

SPI Podcast Session #37 - Monetizing in a Hobby Niche Success Story Interview Series - 3

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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 you're host, he always prefers almond butter over peanut butter, Pat Flynn.

Pat: Hey everybody. What's up? And welcome to session number 37 of Smart Passive Income podcast. My name is Pat Flynn and thank you, thank you for tuning in. Now in the intro you heard me talk about Caine's Arcade and if you don't know what that is I highly encourage you, I highly encourage you to go to CainesArcade.com. That's C A I N E S [Arcade.com](http://CainesArcade.com) and seriously, just get your family together and watch the ten minute short documentary. It's just amazing and I'm telling you, I don't want to ruin it for you but I seriously shed tears of joy, when watching how awesome this little kid, Caine, is and what he's up to and what happened to him. And I guarantee, I guarantee that after watching it you'll have a better day. It's just amazing. It's awesome. Now speaking of awesome stuff, we have another success story interview today with a woman who just impressed the heck out of me, with what she's doing online. How she's doing it, how she got started, how much money she's making. And it's kind of funny because she's doing it in a niche that is sort of made fun of in the internet marketing industry. We always like to use this niche as an example in what we teach. And no it's not dog training but I'll let her tell you what it is right at the beginning of the interview. But, you know, no offense to the other interviews that I've done already, this interview, man, when I was listening to her story my head was resting on my fists on my desks and I was just, I was just taking it all in. It was just amazing. Very inspiring. She's a very, very, very smart, hard-working woman, which is what I love about her. So everyone, let's please welcome Lain Ehmann to the show. Lain, thank you so much for being here.

Lain: Oh, Pat, I'm excited to be here. Thank you so much.

Pat: Oh my pleasure. So, tell us about your business. What's the, first of course, what's the url and what's it about, and how are you making a living online?

Lain: You can find me at www.LayoutaDay.com and I am in the scrap booking niche and yes indeed, we get made fun of all the time. But it's true, you can make a living in very niche markets online and I'm excited to be able to share a little bit about that with you.

Pat: Me too.

Lain: So, I actually started my career as a free-lance journalist, way back about fifteen years

ago. I was writing about everybody, for everybody from the Boston Globe to the San Jose Mercury to Runner's World, a whole variety of different publications, with kind of a specialty in high tech marketing. If anybody remembers some of the high tech magazines like the Industry Standard, I was a regular contributor for them, and that's going back a ways. And then the .com bust, like right around the turn of the century, 2000 came, and a lot of that started drying up. And I had a wide enough base that I was able to keep writing about a number of different things, but I thought, just like you encourage people to do in your audience, you know, think about what your really passionate about, wouldn't you really want to be doing that? And what I love doing was scrapbooking. At that point in time I had a couple kits and had really fallen in love with the hobby of scrapbooking, capturing their stories and photos on scrapbook pages. And so I contacted one of the scrapbooking magazines and I said, "I'm a freelance journalist, I'm also a scrapbooker, do you ever need writers?" And in fact, they did. So I started writing for them, became a contributing editor for them and was writing pretty much exclusively for that niche. Started travelling the country teaching on behalf of the magazine, and then our next big economic downturn came and the magazine folded. So I had, at that point, a scrapbooking blog that was on TypePad, and had, you know, just a handful of audience, regular readers. Based on the classes I was teaching and based on my name in the industry and things like that. And so at that point in time, I thought, you know what? I'm going to see if I can do what I was doing for the magazine online. I'm a writer, I can write articles and post them on my blog, and I can teach via the internet. So I can do all those things I was doing, but I'll be doing them for myself, instead of for the magazine. So, one of the first things I did was move from TypePad to WordPress and start an email list. And at that point I brought about 500 subscribers with me to the AWeber list that I started. So I really started pretty small, I mean 500 regular readers is not a huge number for people who are starting from scratch. It sounds like it but it's really not that many people. So that was kind of the beginning.

Pat: Alright, so you have this experience as a writer in the tech industry, then you move to do something that you're more passionate about, scrapbooking. You get into this magazine and that's going well. You get to travel around the country and magazine folds. So you decide to go online, you had a blog at TypePad, you switched to WordPress, you had 500 subscribers. So how does that turn into a business though? So, once you have that blog and you have, you know, a small following, where does the, you know, monetization come in, or how do you, you know, I understand that these subscribers are probably hardcore followers of you. But from that point from where you switched to WordPress and you had a small email list, how did you go from there to then building a business out of it?

Lain: Right. That is a great question because there's a big leap there between zero and making a full-time living and what I did is I kind of looked at what I was doing already that people really resonated with. And one of the things that I had started several years ago was a challenge, called Layout a Day, and that's where the name of my blog came from. I'm sure many of your listeners are familiar with the NaNoWriMo, the national novel writing month. Where people are challenged to write a novel in a month. And I thought, you know, I need to do something like that for our industry that is a stretch goal that will inspire people. Because I'm a great cheerleader and inspirer. I'm a good scrapbooker, but I'm really a great writer, a great communicator and a

great rallyer and community builder. And I knew that's where my specialty was going to be. I wasn't going to wow people with the great artistic creations I made, although people appreciate my scrapbook pages. That's not, that's not, I'm more like the Rachel Ray of scrapbooking, where I'll help you fit it into your life. You're a busy mom or a busy parent and I will encourage you along the way and give you ideas and inspirations. So that's really what I did. So I started this challenged called Layout a Day , and it slowly grew and grew. We did it several times a year. The first time around I think I charged people like ten dollars to participate and we had maybe 100 people involved.

Pat: That's pretty good.

Lain: Yeah, that slowly built from there. I started also researching other ways of making a living online. I took Yaro Starak's blogger course and learned quite a bit through that. And in fact I think that's where I was first introduced to you. And just looked at different ways of monetizing what I was doing. So it really built over time, and that Layout a Day course was really the cornerstone of what I was doing and that's why my blog is named that. So what I would do then is figure out, is OK, we did this month of this course, this month long course, now I want to take that content and repackage it. So I would take the course material from that month and then repackage it as an information product. And then I would sell that information product. And then I would go forward and start the next month long course and then repackage that. And some I would repackage as audios. Some I repackaged as fixed term, I'd guess you'd call it a fixed term program where they'd get an email every day for the month. One was an ebook. So I repackaged them in different ways trying to reach my audience on different levels. And that's really been one of the biggest keys to what I've been doing is trying different things and not going solo source with anything. Not relying completely on AdSense, not relying completely on affiliate sales, not relying completely on Layout a Day . Really expirementing and trying to provide different things to my audience to reach them and to also bring in multiple streams of income.

Pat: That's great. I always talk about diversification in offering people different options. But as far as the options that you're giving people, what's kind of the most, I guess what's most successful for you? What's bringing in the most money as part of your business?

Lain: Right. When I look at my income now, let's look at 2011 and going forward into 2012. I did hit six figures in revenue last year for 2011.

Pat: Congratulations.

Lain: Thank you. Now, that's not all take home pay because I do have affiliates in there that I'm paying and I'm hoping this year to his six figures in take home pay, in actual money that comes to me. But one thing that I started last year, because I'm always looking at how I can apply different successful techniques and strategies in other niches, in other businesses. And how I can apply them to what I'm doing. One thing I saw was the ability to create these online

webinars. Provide video and because scrapbooking obviously is a very visual market, I saw that there was the technology where I could actually bring classes to people, not only via video which everybody's been doing via YouTube and things like that, but do it in a live environment. So we could get together in a web room and have several hundred people together, bring instructors from all over the country together, or all over the world actually, bring them together in a central location, and create these online events. So starting last year, I put together live online multi-day events. So basically like trade show, or a convention, but online. And the students enroll and they get access to anywhere from twelve to fifteen classes. And they can view them live and then we tape everything and they get the replays afterwards, but they love the interactive aspect of it. So they're not just watching a YouTube video, they're watching a class presentation with, you know two hundred other scrapbookers and they're all chatting and they could ask questions of the teacher. Just that interactive level has been extremely successful and no one else was doing it in the scrapbooking industry.

Pat: Yeah, that's really, that's really, really smart. So how much would a ticket to this event cost?

Lain: Sure, it's called TrueScrap and to put in my little plug it's at www.truescrap.com. And our next event is coming up in April of 2012 and it's, well depending on when you enroll, it's \$127 early-bird registration and \$147 when you enroll shortly before the event, after the early-bird special has gone away. And again, they get about twenty hours of video content, plus they get a digital goodie bag and discounts and all sorts of other fun stuff. Because scrapbooking often takes place in isolation, like a lot of hobbies. Whether if it's if you paint water colors, if you build wooden boat models, or whatever you might do. It takes place by yourself but you like to connect with other people, and this brings together the community aspect with the education aspect and it's been really successful.

Pat: That's great. Congratulations. So April 2012, \$127 for early-bird pricing. Is that the same pricing as before?

Lain: Yeah, so when we started our very first one in April of 2011 it was \$97, and then it increased to \$127 because we added more features to it. So the second one we did in October of last year went to \$127 and this time it's, and it's been \$97 for alum so it really encourages people to re-enroll. And each time we grow a little bit. So I get feedback from people and see, what do you want, what can we add, what can we do that would make this better for you. And then we just layer it. We add on new elements that people are asking for and that's been really successful too. Because I really try to listen to them and see what they're interested in. So \$127, we had 350 people at the October event and we're hoping to pass that for April this year. So people can do the numbers and see what we're kind of looking at in terms there in terms of revenue.

Pat: Yeah, 127 times 350, just let me do that in my head really quick, 44,450 bucks.

Lain: Sounds good to me.

Pat: I used a calculator. I was cheating. But yeah, that's just amazing, that's just for one event and you can do multiple events per year. I think that's a great idea. Especially when, like you said, you think about the niche in general, it's kind of a thing you do on your own but to express interest with other people and be a part of a community, that's huge. And people will pay money to become a part of the community, obviously.

Lain: Exactly. And that's what I hear from people as well as that it's an experience. It's as much about the experience of being together as it is about the inspiration. Everybody's got, I mean probably in any niche, they've got the information they need, you know. It's the same reason people sign up for classes in the internet marketing space, because they want to be led through it, they want to be part of something with other people and that's really held true for these events.

Pat: Yeah, absolutely. So are you doing all of this by yourself or do you have kind of a team with you?

Lain: I have, I have some help. I have several VA's who assist me and one in particular, shout out to Kelly. Hi, Kelly.

Pat: What's up, Kelly?

Lain: And she is my right-hand person and she handles all my customer service. Because I tend to get very distracted, I mean I am such a perfectionist, if I get one email that says, "you know, I really didn't x,y and z," which might just be a matter of opinion, not anything I did wrong, but it will really take me off my path. And I really have to focus on the big picture because that's where my value is. So I have somebody handling customer service, she handles a lot of the questions about, hey, I couldn't get into the webroom today, where's the replay for this. She handles all that for me.

Pat: Where did you find Kelly?

Lain: She actually was a member of my audience and I wanted.

Pat: That's the best place to get people.

Lain: Oh my gosh. She understands completely what I'm trying to do. She understands how I would approach things, because she has been around me for so long now. And I never have her write as me, she always writes as herself, and if somebody gets an email from me, they know it's from me. But she has that same, like she knows I always do things with a sense of humor, and it's not just a straight email back, it'll be trying, I always try to get people to smile. That's kind of one of my things is, you know, we're too serious. So she'll add that element of fun to things and she just really understands who I am and what I'm trying to accomplish and she's been

fantastic.

Pat: That's great.

Lain: And then I have a handful of other people who work on a project basis, helping me like once I record my podcast, they upload it and post it on the blog for me. And some behind the scene things like that.

Pat: OK.

Lain: I have a membership site too and I have somebody who helps me with that as well.

Pat: Awesome. So, you just mentioned podcasts, so that's one way you're getting new eyes on your brand and kind of expanding your authority in the space. Are you doing anything else to market your business?

Lain: Yes, I am. So, I take the Pat Flynn approach to marketing and you need to be everywhere.

Pat: Yes.

Lain: So, probably my top areas are the podcasts. I also do videos quite a bit on YouTube and that's been very helpful too because again, scrapbookers are extremely visual. And a lot of people go to YouTube and just type in scrapbooking video and they'll find me. I also do a little bit of guest blogging, not a ton, but a little bit. I do article marketing. I'm trying to think what else. A lot of traffic will come from instructors within my TrueScrap events that we do. They'll refer people over and they'll discover me because they like person X and then they come to TrueScrap and my personality is so much a part of that, they say, "oh, I really like her" and then they end up following me as well. I do SCO for my blog as well. So pretty much anything that I can do. I'm on Twitter, not a ton because it seemed a little spammy lately, but I try to maintain a presence there. I have my Facebook fan page as well. So I just try to do it all, a little bit but focusing on the podcasts and the videos mostly.

Pat: Nice. Be everywhere, I love it. I love that you say that. And also affiliate, you've got affiliates pushing stuff.

Lain: Yes, I do, I have an affiliate program as well.

Pat: Great. Couple more questions before we finish up. What do you enjoy most about doing business online

Lain: Well, the part that I enjoy about business online regardless of what niche I would be in, is the flexibility. I have three kids, I live in Boston, but I'm originally from California, and it allows me to either travel to my kids events and still maintain my business presence. I can be Tweeting

while I'm sitting at a baseball practice. Or I can travel out to California to visit family and still, in fact I'm in California right now visiting family, and still maintain my business. And that flexibility is just, is one of the top elements. And also just the ability to set my own path. I don't think I'd make a very good employee anymore. I have definite views on how things should be done and I can try it and see if it works and if it doesn't work, it's all me and if it works, it's all me. And that's a lot of fun, to have this living laboratory where you can test your ideas and concepts and see yourself grow and challenge yourself and just make whatever you want of it. I love that.

Pat: I know that's awesome. Great answer. Last question. What are maybe two or three tips you have for people who are also wanting to start their own online business?

Lain: Good question. I was at the niche affiliate marketing conference in Atlanta in...

Pat: NAMS.

Lain: Yes, NAMS. I was actually instructing at NAMS and one of the other instructors, [Jack Bourne](#), I was sitting in on his class and he said, find your, I'm trying to remember how he phrased it, find your unfair advantage. And what he meant was find the thing that other people don't have and it's unfair only because not everybody has it. So it could be your contacts, that you know everybody. That was something that I actually had because I had been in the industry for so long. So a newcomer to the scrapbooking industry would see that as an unfair advantage because hey, Lain's been around here for fifteen years, you know, it's something that gives me a leg up, or a start on the race. It could be that you're great at technology, or you're great at web design. Or it could be that you've got unlimited financing, because you've got a rich uncle who will bootstrap whatever you need. Whatever your personal unfair advantage is, find that and find, it could be a skill, leverage that to the hills. So, in my case if it's connections, that's something that the TrueScrap event has allowed me to hit the ground running with. Because I could call these great teachers who had audiences themselves and they knew who I was and they were willing to take a chance on me. So find your unfair advantage, that's number one. Number two is that whether it's multiple streams of income, multiple streams of traffic, multiple streams of ideas, don't go sole source on anything. Always be looking for something else to add either to what you're offering your customers, or where you're getting your inspiration, or where you're getting your income. Because you just never know which one's going to hit big and you also never know when one's going to go away. So that's another one I would say.

Pat: Yeah, no, perfect. Thank you so much. What an inspiring interview. Thank you so much, Lain, for sharing that information and your knowledge and wisdom. I wish you, and I'm sure the rest of the community wishes you as well just even more success in the future. Let's see a six figure event this year, or something like that.

Lain: Thank you. From your mouth to God's ears.

Pat: Alright. So if people want to learn more about you and what you do, where, one more time,

would they go?

Lain: Well, I am everywhere as you know, but the blog is LayoutaDay.com, Facebook is [facebook.com/ Layout a Day](https://facebook.com/LayoutaDay) . I'm on Twitter at [Lainehmann](https://twitter.com/Lainehmann) and I'd be happy to connect with anybody about if they have questions about they're particular niche and they want somebody, just somebody to bounce ideas off of. Or anyway I can be of service, I'm a big believer in giving back. So I'd be happy to help.

Pat: Alright. Well, thank you again, Laine, again this is Laine Ehmann, the Rachel Ray of scrapbooking in her living, she's living in her own living laboratory and I really think that's great advice. You know, just keep trying things, see what happens, if it doesn't work out that's the beauty of doing online business, it's not a huge risk and things are fairly inexpensive to experiment with, and then just see what works and go from there.

Lain: You got it.

Pat: Alright, thank you, take care.

Lain: Thank you, Pat.

Pat: Alright, bye. Alright, well I hope you enjoyed that interview with Laine Ehmann from LayoutaDay.com. Super amazing, inspiring, incredible story and just listening to that again just gets me on fire. It really makes me want to take action and I hope you feel the same way too. So I'm just going to leave it at that today. Your goal from this point until the next podcast episode that you listen to is to take action, whatever that action may be, do something for your business and really accomplish it. Think about in the next five minutes what that's going to be and then work towards it and the next time I come out with an episode, or the next time you listen to one, have that done. Alright? So take care, good luck and I wish you all the best. I'll see you in the next episode. Peace.