

# Episode 93

📅 Wed, Nov 27, 2024 10:00AM ● 51:18

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

storytelling, Ohio Magazine, Jim Vickers, Best Hometowns, small town tourism, travel and lifestyle, community branding, bed taxes, marketing advertising and PR, pitching the media, Bryan Ohio, Spangler Candy Company, downtown revitalization, Bellefontaine, print media revival

## SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Jim Vickers, Ethan DeLeon

---

J

**Jim Vickers** 00:00

It's so easy to tell your story now if you know what it is and you know what it is about your story that's special. And every town has something about their story that's special. I don't care what town it is. I can find a story in it. I guarantee it.

E

**Ethan DeLeon** 00:13

Welcome to the Small Nation Podcast, brought to you by Coverlink Insurance, where people are more important than policies. On this show, we unpack lessons from entrepreneurs, break down development strategies, and do deep dives on small town success. Our goal is to provide value to our listeners by hosting conversations that teach, inform, and inspire. Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon, and I'm here in the studio with the founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we're excited to be hosting the editor of Ohio Magazine, Jim Vickers, on the show. Welcome, Jim.

J

**Jim Vickers** 00:46

Yeah, thanks for having me.

J

**Jason Duff** 00:47

You know, there are 3 magazines in my life. We've got Forbes, which obviously business news, pretty big stuff. Forbes 400 list. Inc. magazine, as an entrepreneur, like growing up, one of my goals was always to get on the Inc. 5000 list. And of course there's the 500 list. And then there comes Ohio Magazine. And let me tell you, yes, I have the latest copy here and it happens to be the Holiday Classics Edition. Yeah, but we're going to talk more about this. And it's just a pleasure to have in the room today the editor of Ohio Magazine.

J

**Jim Vickers** 01:22

My pleasure to be here.

J

**Jason Duff** 01:23

Yeah, absolutely. So we typically like to start at the very beginning with a lot of our guests. Where did you grow up? Where's home? And how— like, take us on the journey.

J

**Jim Vickers** 01:31

Yes, I will take you there. New Philadelphia, Ohio. If you know where that is. Big city. Big city of like 16,000 people next to Dover, Ohio, which has about 16,000 people. One of the oldest high school rivalries in Ohio. That's one of our claims to fame. So I grew up there and went to Bowling Green State University.

J

**Jason Duff** 01:50

Woo-hoo, we've got a lot of BG folks in the podcast.

J

**Jim Vickers** 01:52

I know, I know. There's a connection there with you guys. That's great. And then went into newspapers in Lorain, Ohio. So that's where I started. I wanted to do magazines, but I was advised to do newspapers.

J

**Jason Duff** 02:05

Mm-hmm. Was your degree in journalism or journalism?

J

**Jim Vickers** 02:07

Newspaper track. But I always wanted to do magazines. So I found a newspaper that let me write features. I call them Sunday stories, which meant, hey, you can— these run on Sundays and you can do them in your extra time, you know, in addition to your beat. And it really gave me the skills about storytelling and how to develop a story. And that daily writing knocked off a lot of my rust and taught me AP style and just got me, you know, really trained on that. Whereas this ability to delve into features and tell stories was really appealing to me. So I went to work for a business magazine for a year, which was, you know, which gave me that ability. But then with Cleveland Magazine, which growing up in Northeast Ohio, Cleveland Magazine—

J

**Jason Duff** 02:48

that was the big one.

J

**Jim Vickers** 02:49

Is just legendary, right? So I got a job as a writer there and worked there as a writer, became the managing editor of that magazine. And then same company owns Ohio Magazine, which is Great Lakes Publishing. And when that editor was going to retire, I moved over there about 10 years ago. Nice, very cool. So that's been my path into the business.

J

**Jason Duff** 03:10

How would you describe what Ohio Magazine is for those that maybe haven't read it?

J

**Jim Vickers** 03:14

Yeah, for sure. Yeah, it's a good question. It's largely, I would call it a travel and lifestyle magazine. We say we connect Ohioans to Ohio. There are places you do not know about in Ohio that are really great. And the, you know, largest part of our readership, day trips, you know, they, or weekend trips, you know, they want to go somewhere close. They want to drive 3 or 4 hours max. So you can drive from the corner of Ashtabula down to Cincinnati over that span. You can have a very different experience in those two places. So I think that shows you the power of Ohio. And so that's what we do. And we, our tagline is the beauty, the adventure, and the fun. And that's the filter that we show everything through, but we're really about connection and being a guide to like, hey, you did not know about this, you need to know about this. And that guides everything we do.

J

**Jason Duff** 04:03

Yeah, that's super cool. One of the questions I had for you when I first met with you was, does every state have, you know, a magazine publication like this, or is it more of a— special to Ohio?

J

**Jim Vickers** 04:14

It's a great question. Not every state— most cities have a city magazine. That's very common. State magazines, less common. There are regions of states that have magazines. One magazine that people may have heard of is Texas Monthly. That's almost like a national magazine, though. Like, they'll have Beyoncé on the COVID you know? I mean, that's, that's just a whole different realm. But yeah, so there's not that many statewide magazines. Our state, North Carolina, is a very good statewide magazine. Down East in Maine, really like that magazine, which is that Providence area— I'm sorry, Portland area of Maine and that, you know, down east.

J

**Jason Duff** 04:54

Yeah.

J

**Jim Vickers** 04:54

So those are two really good magazines that I like. And, you know, so Ohio Magazine has been around for a while though, which is what's interesting. But yeah, so no, the short answer is not— there's not a lot of us. Sure. But when there is a place where people have an identity and they feel aligned with something, I think it's fertile ground for that. And I think Ohio is one of those places. If you live outside a big city, you're not a Clevelander, you're from Ohio. Yeah. And that's the difference.

**J****Jason Duff** 05:22

Yeah. No, that's really cool. And I think Ohio has a lot of special pockets, you know, that people may not know about, um, even if you live here. So that's, that's really special. We share on the national scale when you travel to other places and people talk about Ohio, you know, the negative connotation of being a flyover state is sometimes what you hear, right? But for those of us that have lived here, and even when those people that call it a flyover state actually come here, they're like, actually, this place is pretty cool. I mean, whether it's Columbus's food scene, right, or the athletics that you see in places like Cleveland and Cincinnati, or, you know, the transformation, innovation happening in Dayton, And then, and this thing that we're most excited about, is all the pockets of these small towns. Who would know that there's an Ohio's wine country? Who would know that we've got two inland lakes that, you know, have resort-style living and features all around that? And I think that's a lot of what your publication does is help tell those stories.

**J****Jim Vickers** 06:21

Yeah, I agree. I think that's the really what we like to own is telling those stories, you know, Cleveland Magazine is going to tell those Cleveland stories better than us and in a different way. And I think for us, we have the ability to go into these small towns and tell the stories that don't get told all the time. And there are some incredible— you guys know this, but there are some incredible stories in small towns.

**J****Jason Duff** 06:43

Yeah, absolutely. And we always say like small towns build great things.

**J****Jim Vickers** 06:47

Yeah.

**J****Jason Duff** 06:47

And yes, but you know, whether it's— our state is well known as agriculture. I mean, there's like hundreds of years of really great evidence of the food that we, we grow and the cattle and beef and, and all those things. But then what came along, you know, 100 years ago is this was a state where innovation happened, where entrepreneurs started building manufacturing. And then over the last, you know, 80 years, even most recently, the last 40 years, companies like Honda decided to build their manufacturing operations here. But the thing that I'm hearing a lot in circles today is how important tourism is to our state economy. I mean, hundreds of millions to billions of dollars of new money coming from other places to here. And, you know, what, what, how do you kind of look at the industry overall related to tourism, how Ohio benefits from that?

J

**Jim Vickers** 07:40

Yeah, tourism in Ohio is such an important thing. I mean, I cannot be, you know, overstated. It's just like one of these things where when you have people who will come to your state and they can have an experience that is go see an NFL game and then go drive to a small town and then go the next day and go to a different city. And I just feel like when you have a place like Ohio that has such a variety of things to do, it becomes such a power of like, wow, people want to go there. I mean, I think West Virginia does a great job at this in all their marketing, Michigan and all the Pure Michigan, and they make you want to go there. And I think that's, We have such fertile ground in Ohio for that. And so it's just so important. I mean, it's so important, the bed taxes and all that go into it that support, you know, the communities and the tourism in the communities and convincing people to come there. And, you know, a lot of our partners on our custom publishing side are those communities. And so we know them very well and we know how important it is and we know, You know, we've seen what happens before and then after, you know, and it's a big difference.

**J****Jason Duff** 08:51

We've hosted several presidents of chambers of commerce on the podcast, and I always love their insights about what tourism means to their town and the community in terms of taxes. We've talked about income taxes, you know, the employees that work in the restaurants and the venues and the hotels, and then the real estate taxes. So as people invest and improve their properties that, you know, funds property taxes that goes back to the school. But bed tax in particular, I remember interviewing Anna Loudon of the Logan County Tourism Bureau, and she explained to us that more than half of her budget is funded by the bed taxes of people staying in area hotels and Airbnbs, and how essential that was for her utilizing those bed tax funds to fund promotion and advertising and investment for the local economy. And, and, and that all relies on tourism. Yeah, absolutely. Um, so I'm curious, you know, here, obviously you two have known each other, and the introduction was made to me at some point along the line, but how, how was the introduction between, uh, Ohio Magazine and Small Nation first made? Well, I'll just comment, I've been a reader, um, and I, uh, you know, I'm old school, I like books, I like magazines, and I remember the days that you could go into the local Barnes Noble or the local bookshop and see the magazine rack. But it just happened that I went to the Ohio Magazine website and have followed it, but how I kind of got reacquainted with Ohio Magazine is what they were doing with their digital marketing. You know, I happen to have earned a doctorate in Facebook. That means I spend a lot of time. Congratulations. Thank you. I don't— I'm still waiting for my certificate from them. But I had spent a lot of time just following channels. And the thing that I will share about Jim and the articles, and you particularly, if you look at the ones that he writes, having a compelling headline is what pulls me in. So if it's like the 12 things that you need to do at Christmas time in Ohio, I'm probably going to click on that link. And I did. But this is the thing. It wasn't clickbait like a lot of articles you've got to worry about today is that they have this big hook and then you, you go through 5 pages of advertising.— to actually see the article, the comments that he was making were actually things I hadn't done before. And so it gave me some interest to wanna subscribe and learn more. And so by following them, I had to say that one of the big features that they do every year is they highlight, uh, the best hometown. And I followed over a number of years, and truthfully, when we were building Small Nation, we were kind of studying what would go into building a vibrant community in town. And there were those towns, and I've named several of them in previous podcasts, that I would travel to, that I would say I would dream of having a downtown that had this many restaurants, this many retail shops, that had all these volunteers, the way it was decorated. And then the biggest thing was the way that town made me feel when I was there, right? Yeah. And so I have to tell you, when we were dreaming of rebuilding downtown Bellefontaine, it was with the understanding and looking at our aspiring communities, many of them who were featured in Ohio Magazine as being best hometowns in Ohio. And that's how we got reconnected because, you know, I think many people in the community of 2 years ago or 3 years ago, I lose track of time, but we're nominating the Bellefontaine to be considered in that. Right.

**J****Jim Vickers** 12:26

Yeah.

**J Jason Duff** 12:26

Yep.

**J Jim Vickers** 12:26

That's exactly how we met, I believe, for the first time was when I came for that visit. Yeah.

**J Jason Duff** 12:31

Can you explain for those that may be listening to say, how do you get nominated or apply?

**J Jim Vickers** 12:37

Sure.

**J Jason Duff** 12:37

What is that process? And what is the Best Hometowns?

**J Jim Vickers** 12:39

Sure. So Best Hometowns is something we've done since 2006. And what we like to do is we pick 5 towns every year that have something going on, I guess I would say, like, for lack of a better term, like there's some kind of change that's happened where someone in their community, be it their CVB, be it their mayor, be it residents. We got a lot of residential postcards from Bellefontaine. I think there was a campaign, but it was very impressive when you would go to your mailbox and find 20 postcards in it and people being passionate about their town, you know? And I think, so that's how we get, it's something we've been doing for a number of years. We recognize 5 towns every year. There's no definition of what is small town. We've done villages, we've done cities of 40,000 people, but it's more of a vibe, it's more of an atmosphere. We never do big, big cities. But so every year in the fall, we honor Best Hometowns. And you can, each spring we put out nominations and say, tell us about your town, tell us why we should feature your town. And we get all kinds of nominations, a lot of residents. We do get more formal nomination forms from cities sometimes that are actually quite impressive sometimes saying, hey, you know, here's all the great things going on. It's very exciting to look through them. Then we go visit and we do our site visits in the summer and come see firsthand what's going on. That's how I came to Bellefontaine, met with the mayor, we met with you, you took us around and yeah, so I forget how many, it was a few years ago, but not— It's been a few years ago. Yeah, but not super long.

**J Jason Duff** 14:07

Yeah.

J

**Jim Vickers** 14:08

But that's what it is. It's really a celebration of small town. And I think there's, it sounds corny to say small town values, but friendliness, pride of place, you know, having pride in your downtown, in your home, and actually, you know, being a good neighbor. Those are all things that are kind of amorphous and they're hard to judge and stuff like that. But you see it in these communities through what happens physically, these transformations of their town and these efforts of people who band together. It's pretty amazing. And it's really one of the most fun things we do every year. Yeah.

J

**Jason Duff** 14:43

And to this day, we still have the sign up, you know, as you're driving into town. Yes. You know, Ohio's best hometown. We love that. 2022 or something like that. Like that, you know. There's kind of a double-edged opportunity is, I imagine, for the magazine of getting communities that are aspiring to apply and be nominated and go through that process. That's getting more eyeballs and attention and focus on Ohio Magazine. And then in the, the flip side of that is that when the communities are recognized and awarded with that, um, that's also putting more eyeballs and opportunity on people that have never maybe been to your town, or when they are driving through. This is, I think, the, the way to integrate. And I've seen so many communities do really good job of this, and we tried really hard of that too, about when you get recognized for an award, celebrate it.

J

**Jim Vickers** 15:31

Yeah.

J

**Jason Duff** 15:31

Yeah. Have a party, have an event. And, uh, you know, I, I still distinctly remember back, like, we literally did like an unveiling of the front cover of the magazine. Yeah, because it is something very special. If you think, roll out the red carpet, celebrate individuals' hard work and all that they've done, and then I remember we end up printing up window clings to like the merchants shared in that success. And, you know, thinking of all the volunteers that serve on the nonprofits, like they're a part of that too. But it is a really great opportunity to look to applying for awards and recognitions like Ohio Magazine's Best Hometown. And I also like to, if you look through the magazine, instead of just making it one town, you kind of have a regional focus and there's multiple towns that are awarded that, right? Yes.

J

**Jim Vickers** 16:21

And the idea behind that is, you know, quite frankly, if the town's on the other side of the state from you and you've never heard of it, you might not be as interested as seeing a state in your region. Hey, I haven't been to McConnellsville, but I know where that is. So I think that's interesting from that perspective. And that's— and we also want to celebrate more than one town. So we have 5 stories to tell in each issue, which is, you know, makes kind of a critical mass of positivity, I guess, for lack of a better term on that. But I think Ohio's so different too. And that's a big thing of why you do 5 different regions, 'cause Appalachia is very different than the Lake Erie Shore. And it's not saying those towns are better or worse than each other, but they're different than one another. And so I think having those 5 different regions kind of showcases different areas of Ohio and breaks it up in a very nice way. That gives you kind of some navigation for what the different kinds of communities are when you look at any given issue. Yeah.

J

**Jason Duff** 17:16

And this stuff doesn't just happen by coincidence. Like you both have shared that you have to apply or nominate your community rather. And I know for here in Bellefontaine, we got gorilla with it and sent out some postcards to really grab the attention or creating videos or things like that. But I think for our community, leaders that are listening, don't be afraid to try those out-of-the-box thinking practices to bring the attention to your community, because when that happens and then celebrate it big on the other end, that's the other side of it. But then when that happens, it just raises that sense of pride for everyone here. So you're no longer the flyover state, no longer the small town that no one cares about. Like if you're, you know, living in a bigger city and you're originally from this small town, you see that they're winning these awards for the restaurants and retail. As like, oh, maybe we should think about moving back. And then what does that do for, you know, the taxes and everything? So I think that's just a really cool ecosystem here. But I wanted to also kind of just highlight some of the winners of 2024. I think, yeah. Do you know what they are off the top of your head?

J

**Jim Vickers** 18:18

Yes, I do. It's Bryan, Urbana, McConnellsville, Millersburg. Oh, now you stumped me.

J

**Jason Duff** 18:23

Yeah, you're good. They're on there. If we need that.

J

**Jim Vickers** 18:26

Urbana, Bryan, Hilliard, McConnellsville, and Millersburg.

J

**Jason Duff** 18:29

Yeah, I always forget.

**J****Jim Vickers** 18:31

Pretty good list. Yeah, but it is a great list. It's a great class of these, these 5. Would you like me to talk about?

**J****Jason Duff** 18:36

Yeah, absolutely.

**J****Jim Vickers** 18:37

Please do. So Urbana is, you know, just, just down the road from here, west of Columbus. And it's a great community, a lot of history in that community. Not only Grimes Field and the Champaign Aviation Museum, but War of 1812 history that I didn't know about. Just great town and a lot of vibrant vibrancy coming through redevelopment. And Jayman Selman, who I think has been on your show before. Yeah, yeah. Good friend. Yeah, he's doing some great work down there on the square. And other business owners too have come to town, said, I'm going to invest, I'm going to invest in the square. There's some wonderful restaurants on the square and fun things like the Johnny Appleseed Education Center is there, which is very fun, very kid-friendly. Never knew it existed, you know? So that's a great town. Bryan, Dum Dum Sucker, Spangler Candy Company. Yeah, if you know that, that's Bryan, Ohio. They have a beautiful downtown that they put a lot of care into filling back up. They had a lot of vacancy problems. Um, just a wonderful downtown, wonderful community. Um, Millersburg is in Amish country, so a lot of places that you go to in Amish country have a Millersburg address. But what we're talking about is the core Main Street of downtown Millersburg and that surrounding area. Which is what is actually Millersburg, which is a really vibrant historic street of businesses around the courthouse there that have all kinds of things that you would, you know, you find a brewery in Amish country. You don't really expect that, you know, but that's there. And then Hilliard, a Columbus suburb. We frequently get Columbus suburbs. And I love how Hilliard, they have the old Hilliard. They're celebrating their history. History is at the forefront of what they do there, even though they're a Columbus suburb. They're thriving. They're growing, you know, it feels city as soon as you leave and get down into Columbus. But they have a real sense of history there. Amazing. And then McConnellsville, which is a village in Morgan County in Appalachia, which looks like it's frozen in time in a totally good way. You know, the buildings when you walk down there. I did their presentation where we give the award and it's in this old Opry House and it's just beautiful. And they had a show going that night and music and people were coming out and that town really was a town that was a mining town. And to this day, there's a hardware store there that has been run for like 4 or 5 generations of family members. And it's just— you don't see that anymore, right? So— and meanwhile, there's a diner down the street that is really popular and there's a great brewery in town. And then there's a place on the edge of town that was on Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives, you know. So there's like cool places to check out, even though it's this tiny town. So those are the 5 this year, and I was really excited to visit them. I visited all of them at some point in this process, and it just was really fun. And it's always fun though, to be honest with you, the discovery, the meeting people, the making new friends. Because honestly, like, I meet people and then I stay in touch with them, and it's just, it's an amazing way to connect Ohio for me and for our, for our magazine, to be honest.



**Jason Duff** 21:41

Yeah, sounds like kind of a dream job there.



**Jim Vickers** 21:43

Yeah, it's fun. It's fun.



**Jason Duff** 21:44

One of the, the communities they mentioned, I have a personal story in connection with, and that is the Bryan, Ohio community. Sure. You know, 4 or 5 years ago, we met Amy Miller of the Bryan Area Community Foundation. Yeah. And, you know, at the time there were some pretty big headwinds and challenges in Bryan, Ohio, in the downtown. And, you know, being able to go up there and tour their downtown, I saw this courthouse that was right on the square that probably is one of the most beautiful courthouses. And it's amazing. It's just gorgeous. And, you know, at the time they were really struggling to figure out their identity of like what, what You know, what are the points of pride that we have in our town? And, you know, when you're a local, everything kind of seems the same. Like you've seen the same things for, you know, 5, 10, 20, could be longer years. But me coming into it, I learned that there's 3 100-year-old companies there. There's Bard Manufacturing, which is a global leader in air conditioning and so many other types of industrial types of units. The Ohio Arts Company, which is the maker of the Etch-A-Sketch. I mean, literally, There isn't anyone that's not played with an Etch-a-Sketch. And then Spangler Candy Company. And when I learned more about Spangler, of course, I remember going into the banks when I was little, getting the Dum-Dum Suckers. Oh, yes. But then, like, I was asking about, tell me about Christmas in your town. And like, well, we, you know, we do manufacture candy canes. And I learned later, like, one of the largest manufacturers of candy canes in the world. And then, like, we've got this beautiful courthouse, but they yet hadn't like uncovered all of the potential. And I said, there's so many towns that would die to have a candy company in your downtown. And later what that led into is a consulting relationship with us where we were able to work with them to develop a community brand, which I have to share. And I shared this story with Amy, we talk about it in the podcast. She was like, Jason, the brand cannot be about candy. And I'm like, well, so we were doing the Google research,, you know, trying to figure out how people think about Bryan, both locals and visitors. And I want to tell you, I ended up— we could not talk about candy, but what we ended up is Live the Sweet Life in Bryan, Ohio, which is so much more than candy. And what's so neat today is to see them be recognized as the work that's been done over the last few years is truly inspirational in Bryan, which the idea of bringing the museum and the candy store into the downtown. And it was so cool when I got my magazine. Yeah. Yeah, we had something to do with this. Yeah, this was something literally we designed renderings and plans and work with, with Spangler to dream this up. It is now a real thing. If you've not been to Spangler Candy World in Bryan, Ohio, this is my pitch. Go check it out. Yeah, it's great.



**Jim Vickers** 24:26

We went there. It was a lot of fun. It is totally fun.

J

**Jason Duff** 24:29

Yeah. And I think that's the neat thing of, of what we can do on the real estate side is like help building owners and businesses realize the potential of underutilized properties. And then teach them a little bit about how to develop that community brand and how to integrate their, their marketing and their advertising with their, with their real estate and what their community is going. But where I want to pivot with this, there's a very big difference between marketing, advertising, and PR. I didn't know— again, this is going back to like my business, you know, school, school days. Like a lot of people interchange those and call them the same thing. And I will tell you, in the magazine, you kind of need all three of those things because you're— you and Great Lakes is running a business, right?

J

**Jim Vickers** 25:12

Right.

J

**Jason Duff** 25:12

So if there aren't advertisers, right, there's not a Jim Vickers, right? Right. Okay. So, but with that, can you, can you maybe share, like, for those about if someone's pitching you a story or idea, like, what is PR and how— what is the appropriate way to reach out to any reporter on some kind of PR idea?

J

**Jim Vickers** 25:31

That is a great question because I honestly do not get as many pitches as I think I should get, and workable pitches. I get a lot of pitches that are not even Ohio or not even close. So really, I think this is a good question. Um, so I always just appreciate someone saying, hey Jim, saw the magazine, saw this story, we have something going on in our town that reminded me of that, here's what it is, give me 3 paragraphs. You don't have to make a press release, you don't have to do anything. I prefer if you don't check on it the next day because I do get a little bit busy, but I promise if it is something that you've seen and you feel like you have something similar, I will get back to you and say, hey, this is cool, or it's too soon, or hey, I'm gonna put this in my story file and bring it to my meeting, which I think some people think I'm making up, but it's very true. We have a big list of stories that anytime someone pitches us, we put it in a file and we go through it. Hey, because for a particular issue, you might have a geographic mix that you need to make something different. So we have like a master list of story ideas. So I really think it's just keeping it casual. In reaching out to the editor or the managing editor or whoever the proper person is. And we have a pitch guide on our website that outlines how to pitch. And I think, um, it's a valuable thing because there's a lot of promotion that's left on the table because people never make the pitch. Yeah, it's just— I think it's so true. Like, sometimes I'll find out about something and I'll be like, why didn't they tell me about this? Not that I'm the center of the universe, but like, they're just missing the opportunity to like trumpet this thing, you know? And I think the people that I have the best relationships with just kind of keep me in the loop, you know, of what's going on in their towns. And I think it doesn't always work that you're going to get covered immediately, but building that relationship, building that, that dialogue and understanding what the magazine's mission is and what their audience is and who they're trying to serve and how your story fits into that mission is very important.

J**Jason Duff** 27:18

Yeah.

J**Jim Vickers** 27:19

All right.

J**Jason Duff** 27:19

At this time, we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. Big city dining in a small town. Now that's The Syndicate. Join them for fresh steaks, pasta, or seafood for dinner, or stop in for Sunday brunch to experience one of their signature dishes such as chicken and waffles, and maybe even pair it with a mimosa flight. Located at 213 South Main Street in downtown Bellefontaine. Tired of gyms not being open when you wanna work out? Then check out the region's best 24-hour fitness center, Anytime Fitness in downtown Bellefontaine. They have all the equipment you need and the best trainers and coaches to help you get in the best shape of your life. It's truly your one-stop shop for fitness. Anytime Fitness is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. I think this segues into something I wanted to hit on in this episode, and that is storytelling about your community, you know, your town or whatever. And, and you come from a journalism background, newspaper into magazines. And so it may be obvious to you because you are a storyteller, right? You're, you're looking to tell the story of people's communities. But I'd like for you to maybe just double-click on that for a second on the pitch and like why people need to build this narrative and then pitch it to you and why that matters. I mean, for the magazine's purposes, certainly. But then beyond that, let's think how that can impact the community.

J**Jim Vickers** 28:35

Yeah, I mean, something has happened with the rise of social media is we've democratized telling our story. It's just, it's so easy to tell your story now if you know what it is and you know what it is about your story that's special. And every town has something about their story that's special. I don't care what town it is. I can find a story in it. I guarantee it. If you just tell me enough about the town, I can find the story. And I think when people live there, they may miss it sometimes or not think it's special enough or not think it's interesting enough. At the same time, those people know their town the best. They know everything about their town. They know the history of the town. So I think it's sitting down with the stakeholders that— whoever that is for your group— and saying, what are our best stories? What are the most compelling things about us? And I think getting those down and kind of workshopping those and kind of sharing those, running them by people, hey, Jim, what do you think about this? Would this fit? I think that is how you start to hone that story. And then I think you really got to tell it a lot and you got to tell it over and over. It's that whole thing. If somebody has to hear something 7 times, you know, before they know it. And I think it's that, you know, you just have to get it out there. You have to make it part of your social media. You have to make it part of your website. You have to have the about us. You have to be clear on what you know, what you have and what your story is. And it's okay if that changes. It's okay if you don't know off the bat what it is even, you know, it's just starting to tell it. And I think that's by starting to figure out your story and tell the story, um, it will, it will come together.

 J**Jason Duff** 29:59

It really will.

 J**Jim Vickers** 30:00

It's like I always say, there's a crisis point in every long feature where you're like, is this thing going to get written? And then once you hit that, there's a point where you're over the roller coaster hill and you're like, oh, I got I feel like this is the same kind of thing. Once you have done this enough, you start, you know, your story becomes second nature and everyone's telling it the same way. And who are your stakeholders? And I think that that's powerful. And I think so figuring out what your stories are and what about your story will be interesting to other people from a travel component. That's what I think is most important for communities is what would people drive 3 hours for?

 J**Jason Duff** 30:32

Yeah. And I think a lot of people give credit to Bellefontaine and the work, Jason, that you have done with Small Nation throughout the years. And people might— I've heard people say, you know, oh, that's great. You have private investment, X, Y, Z, the real estate or the business owners were willing to move into the real estate and things like that. And I think that everyone's just trying to find the reason they can't do it in their, their town. But I think people significantly overlook the storytelling aspect of it. If you even if you don't have the money, you can storytell, right? You can find those group of people. And that's what we do in our consulting services, right? I don't know if you want to speak to that. Like when we go into a new community, like what you did in Bryan, Ohio, right? It's funny because some of the exact things that you were saying, I think, is how you start the consulting relationship, right? It, it is. I mean, it's listening. We do a lot of listening. Yeah. And I like to ask questions. I've always been someone— this is what's been fun about doing interviews in these podcasts is I think I know someone and then I get to ask all these questions. I had no idea. Um, but with that, it's like you, you have to uncover the weird. You have to uncover What's different from this community that, that is like shocking or interesting or unique and what most people, they have it, but they have either felt uncomfortable of like sharing it. And since you're working in Pickle Ohio right now. Yeah. I don't know if you know this, but do you know that Pickle Ohio was the underwear capital of the world? I didn't know that.

 J**Jim Vickers** 31:56

That's a good one though.

J**Jason Duff** 31:57

But let me just tell you, and I'll tell you, I bet you if Pickle has not been a best hometown, I'm going to put the bet on this show right now in the next 3 years that will be, because they are on a trajectory to really identifying owning their weird. And I learned through my research with them, Captain Underpants— Ethan, you're probably too young. That was a huge comic. Do you remember that? That was a big comic. It was written and taught— that was all designed in Pickle Ohio. Really? Yes. But now they're a little embarrassed about that history today. But like, there's a way in every town to un- unpack those stories. And I think what I try to do is— how my brain works is I'm a little bit of a curator. Um, and a curator— and this is where I'd like to go with the segment next— is like, I can look at a building and I study its history, and I look at the architecture details and the way it's laid out, and I have a unique ability to figure out its highest and best use. But, but to do that— and I think that's the same thing of, of maybe going on is you can do an interview of someone and write a story. Yeah. But if you don't have the right headline, the right, uh, photography, the right way that it's laid out and presented— and I kind of want you to speak because I— the words and the writing of your magazine, I, I feel is really solid. I actually think what keeps me interested and keeps me reading is the way that it's curated. And that, that is, that is you can have really good writers, but you can have people that from graphic design or from layout, they bomb that. Can you maybe, maybe it's not just you, maybe it's other members of your team. How do you, how do you do all this?

J**Jim Vickers** 33:35

Yes, that's a great question. We talk about it constantly and we talk about the mix, the lineup, and it is curation. We talk, we talk about internally till they get sick of me talking about it. You know, I'll pick something apart of like, but is this really the right mix? I feel like, you know, so we go through a lot of that, but I think I'm glad you mentioned that. I think the writing, we always hold ourselves to a high standard of writing. We try to hire the best writers that we can afford, and they are all really good, who we use on a regular basis. We like having that consistency. But I think it's one of those things where it's like, you got to have tentpoles in there that you know you want to hit. Like 1803 is our history heritage home because it was the year Ohio was founded. The food and drink is called Farm and Table because of the agriculture, but also all the nightlife stuff and just the places that are landmark restaurants. And so we came up, when we redesigned the magazine, we said, what do we want those temples to be? And what do we want to curate stuff around? And that's how we do it. And headlines, we definitely workshop headlines to death. Is it too overly cutesy? Is it just too straightforward? Could it go on top of any other story and wouldn't matter? I always say headlines should work on two levels, which is a whole other podcast probably for me to explain that. But, you know, so I think the curation and from telling your own stories of town is knowing, like the old knowing what to leave out, you know, like kind of knowing what this snapshot of this, of Ohio is for November, December right now, this year, this is what this is. So it's something we discuss a lot. We have story idea meetings. Will— it's all of the team members bring ideas. Quite frankly, a lot of my team members bring many more ideas than I bring because I don't like to go in and say, I'm Jim and here are my 20 ideas. I want to hear what my team says. Yeah, I want to see what my team's getting excited about and my art director is excited about visually and from an artistic perspective of the photos. And it really does all work together. And I'm really, I'm really happy you mentioned that because we put a lot of work into it. I do think it separates great magazines from okay magazines. And I think the great magazines that understand their advertisers and understand their audience are the ones that survived and will continue to survive. I think the vinyl record has brought the idea of holding something in your hand back. You know, I think that popularity has— of an analog thing is just really powerful.

**J****Jason Duff** 36:03

I wrote an article and it actually got picked up by Entrepreneur Magazine once on the retro effect. And that's kind of what Jim was talking about, that there's no— this normal product life cycle that every industry kind of flows. And whether you talk about antiques or vinyl records, and I happen to believe books and magazines, and I shared this week, there was on CNN.com a whole article about how Barnes Noble is opening up a record number of stores and independent booksellers are expanding. Um, the fact they saw traffic kind of the last year, as I, I think I'm saying this right, was up 7% year over year. So there's— that's actually a positive trend. And, and I think it is because those of us that remember walking into a bookshop, the smell, the experience, the walking around— I, when I go to my Amazon, and yes, it feeds me, and AI and algorithms feeds me, yes, all the things that I should be reading, but then it's kind of keeping me, you know, I'm not, not exploring what what new things I want to learn and grow. And so I am excited about that retro effect bouncing back. And I do think we have a responsibility as economic development professionals, developers, you know, writers to help get people excited about what, what, what there is to see and explore. Yeah. And can you maybe share because we were talking before the episode started here, really what I was excited, you know, over your tenure and career of like traveling around, has there been any stories or anything that you look back, it's like, I'm really proud of that work, and like, this was fun and interesting and surprising to me as I got to write this story?

**J****Jim Vickers** 37:40

Yeah, I think— gosh, a couple stories I wrote personally. One was behind the scenes at NASA, uh, Plum Brook Center in Sandusky, where they filmed part of The Avengers, uh, the opening sequence of that big —

**J****Jason Duff** 37:53

like, I don't know, Sandusky. Yeah. Wow.

**J****Jim Vickers** 37:55

So they were having a NASA open house. And I was like, would you give me like a behind-the-scenes tour of NASA in advance? And they said, sure. And it was just amazing. Like, I saw the Orion service module there. They were testing it, shaking it to see how hard they could shake it before things fall off type thing. It was there to, you know, I mean, this was years ago at this point, you know, this was like 4 or 5, this was pre-COVID. So seeing that kind of stuff was really amazing. I did a really interesting profile on the artist Don Drum. I don't know if you guys are familiar with him. He's from the Akron area. Just, he takes industrial materials like, you know, Cor-Ten, which is on the outside of like a railroad boxcar, and makes a sculpture out of it. And he has a lot of cast aluminum pieces that are very popular in the Akron area. Just a super interesting dude. He— we did a story on him for his 80th birthday. And just one of the most fascinating guys I've ever met, was really at the forefront of his medium, was friends with like Dale Chihuly when he was at the forefront of the way he did glass. And then it just— he knew all these people that I was like, this is amazing. And he's like, let's go to lunch. And he was just a fun guy, but he has an amazing story. He did the sculpture at Kent State that has the bullet hole in it. And when they were investigating, they asked— brought him out there to look at it and say, which way do you think the bullet came based on how this went through there? And just stuff like that, just was like, man, he was like a witness to a part in these historic things. But he's just a cool guy and a pioneer. So those are two that really stick out to me. As far as like profile subjects. As far as towns, I love so many towns. I am a sucker for Marietta though. I love that town. That's a great time. Just so much history, I had no idea. And then, you know, towns like Worcester and Medina, they're really, really vibrant towns with lots of restaurants.

**J****Jason Duff** 39:41

Christmas is magical.

**J****Jim Vickers** 39:42

Yeah, and you can go, yeah, you know, spend a day there, you know, and it's just amazing. So those are a couple things that kind of come to mind off the top of my head. I don't know if that answered your question, but—

J**Jason Duff** 39:51

Yeah, it does. I love that you travel and get to meet those unique people, and it's always the things that surprise you. One of my favorite recent visits has been to Dresden, Ohio. And Dresden, Ohio was the home of Longaberger Baskets, and we hosted Robert and Ronnie on the podcast. And what I loved about their story is in the heyday when Dresden and its basket empire, billion-dollar basket empire, was, was there, they were sales consultants that were some of the, like, best sales consultants in the country. And they fell in love with that whole vision that Dave Longenberger built. And of course, when Dave passed away, there's been a lot of changes in Dresden, Ohio. But what is still there is this culture for building and making things. And the new Dresden and Company that manufactures and creates The next generation of baskets is coming out of this whole new generation of makers and creators and doers. And if you've not been there recently, that's another one that is a town that I say is on the move. And part of it is, of course, the legacy and history of what's there, but now how they're innovating with it. Yeah, super cool. Thank you both for giving a shout out to those communities. I did want to highlight this just because I took the time to look through our catalog of episodes, but I was pretty proud to say that 3 out of the 5 award winners for the Best Hometown Award this year, we've had guests, you know, representing that community on the podcast. So we've already— there's one in addition that even though they weren't on the show, we've done— and Hilliard done an incredible amount to support, you know, things that are happening in there too. Now, the one that's on my list that I was a shout out that we got to get to is McConnellsville.

J**Jim Vickers** 41:38

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

J

**Jason Duff** 41:38

Yeah. So that's one that yet to put— one's putting communities on our map. Yeah, for sure. But just I'm going to highlight their episodes real quick with Urbana. Episode 56 with Jamin Selman is one of the entrepreneurs that are doing great stuff. Bryan, Ohio. We talked about Amy Miller quite a bit. That's episode 48. If you want to learn more about that, episode 61, we had Megan and Rob Fry with the Crooked Can, which I would say was a catalyst to a lot of the development that has happened in their historic downtown there. And Andrew Hirsch of Westward Collective. And Andy Warnock and Andrew are — just opened up the new winery that's there in Hilliard. So that's another, another mention for another podcast guest. Yeah, absolutely. So it's cool. But one thing I wanted to highlight by saying all that is that these people aren't doing them alone or doing all of this alone. They're leaning on each other. I mean, it's no coincidence that they've, you know, build a relationship with Jason and other developers and entrepreneurs in the area. Like, they are, you know, humble and learning from other people and collaborating, right? That's another way. Like, if you want to be a part of these communities that are seeing, you know, success and being recognized by Ohio Magazine, just a few tips. And I think just me being a part of the show, I'm recognizing, you know, these movers and shakers that we're seeing these communities win. Which is really cool. And then the flip side for our listeners, we are learning through these interviews. Absolutely, yeah. And that's the thing is that it's all these communities are kind of rising together because we're sharing, just like learning about advertising and PR and marketing. Like that advice is immensely helpful to elevate everything that we're doing, so. Yeah, absolutely. Well, thanks for covering a lot of that material, but I want to move us into a fun segment of the show here, our rapid fire. Q&A.

J

**Jim Vickers** 43:27

All right.

J

**Jason Duff** 43:27

Um, you're ready for these hard questions? Love it. Uh, first one, are you a Coke or Pepsi guy? Coke.

J

**Jim Vickers** 43:33

Coke, yes. Yeah, Diet Coke, but Coke.

J

**Jason Duff** 43:35

Yeah, my man. I was— see, the same. I'm a Diet Coke person too.

J

**Jim Vickers** 43:38

Yeah. Have you tried the Oreo Coke?

J

**Jason Duff** 43:39

Oh yeah, it's Oreo Coke.

J

**Jim Vickers** 43:41

Yeah, I don't love it. Don't like it? Just— yeah, I just wondered if you tried it.

J

**Jason Duff** 43:44

Well, I have mixed— well, maybe I haven't had an Oreo Coke. I've had Oreos with Diet Coke.

J

**Jim Vickers** 43:48

Oh, okay. There's an Oreo Coke out there now. I'm just saying, like, I'm not a fan of that one.

J

**Jason Duff** 43:52

I've tried it, I don't love it. They've tried a lot of funky flavors, that's for sure.

J

**Jim Vickers** 43:56

I thought it'd be great and it was like, eh.

J

**Jason Duff** 43:57

I was just down in Tennessee earlier this week and asked for a Pepsi product. I almost got laughed out of the restaurant. Oh yeah, down south, not a fan. Yeah, I know. Great. Next question is outside of Bellefontaine. I know we've got a lot of great restaurants here and we highlight them a lot, but what is one community with several great restaurants that our listeners should absolutely go and check out?

J

**Jim Vickers** 44:17

Oh gosh, that's Oh, well. I— Stumped him. Yeah, I think— I'm not going to know all the restaurants off the top of my head. But Medina is one. I mentioned that in passing. They have such a critical mass of just every business space, I feel, in that area is filled. And they have everything from sit-down nice restaurants to like— I think it's like a pizza shop in an old courthouse or something like that, like an old wooden building that served as their courthouse once upon a time. I might have the slightly wrong history.

J

**Jason Duff** 44:47

Beautiful pottery store.

J

**Jim Vickers** 44:48

Something like that. There's a beautiful pottery store. There's not a Starbucks to be seen, you know? And I asked, I said, how in the world do you not have a Starbucks here? Like, how did you keep them out, I guess, quote unquote. And she said, you know, when these come up, they go quick. So it's very vibrant. I feel like Medina is awesome. Great town. Worcester has a lot of going for it too. I feel like they have a lot of places, same kind of deal where you can go there and it feels like you're having an experience over the course of a day with everything you can do there.

J

**Jason Duff** 45:16

Yeah, cool. Thank you. And the last one I have for you here is if you weren't doing this kind of work, what would you be doing?

J

**Jim Vickers** 45:22

Oh my gosh.

J

**Jason Duff** 45:24

That's always— that's a trick.

J

**Jim Vickers** 45:25

That is a great— that is a great question. I don't know. I really do like dogs, but I don't think being a dog walker would really pay the bills. But it's a very, you know, if you could— I mean, I do enjoy working with animals. I did volunteer at an animal shelter, at the dog shelter in Summit County when I lived there. And So probably something along those lines.

J

**Jason Duff** 45:45

I'm really happy you brought that up because he does not yet know. I'm going to show him where it's at, but we're getting a new portable pet wash. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. Station. And we have, and it's right going to be right here in the downtown. And we have a space directly next to it that would be perfect for a pet boutique.

J

**Jim Vickers** 46:01

All right.

J

**Jason Duff** 46:02

For anyone listening. Yeah. Well, I'll get the lease papers as Jim's walking out.

J

**Jim Vickers** 46:07

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's good to have a fallback plan, right? So I can always do that.

J

**Jason Duff** 46:11

When you're done with Iowa Magazine, we're ready for you. Um, do you have any pets of your own? I do.

J

**Jim Vickers** 46:16

I have one dog. He turned 5 yesterday. His name's Ted. He's, uh, kind of like a Jack Russell Terrier mix. Okay. I don't know what— I don't know what he is, to be honest with you, but that's what he looks like.

J

**Jason Duff** 46:24

Yeah, I love it.

J

**Jim Vickers** 46:25

Cool.

J

**Jason Duff** 46:26

That's awesome. And then just a couple closing questions for you here. Uh, the first one is, what is one professional development resource that was impactful for you along your professional journey?

J

**Jim Vickers** 46:35

Gosh, um, this is very basic, but The fact that the AP— I have two answers. One is the AP Stylebook being digital has like changed my life over the past 15 years since I've had it. We follow AP Style, the magazine. We used to have physical books we lugged around that you had to buy a new one every year because they changed something. So that has just taught me just opening that up and looking up things like what are the rules about dimensions? You know, what are the rules about ages? Which sounds very nerdy, but it's very helpful if you can recall that off the top of your head. That's been very good. Secondly, there's a podcast I listen to a lot that I've brought into my work called The Minimalists. I don't know if you're aware of them.

J

**Jason Duff** 47:12

Heard of it. Heard of it.

J

**Jim Vickers** 47:13

Yeah. So Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus are from the Dayton area.

J

**Jason Duff** 47:17

Okay.

J

**Jim Vickers** 47:17

They started it. They have a couple of documentaries on Netflix. They have a weekly podcast. Highly recommend getting the Patreon level, which I do. But the idea is living a meaningful life with less in every element of your life, not just less clutter, but less commitments, less trying to jam everything into your week, and just explores this idea of making time for what matters.

J

**Jason Duff** 47:40

Yeah.

J

**Jim Vickers** 47:40

And it is a fascinating lesson every week. And you really do— does stick with you and you bring it into— I brought it into work a lot. Like, what is the most important thing about what we're doing here? And what do I need to be focused on this week? And what do I need to make room for that really matters here? And that's been really beneficial to me. I highly recommend that podcast.

J

**Jason Duff** 48:00

Yeah, that's a good recommendation. I think I've seen their documentary on Netflix. I didn't realize they're from Ohio, though.

J

**Jim Vickers** 48:05

Yes, they're from the Dayton area. They're based in California now. And Ryan is no longer on the show on a regular basis. A guy named T.K. Coleman, who's excellent, is on there with them. He comes back, though, and is still part of it. He just lives in Montana now. But yeah, they grew up in Dayton and they, they've really had a lot of success with that.

J

**Jason Duff** 48:22

Yeah, super cool. Great recommendation. And then the last thing is, where can people follow you, the magazine. Yes, thank you. And if they wanted to sign up for the magazine, how do they do that?

J

**Jim Vickers** 48:32

OhioMagazine.com/subscribe. If you just want to try to get our newsletters and see if you like us, OhioMagazine.com/newsletters. You can sign up for as many or as few as you would like. We have a number of different ones. And then social media, we're @OhioMagazine everywhere. But we'd love to have you following us everywhere or any of those places. But those are the big places to hit us. And OhioMagazine.com has our content obviously as well. Although we— I do think it is best enjoyed on paper.

J

**Jason Duff** 49:02

So yes, yes, I'm probably going to get this autographed before he leaves the studio. Yes, do it. Do it. On that note, we're going to wrap up. But Ethan, if you see Nick dropped, can you grab those real quick?

J

**Jim Vickers** 49:12

You got the long arms.

**J****Jason Duff** 49:13

You can do that. But I am here to say these are hot off the press. But, you know, one thing that I think ties this together that we're you know, trying to take some thought leadership and ownership of is Christmas is really important for towns. Yes. And I happen to be in Grapevine, Texas, probably about 2 years ago, and I met some of the community leaders there. And about 10 years ago, Grapevine planted the flag and said, we want to make our town really extra special for Christmas. And so we declared ourselves as Texas's Christmas capital. They just— Texas is Ohio's Christmas capital. Well, it was in Texas. Oh, okay. Yeah, but Here's what we're doing in Bellefontaine. And part of it is, is as I travel to other towns and you mentioned many of them, it was their parades. It was the places to get photography. It was the places to eat, to shop, to get coffee and hot chocolate. And I will tell you, this year we're going to have— we're declaring it, we're planting our flag. And my hope is, is in the future, Jim, you and your team can come back and enjoy everything around here for Christmas. But we will send you home with a sticker. All right, you will be official. But, uh, yeah, no, I hope everyone— we're heading in here, um, into the Christmas season. I know next week we've got Thanksgiving coming up, but, uh, just pick up your copy of Ohio Magazine, particularly the Holiday Classics Edition. I've got all the places that I've yet to travel. You'll see that there's my yellow sticky notes here. But, uh, just thank you for being a guest and sharing your knowledge, your advice, and ways towns can promote themselves and also all the cool places that we have here.

**J****Jim Vickers** 50:49

Of course, it's been my pleasure. It's been wonderful. Thank you.

**E****Ethan DeLeon** 50:51

Thanks. Thanks for tuning in on this episode of the Small Nation Podcast.

**E****Ethan DeLeon** 50:54

We hope that conversation proved valuable to you. And if you enjoyed it, be sure to share the episode and follow the show on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or your favorite podcasting platform. You can also subscribe to the Small Nation YouTube channel if you prefer to watch your episodes. Follow Small Nation on social media and we'll see you in the next episode.