



**SPI 269**

# How to Build a Massive Community Behind Your Physical Product with Tom from Chubbies

June 7, 2017



Pat Flynn: This is the Smart Passive Income Podcast with Pat Flynn, session number 269. Let's do this thing.

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 . . . most of his closet consists of t-shirts from startup companies . . . Pat Flynn.

Pat Flynn: Hey, what's up everybody? Pat Flynn here, and thank you so much for joining me in this session of the Smart Passive Income Podcast. Super stoked you're here, and I'm really excited for this interview because it's a very unique one. We are interviewing one of the four co-founders of a company called Chubbies. What does Chubbies do? They sell men's shorts. Now you might be thinking to yourself, "Well, how interesting can an interview from a company about shorts can be?" Well, this has been one of the most inspiring, and interesting, and educational interviews I've done in a while because Tom over at Chubbies is gonna reveal exactly how they've been able to build this massive, massive brand and almost cult-like following for their product, and how they've been able to use content to do that, and how they empower their community.

Just now, this company spreads like wildfire because of word of mouth, and it's just really inspiring, especially for me now that I'm creating a psychical product very soon, but I think for anybody. You want to create a sense of culture. You want to create that kind of word of mouth recognition. This is exactly what you need to listen to. What's really cool also about this is the meaning behind what they do and how they portray that and how they are, like I said, bringing this community together in a way that grows the brand but just, again, empowers the people who are actually their customers. So we're gonna talk a lot about that, so let's not wait any further. This is Tom from Chubbies.com. Let's do this.

Hey, what's up guys? Pat here with Tom from Chubbies, ChubbiesShorts.com. Tom, thank you and welcome to the SPI Podcast. Thanks for being here.

Tom: Absolutely Pat, thanks for having me.

Pat Flynn: So you and I . . . actually, this is the first time we've spoken, but I've heard about Chubbies so many times from my good friend Matt, who many of the listeners know, who is my partner in a number of businesses, and also his company's helped you with your website design. First of all, when Matt first introduced ChubbiesShorts.com to me, I was like, "Okay, retail clothes, okay whatever." And then I went to the site, and I was just immediately blown away. Immediately I started to understand the personality of Chubbies and the culture. Then I went over to your Instagram. Holy crap, 300,000 followers, and you sell shorts. What's that like for you? You founded this amazing company with such a great following and a huge culture behind it. What's that been like for you?

Tom: I mean, it's amazing. For us, it's all about the community, and it's all about giving people a good time. That's what we try and do on the website, on our Instagram account, on our Facebook, on our Snapchat. It's entirely about having fun and making jokes, and building . . . yeah, it's a short shorts company. In its own right, it's just so awesome that we have this community of people that we can connect with that love our products, love the content that we put out. Yeah, it's just very, very awesome and very fortunate for us as a business.

Pat Flynn: How did you get started with Chubbies?

Tom: Yeah, there's four total co-founders of the business. I'm one of them. We got started because we were all just good buddies and honestly, we all wore short shorts. We all have different legendary pairs of short shorts, and they were passed down from dads, uncles, salvaged from bins at thrift stores, and everyone had their key pair that they would wear on the weekends, whenever we went on trips, or whatever. It just started to kind of evolve into an ethos and a brand. The other side of that is that men's fashion, when we were starting, was just really unrelatable. It was washboard abs, cologne-covered shirtless guys hawking tight t-shirts and cargo shorts. We didn't really relate with that, so the product was so obvious to us

because we couldn't find it anywhere.

We were just so passionate about it and loved it, and the brand started to evolve out of that feeling of everything's just a little too serious in the world of men's fashion. So we started to work on, what's the sort of content that we can put out? What's the sort of messaging we can put behind it? We made, I think, 50 pairs as a group just on a whim to try and see if we could sell them. We went up to the shores of Lake Tahoe in California, and we had a plan to set up a booth. We'd go from group to group on the beach marketing them, telling people about the product. Right when we landed on the beach, we had backpacks full of shorts. People were running up to us, asking to buy them. Once we sold out of them there, people were asking to trade shorts with us and all this good stuff. You could immediately tell the product resonated.

We launched the website in September of 2011, and that's really when the marketing and the content began. It was immediately something where people could tell it was different. The models that we hired were just ourselves. We didn't go out and find this pristine male archetype. We wanted to be relatable. We wanted to be fun. We wrote our emails, we wrote our content like we were writing for our friends. That was really kind of the kernel of what we wanted to get.

We wanted to sell products to our friends, and we want to expand our friend group as much as we can to make sure that we can do that. So that's kind of what all of our outlets turned into, is they're really the personality of the brand. We think of it as, that's the way that we're expanding our community. That's the way that we're adding more and more friends to this group, so that we all feel like we're all buddies in this. When we meet somebody on the street of one of our storefronts, we know them and they know us. They get our personality. They get our sense of humor and all that good stuff. So that's really what it's been about from a marketing perspective is evolving that and building that community through content that showcases what we care about and what we think is valuable.

Pat Flynn: Yeah man, I'm here on your website and I scroll down a little bit, and

then I see what's almost a mission statement, or, "Hey, this is who we are." It's a big, bold, blue section where you can read, and it kind of has different divisions. The first thing that I see here is, "Welcome to Chubbies. Here's what we believe. We believe in the weekend." And then a bunch of other ones. I'm here on your Instagram as well and it says, "Hey, the weekend has arrived." So what's this weekend deal and why is that important?

Tom: Yeah, for us the work week is encroaching more and more and more on the weekends. The weekend is something we need to protect and savor. So we really do think about it as this battle between us and the work week. Cell phones are starting to creep up on more and more of our lives, constantly staying connected on email, constantly staying connected on whatever messaging platform you use, and we're fighting the fight of . . . you know, let's expand the times where we're having fun and the times where we're hanging out with friends and hanging out with family. That's so important to us and the guiding light behind everything that we do, and that's the weekend. That's when you're not stressed about your career, or what you're doing next, or how you can make your next buck. You're taking time to enjoy life, and that's really . . . If we can provide a service to anybody, that's what we want to do with our clothes, with our content. We want it to be that kind of instant levity.

Pat Flynn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tom: The weekend is that to us. The weekend is that release, that Friday-at-five feeling. You are free. That's exactly kind of the feeling that we wanted to hit on. So yeah, that's why we harp on the weekend so much. That's the most important thing in the world to us.

Pat Flynn: Right, well it sums it up perfectly, I think, whoever came up with that, or perhaps it was just sort of organically pumped out. It sums it up perfectly, and I'm curious in terms of the marketing strategy and trying to figure out what has been working marketing-wise to expand your brand. I'm sure it's changed over time. What were some of the key moments in the life of Chubbies so far that have really sort of hockey stick grew the business and the exposure?

What were some of those things that kind of really started to work really well for you?

Tom:

Yeah, I'd say here, we're one part lucky and one part good. I'd say the lucky part is that we were able to put out content that people liked. You know, I had never marketed before in my life. I'd written a ton of emails to my buddies, but I had not written emails in any corporate sense nor run any advertising. So being able to write and connect with an audience and start to realize that people out there think like I do and all that kind of stuff was lucky for us. So that was kind of the basis of the website when we built it. When we launched in September, we launched in the fall and right into winter. So that's not short season.

We weren't seeing the hockey stick growth there, but what we did is right in the January, February time frame, we started writing emails and sending them out to social groups on college campuses. So fraternities, any sort of business groups, any sort of social groups that we could find where we could find their contact info, we just emailed them and said, "Hey, this is what we're doing. If anybody's interested in working with us or becoming an ambassador for us, let us know." 90% of the time when we got a reply, the person was like, "Yes, I know somebody and it's me. Choose me as your account rep," or whatever. And basically the reason was they had read the website and they connected with the email. They said, "This sounds ridiculous." So that group was about 30 people, but they were immediately a source of more drive and more directive.

Then also meanwhile, we had been acquiring customers just organically, which is still always our biggest customer acquisition channel is just organic word of mouth. So those two things happened kind of coincidentally as we got to critical mass. We also got these guys involved, and we saw our first spring. That's when we had bought the inventory to get us through the following summer, and we sold out of it within two weeks. So inventory that was supposed to last us six months lasted us two weeks. That's really kind of the first moment.

As we've gone along, we've seen a lot of other huge wins for us. So last year was another big win for us in a more advanced sense. Last year we did 350 million video views on Facebook and across our channels. That was a huge terms from the content perspective, and that was something where we had been working on content for a long time, for all five and a half years that we've been running the business. Last year was the year where we really unlocked it. Once again, it's one part lucky, one part good. We were lucky because we were able to bring in some extremely talented people and our content team is pound for pound. I'd put them up against any creative team out there. Really started gelling. We brought in two new hires almost a year and a half ago, and really started upping both the output rate and also the creativity.

That's kind of the more qualitative part, but then we also institutionalized a really concrete strategy behind how we understand content, the metrics we're interested in, and really applied a data-driven approach to how we output content and creativity. That worked like gangbusters for us, and that was another huge moment in kind of the growth of the business that we saw that hockey stick once again.

Pat Flynn: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's obvious that content has become a major thing for you guys. It is what has helped you guys get on the map and whatnot. You had mentioned earlier that you created content that people liked. How can a person listening to this who has a physical product, especially if they have a physical product, how can they create this kind of awareness of their brand from the content? Okay, you have shorts. What do you even start writing about? I'm curious how you would address somebody who's just asking themselves that. "I have this product. I don't even know what to write about. All I know is this product."

Tom: Yeah. I'd say this is something that I've thought about quite a bit. I'd say the best analogy that I can give is think about the brand like a human being. Think about it like a person with a personality. More often than not, that personality is gonna be yours as the business owner, as the person who's gonna be writing or creating this content.

Pat Flynn: Right.

Tom: So you know, write about the things that you care about. Write about the things that have an emotional connection to you. That's where you'll start to find kernels. We were not knocking it out of the park every time we wrote, but because we were pumped about it, because we were passionate about it, it enabled us to keep testing and keep driving. There's a great book on copywriting called *Hey Whipple, Squeeze This*. It's more about advertising copywriting, and one of the key tenets is, "Treat writing just like a job." You have to crank through all sorts of ad ideas, all sorts of ad content, to actually find stuff that resonates with you.

Once you find things that resonate with you, that's when you need to see if what resonates with you resonates with your audience. That's iteration, and it's being willing to put content out and having an understanding of how to track metrics and how to understand metrics. If you're putting content out on email, it's tracking open rates, click rates, how people are behaving on the site from that traffic. If it's on Facebook, there's all sorts of metrics that they have, but it's applying that rigor so that you can start to develop your sense of taste. Just make sure that your taste lines up with your audience's taste.

So I'd say yeah, just get started by writing about things that you care about, and don't necessarily think about it from a business perspective of, "Oh, the business has to be saying these things, and we have to be endorsing these products and doing this sort of thing," when you don't necessarily care about that. So find that intersection of "relates to the brand you're trying to build" or the product you're trying to sell, but also you really fundamentally care about it. It needs to be said, almost, and start iterating through those concepts and see what starts to resonate. Show it to your friends. Show it to groups of people in your customer base, if you have some customers. Just start to get feedback and that will inform your taste going forward, and that will get you better and better and better.

Like I said, last year was our first year where we really, really



eclipsed a significant metric in the world of video. Prior to that, I think three years ago, we on an annual basis were targeting maybe 100,000 or 500,000 views. Last year, we did 350 million. It's a process. It takes some time to get to the real significant numbers, but if you're putting in the work and you have the passion, you already are light years above your competition.

Pat Flynn: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What was the big difference, if you don't mind sharing, between the 500,000 years versus the 350 million year you had last year?

Tom: It was a combination. Content design is really what we've been working on. There's this kind of mythical theory about the creative. You go to the creative, the creative outputs the content that is good. It's this work of art, and you don't question it. For us, it's design and it's a design process. We apply startup methodologies to content design, and really, what we are doing is designing content as opposed to creating individual pieces. It's this constant interplay with our community of, "What do they like?" So I'd say first is we were putting out things that people weren't liking as much. Second is platform. Facebook as a platform is just better for distribution, for us at least. So in those early days we were working a little bit more on YouTube 'cause it was kind of more of the video platform de jour.

Pat Flynn: Right.

Tom: Facebook owned the share, right? So if Facebook owns the share, and we're trying to create viral video content, you really need to go directly to the source of the share because they're building up their own video platform. Now they're doing massive amounts of video views. So it's making sure you understand where your customer is and what the action is you want from your content in designing both the content and the distribution around that. So those kind of two pieces were the two pieces that started to work for us that unlocked quite a bit last year.

Pat Flynn: Can you give me an example of one of your more popular videos from last year? What was in that video, and also, how did that play a

role in selling more shorts?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. So I'll answer the second part first. So for us, like I said, the most significant way that we're acquiring customers and the way that people are finding out about us is people talking about us.

Pat Flynn: That's how I found it.

Tom: Yeah exactly. Content and the way that the brand comes across is the number one thing that you can talk about, as well as product. So product is controlled by an amazing, talented group of people at Chubbies that is not me, so I'm trying to create the conversation in the world of content and marketing. Less often than not, people are gonna be saying, "Hey, I saw a great VR ad by these guys." What they're gonna talk about is content and a piece of content that connected with them. So that is a huge, huge, huge notion, and the Facebook share is a proxy for a real life, in-person conversation. Since that's so vital, that's why we invest so much time in our content.

Then the first part of things is videos that have done well for us. So ours are always ridiculous. We inadvertently made one of the best performing ads of the Olympics, or of the big international sporting event. I'm not sure if it's legally allowed to say the O word.

Pat Flynn: You're fine here, I think.

Tom: Yeah, but at any rate, we were trying to think of, "What does our content play around that event, around the Olympics?" We wanted something ridiculous. We wanted something eye-catching. So we thought, "Hey, what about men's synchronized swimming?" That's not a sport in the Olympics, and we don't quite know why not. So we wanted to build a fully choreographed, fully executed, guys wearing nose-plugs, the hair caps, and just looking very . . . So we did. We choreographed a full video, and I think we got the . . . I can't remember the ranking, but we were in the top ten most watched ads of the Olympics, beating out some very hefty competition, people who put millions of dollars, I'm assuming, into their budgets for distribution and their content production. We spent maybe

\$2500 on a synchronized swimming shoot in the backyard of one of our friend's pools. So that was one that comes to mind as really, really low budget, where we were competing with monsters. Really, it was dependent on this fun idea and once again, not taking ourselves too seriously.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, I see the ad here now. I think it's titled, "How do we add men's synchronized swimming to the summer games?" because it's cool, I guess.

Tom: Yeah, exactly.

Pat Flynn: I see these guys here. It's amazing. How can you not talk about this, right, when you see it? I think for the brand and the culture that you've created, that personality just fits perfectly. So, well done to you and the content team. I think it's fantastic. I think also people listening to this, it's gonna help them think out of the box too. It doesn't mean you have to create something ridiculous, right? It just means you have to create something on-brand that will be talked about, essentially, is what I'm trying to get at here.

I also want to talk about what you've done with your community. You've mentioned community a few times and again, it's these things that we normally hear about not related to an article of clothing, but you've somehow been able to amass this amazing community. I'm sure this stems from the content that you create as well, but how are you even more than the content, sort of fostering this community that you've built? Obviously, when you have a community and when you have fans, they're gonna be there for you, they're gonna buy your stuff. But I'm curious, what are the strategies involved with fostering and nurturing this community?

Tom: Yeah, so first off for us, we use community for content and social's sake. We try not to use it so much for advertising and direct response.

Pat Flynn: Okay.

Tom: So the content that we're putting out and that we're posting

organically is not gonna be a sell. We really don't like selling, and frankly, we're not that great of salesmen. We're better at content, and showing a personality, and interacting. That's really where we have fun and where I think a community starts to form is where they're not constantly being sold to. So I think that's one of the most important things, is don't try to sell so much. More kind of create the relationship that creates demand.

Pat Flynn: I love that. That's the thing I've noticed. I'm here on your Instagram page. I've been looking for anything that says, "Go here. Buy this. This is on sale." I'm scrolling for days here. I don't see any of that.

Tom: Hopefully you don't. Hopefully you don't. I mean, that's been important to us from day one, and even on our mailing list, which is very typically a very strong direct response mechanism. From day one, we've always had a Friday email that is just entirely content.

Pat Flynn: That's cool.

Tom: If you want, you can just sign up for that, and we don't put sells in there. We just give you content and give you fun things that we're trying to create for you. So that's huge, right? That authenticity and that relationship is really important there. And then in the world of Instagram, one of the things that we saw from day one is that when people got the product, they started sending us photos. It was amazing, and they're just the most diverse, ridiculous group of people. That's the fuel for our Instagram feed. So if you look at our Instagram feed, for 95% of all the posts in there, those are customers.

Pat Flynn: That's so cool.

Tom: We want to showcase customers. We want to get them on our feed just as much as they do. So we get probably 1,000 inbound photos that people are tagging us in, and then we'll reach out and say, "Hey, is it cool if we use this photo?" If it's ridiculous or has a lot of personality, or we think it's gonna do well on our feed, that's basically Instagram for us. So that kind of reciprocity, we're really building that feed with our community, and that Instagram wouldn't

even exist without all of the people in the community. So that's a huge kind of . . .

Pat Flynn: I love that.

Tom: Exchange of value there, where they're reliant on us to be the curators and give them good content, and then we're relying on them to send us just ridiculous stuff and share with us the weekend that they're having or that they had, or the amazing experiences that they're having. As much as we'd like, we can't go do all this amazing stuff that our community can do. Yeah, that's one of the things that's really been awesome and that once again, we did from day one. Whether it was through email or Instagram, we always wanted to showcase the community.

We took that kind of to it's farthest extent where in 2015, we hired male models out of our community of customers and people who were fans of the brand. Those are the models that we use. So if you look at that synchronized swimming video, a couple of those guys are just customers that we hired as male models. Once again, just an awesome group of guys and so much personality, so much diversity, which is really cool. I think also that's been awesome for us, and hopefully it's been cool for the community to see that and get involved in helping us build this ridiculous thing that we're working on.

Pat Flynn: I love it man. From the outside here, it's completely inspiring to see a company that's selling shorts have this kind of community. I'm here on Instagram right now. I opened up a picture. It's this guy I can relate to, 'cause it's this guy wearing Chubbies shorts. It's the USA shorts with his son on a doorstep. It's obviously a customer. You even @-tagged a customer here. They're raising their hands in the air, and then there's a little meme thing up above that that says, "Father son level: expert." That connects with me so well.

How do you come up with those meme-related things? I think that's something that obviously is working nowadays in terms of getting shares. Most of the responses here in the comments are people

@-sharing with their friends. “This is us. This is me.” Again, there’s no mention of the shorts there, but they are obviously there and because this is the brand, you’re getting all this free exposure. It’s just amazing. By the way, who comes up with those for you guys? Whoever is doing these memes for you guys, I don’t know if it’s a team or what, but they’re really clever. They’re very short, but they’re just perfect.

Tom:

Yeah, that’s our team of content virtuosos. That’s Mason, Phil, Grant, Garret, Wilhelm. That’s the team there. Yeah, those guys . . . The thing there is, once again, it’s about volume and making sure that even if you don’t feel inspired and you don’t feel like you’re gonna create this whopper of a caption or top cap, it’s that kind of meme content, you crank through. You keep writing and you keep trying to create that content. You combine that kind of ethic with extremely creative and talented people that is all of those guys that I mentioned, and they’re gonna output some funny stuff.

That’s been what we’ve been trying to build is core competency across everything, across the videos that we produce, the captions that we’re outputting. We have this rigorous edge, too. We want to create the best content out there. We want to create the funniest content out there. We want to create content that makes people smile, and laugh, and be that destination, be that source of that for people. That requires a lot of hard work, and that requires us to be extremely creative and be extremely willing to try different things, try ridiculous things, but also put that volume into it and make sure that we are putting out . . . For each one of those that goes out, for example, we’ll probably write 30 to 50 captions. Then we edit it down, trim it down, and we’re posting three of those a day. Then we post seven days a week, so it’s a lot of writing. It’s a lot of captions. I’ll sing the team’s praises all day if you’ll let me, but you guys are incredible at doing that. It’s really that kind of combination of this creativity, but also the ethics that they put towards it.

Pat Flynn:

That’s so cool. Tom, you’ve given us a good snapshot of just how you’ve been able to create this amazing brand from a physical product, and I think it’s gonna be really inspiring for a lot of people to

hear this. I have one final question before I finish up, and that is, do you have any final pieces of advice for those who are out there who are maybe struggling a little bit in terms of getting their community together, in terms of content creation? Do you have any words of inspiration or even tactics or tips to help them sort of start thinking a little bit more out of the box and helping them with those items?

Tom: Yeah. There are plenty of things that you can't control in startup life. There's plenty of things that are unchangeable, that are permanent. The things that you can control are the most important things: are your tenacity, your work ethic, your unwillingness to give up, and your constant search for better results and for more connection with your audience. The second is passion. I think those two are interrelated, but finding something where you can spend 12 hours a day, 15 hours a day, cranking on it because you're passionate about it, where your passion drives you to not accept mediocrity, not accept lower performance. And I think those are the two things that are often overlooked. They're things that you can control, and you can find that passion. You can find that tenacity.

Those two things will make you learn faster, will make you iterate better and smarter than your competition. I'd say just really, really taking that to heart and understanding that, and once you've gone through those really grueling early days where you're trying to find product market fit or you're trying to find a customer base, you're trying to find a connection with people. Those are the things that get you through that. So I'd say yeah, those are just kind of the most important things and the things that we stress here very, very broadly and frequently. That's the only piece that I can add.

Pat Flynn: Love it Tom. What a perfect way to end the show. Thank you so much again everybody. Check out Chubbies.com or Chubbies on Instagram. That's where I would recommend you go first. Anywhere else people should go and check out some of your stuff?

Tom: The Facebook. Facebook's always good. [Facebook.com/chubbies](https://www.facebook.com/chubbies).

Pat Flynn: Cool.

Tom: And then we've got insider looks at the people in the office and the creative team on our Snapchat, which is just chubbiesshorts, with two S's in the middle.

Pat Flynn: Perfect. Tom, thank you so much for your time today and the inspiration. Keep doing what you're doing, 'cause it's working man.

Tom: Awesome Pat. I appreciate it.

Pat Flynn: Alright, thank you so much.

Alright, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Tom from Chubbies.com. If you want to get the show notes including all the links and the resources mentioned in this episode, or if you'd like to leave a comment, either way just head on over to the blog. You can go directly to this show by going to [smartpassiveincome.com/session269](http://smartpassiveincome.com/session269). Again, that's [smartpassiveincome.com/session269](http://smartpassiveincome.com/session269). Like I said, what an incredible interview. Tom, thank you so much for your time. This word of mouth thing, it really does happen from focusing on the community, and empowering them. Content like you can see here, even for a physical product, can be a massive game changer for you. So I'd love to hear what you think. Again, one more time, [smartpassiveincome.com/session269](http://smartpassiveincome.com/session269).

Guys, I really, really look forward to this month with you. We're gonna talk a little bit more about physical products. We have an interview coming up with somebody who's gonna give us the ins and outs of the manufacturing process, and getting prototypes, and working with those kinds of things, and also shipping, and fulfillment, and all that stuff which goes along with physical products. You know, as much as I record this episode for you guys to add value to your life and help you find answers for the questions you have related to your business, I also interview people specific to things that I'm working on too because you know, we're in this together, right? This physical product experiment that I've been working on lately, which is gonna dive into the physical product realm and into manufacturing, and fulfillment, and that sort of thing. All these things, today's conversation with Tom, next week's





conversation with Richie . . . It's all playing a role in how I will be taking this information and putting it into practice. Hopefully you can do that with me, or at least follow along.

Anyway, more information about the product experiment on the blog at SmartPassiveIncome.com, and I'll be talking in specific episodes about that much later as we close in on the year and finish up with hopefully what will be a massive Kickstarter campaign. Again, more of that coming soon. For now, keep rocking it. I appreciate you guys. Make sure you subscribe to the podcast if you haven't subscribed already, and I appreciate those ratings and reviews as always. All right guys, take care, and I'll see you in next week's episode. Until then, keep crushing it. Bye guys.

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