you, a lot of the best information that I've ever received, that relates to what I've done with my business or what I'm doing next, comes and stems from those one-to-one interactions.

Sol: I love it. Give me an example of something you've learned in the past month from these conversations.

Pat: The past month, one was related to the Smart Podcast Player, which is a software company or product that I have. Basically saying that it was loading too slow, and they were very very adamant about the fact that they would probably stop using it if it continued to perform like that, which led to further conversations with my team about performance and optimization which led to some changes that were made to make it faster. And now people who were complaining, are saying, "Holy crap this is even better than it was before, what did you do?" And I said, "Well, I reached out to somebody, they talked about how the speed was slower, and we never heard about that before," and I think this first step-

Sol: That's awesome.

Pat: -Via email or send it to a support ticket, or just dealing with that frustration, but when given the opportunity to speak up, they said it.

Sol: That's awesome, I love that example. I'm going to use that in the future in talks for sure.

Pat: Speaking of, you do a lot of speaking on entrepreneurship right now, where are you going next?

Sol: For about the last year, I used to, in a way, and again I'm sure you've come across these people who do a product launch and they make like $30,000 off a product and they're like, "I'm an expert, I'm going to teach you now," where they get like 500 or 1000 visitors a day to their website, and they're like, "I'm going to teach you how to get traffic," and eventually, there's a horror story behind this, but eventually, there's only so much complaining you can do, and I am … For people who don't know me, I am very much about . . . stuff

like the cookie life and the desserts, and all that that you've seen.

But eventually it became … I have done this now for 17 years. I may not be the greatest or even the top 100 or whatever, but I have some modicum of experience that I can leverage and reach back onto and say, "This is what worked for me." That's kind of what brought me into that, but again, I've never liked coaching, I've never liked consulting, so for me it's more been an avenue of expression. I think I've done like 20, 25 talks this year, or different events, which is very intense, but part of it is getting the reps in, making sure my story can be communicated clearly, so when people come to me and the ask, when they listen to me, they'll at least walk away from it thinking, "I can do this," or "I can approach this," or "Sol's learned this over the years, I can apply kind of the same thing."

Even, for example, as I always harp on people, don't just talk to your customers via email, pick up the phone or Skype with them so you can actually see what it looks like, when they're having a conversation with you. It's been really more rewarding, than anything else, but at the same time, I speak in interesting places for me, I usually go like a week early or I stay a week extra so it's a bit of … I try to travel about 100 days a year, so it's a combination of vacation plus making actual impact in the world. As small as it may be, an actual one.

Pat: I love that, I saw on your "About" page that travel is really important to you, and you're doing that now, which is awesome, and helping by providing value to others along the way, which is great. One thing I saw on your blog that I really liked was this series that you're doing called the Audit series, I think it was called? And can you explain what that is and also maybe share some actual stuff before we finish up today, my audience, they love stuff that they just … Once they finish listening they can just do. So if you have a few of those nuggets to offer, in relation to the audit thing that you're doing.

Sol: The Audit series is basically, we have all these touch points with our customers that we may not realize are touch points, and really it's an opportunity for us to step back and say, "What are the best practices we should be going through?" One of the nice things about having

these large sites that have a lot of traffic is we can do a lot of intensive testing really quickly. We get about five to seven hundred emails a day, we can iterate once a week and have a large enough sample that we know, "Hey is this working or is this not working?"

So the Audit series is these customer touch points such as the thank you page. Or the . . . Or something like the welcome email, which people don't give a lot of consideration to, but they're very impactful because if we think about your own experience with another company, the welcome email or the thank you page are some of the most important ones. So my favorite one, and one of the first ones I wrote about was the thank you page, where it's like if someone has opted in, and they've given you their email, they're incredibly interested. But what's funny is almost everyone I've come across, they've got the worst thank you pages. It either goes to the default . . . or it just says, "Thank you, check your email," and I'm like, "Where is the conversation?" Where are you continuing in a way to sell me who you are or why I should buy into your brand, or what you do.

Some of our recommendations include thank them, remind them why they are at the thank you page, have an opportunity to connect with you in a different place, be it Twitter or be it Facebook, and then give them another CTA. Something as simple as that, will make an actual, actual impact on your business. And the CTA could be something as simple as in your welcome email, you've got the welcome email where you say, "We have people pick from the three kind of types they are," and just segment them right there. Segmentation is so powerful, and that thank you page is the perfect place to segment them. Or offer them a sale, like we make about five to ten thousand dollars a month on Examine.com just from our thank you page, just offering, "Hey, thank you for signing up, this is our supplement goals reference, you can buy it now," and boom, people buy it en masse.

If there's one thing people should really, really reconsider how they're doing, is their thank you page, and their welcome email, which is an extension of the thank you page. Again, thank them for signing up, tell them ... Set the expectations of what they're

going to receive, give them a way of communicating with you, again, people want to feel like they're connected with you, that's all people really want in this world, especially with social media and all that jazz, we're so disconnected right now. And then offer them a secondary CTA, have them do something, you don't have to sell them something, but have them interact with your brand so that the buy-in is more, so that the trust they build with you is a lot more. Definitely, definitely people blow it on their thank you page and their welcome email.

Pat:     Love it man, thank you for that … Thank you so much for that. Where can people find out more from you? What websites do you want to shout out?

Sol:     Pretty much you can find me on SJO.com, that's kind of where I talk about entrepreneurship and kind of the mindset that I approach, and from there you can find me on either Facebook or Twitter, I spend an inordinate amount of time on Facebook mostly, the Cookielife, where basically this year alone, I think I've had 70 people send me cookies from around the world, that's their way of showing appreciation for whatever it is that I muse out there. Just say hi, I tend to be very friendly, I try not to bite, don't feel shy about saying hello.

Pat:     Awesome, I love what you're doing, initially when you said SJO I had confused it for SOJ, which is a World of Warcraft reference, Staff of Jordan, that's how I'll never forget your website now, SJO. com. Sorry it's a little geeky reference there. And the cookie thing, I love that, I saw some pictures of that earlier on your website, I think that's great, that's amazing. I use handwritten thank you notes for the same reason, just to validate the fact that I'm actually making a difference, and you're getting cookies too, and I think that's awesome. I'm going to send you some cookies one of these days, and I look forward to the next time we get to chat.

Sol:     It's an absolute pleasure being on, thanks for having me.

Pat:     Thanks man, appreciate you.

All right I'm back with the good microphone, thank you guys for listening all the way through, I appreciate you so much, and I'm super thankful for Sol coming on the show, and introducing himself to you because I think he's somebody that I think you could definitely learn a lot from. Again he blogs over at SJO.com, you can check out Examine.com and see just what that has grown to. It's become such an amazing resource, I've started to use it myself to look up some information related to things that I use, in terms of supplements and whatnot, it's been really really informative, and it's just so cool that he's been able to create these things based off of stuff that he found that he needed to figure out on his own, it very much reminds me of Nathan Barry and his ConvertKit, which was very much built because there were no good email marketing tools out there that was suiting his needs so he ended up building it himself, and now we all know how successful that has become.

Thanks so much, I appreciate you, and again, look out for next week's episode where we're going to be recapping some of my favorite moments from the Smart Passive Income podcast in 2016. Can you guess which ones they are? Let me know what you think, and let me know what you think of this episode and Sol, over at SmartPassiveIncome.com/session245. Thanks so much, appreciate you, I'll see you in the next one. Bye.

Announcer:        Thanks for listening to the Smart Passive Income podcast at www. SmartPassiveIncome.com.

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