Episode 109

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content creation, storytelling, Champion City Media, Springfield Ohio, positive community content, social media strategy, going viral, social proof, DewBricks LEGO channel, Vohnt, Dewz Crew, authenticity versus AI, business partnerships, run the numbers then take the leap

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Ethan Dewhurst, Ethan DeLeon

Ethan Dewhurst 00:00

As you build businesses and become more successful in those businesses, it's very easy to get lazy, complacent, or cocky, and to think you can do business anywhere and do anything. So if I were to tell myself something differently is don't just try things that sound like fun or a challenge. Stick to what you're good at.

Ethan DeLeon 00:19

The Small Nation Podcast is brought to you by CoverLink Insurance, where people are more important than policy. Unpack lessons from entrepreneurs, break down development strategies, and dive deep into small town success. This is the Small Nation Podcast.

Jason Duff 00:38

Hey guys, it's Jason Duff. I'm the founder of Small Nation. Welcome to the podcast. I'm here in the studio today with Ethan Dewhurst, who has been a longtime friend. Ethan has so many different titles that I could describe, but probably one of my favorite is he is a professional Lego builder.

Ethan Dewhurst 00:54

Now I wanna say professional Lego builder, but I am a nerd for the Legos.

Jason Duff 00:59

Oh, I love Legos.

Ethan Dewhurst 01:00

I love it so much. It's so fun. So like we started, doing it just for fun. And I've been doing that since I was a kid. However, during COVID it unleashed—

Jason Duff 01:11

Probably blew up. What are we gonna do when we're at home all the time? Right?

Ethan Dewhurst 01:14

Lego was the answer for me. So, yeah, I started building like crazy during COVID and built quite a collection so far, but having a blast.

Jason Duff 01:22

Well, we're gonna unpack that, and we're gonna talk about, you know, the Lego channel that has just blown up, but also just the whole theme today about content creation and the importance of like how we storytell, but then also all the different channels and ways that we can do it. And now there's so many breakthroughs that are happening that particularly apply to like small and independent businesses, shops, brands, and just really excited to unpack that. But let's go back and kind of unpack how you found Ohio, 'cause I think that's really interesting. And when we first met, it was in the town of Springfield, Ohio.

Ethan Dewhurst 01:55

Yeah, yeah. So I found Ohio because my family moved. But when I, I was born in New England and then my family moved for work, so I was relocated to Ohio. But I would say, and that was when I was 3, but I would say I found Ohio after college. And that's where I started appreciating Ohio because as my family and siblings would graduate, they would all go back to what we would deem home, which is New England. I was the first to stay in Ohio. And that's where I really started to see my hometown for the first time. grew up in Springfield, but I was never in Springfield growing up. We're always in Columbus or different areas wherever sports would take us. But after college, I started spending more time in downtown Springfield, which I always grew up thinking of as a ghost town, but seeing the potential for the first time in Springfield, Ohio. And that's where I started my roots.

Jason Duff 02:47

Well, Springfield was famous in its history. What are some of the things that for people that might be new to Springfield, Ohio, that might be notable?

Ethan Dewhurst 02:55

Yeah, so it's famous for a lot of industrial items, right? So when you think about the coffins, making coffins there, when you think about making— I

Jason Duff 03:05

mean, I think about coffins a lot, but it's like one of those things that it really, there's an industry behind that, right?

Ethan Dewhurst 03:09

Yeah, and the Casket Building was one of my favorite buildings in Springfield. But then also like the manufacturing spots, when you talk about Tractor Supplies.

Jason Duff 03:21

Navistar was a really big company there.

Ethan Dewhurst 03:23

Exactly right. And so, But you're also within the inventor's belt. So outside of Springfield, you have Dayton with the—

Jason Duff 03:32

The Wright brothers.

Ethan Dewhurst 03:33

Yeah, you have the Wright brothers with the planes, but you also have like the lesser known things like the cash register coming around. So just Ohio and Central Ohio in general is really cool. But what really stood out about Springfield was how it was the Hollywood back in the day. So not just on just the industrial boom, But it used to be like almost like movie stars. Um, and that inspired me being on the video side. It's like, let's bring that energy back. If you see the old photos of Springfield, uh, back in its heyday, it's a whole different town. Uh, 2015, which is when I really started settling down in Springfield to start my own businesses, it didn't have that energy. So that was one of my personal things with me and my friends. We're like, how do we bring that energy back and how do we showcase the currently good and the future potential of Springfield. And that was fun. That was from 2015 to 2018.

Jason Duff 04:28

Well, I remember in 2015, at that time, you know, I'm an OG Facebook user. So like literally in 2005, 2006 when it came out, really spent a lot of time on Facebook as a channel to start promoting what was happening in my towns and my communities. And I came across a video that you had done, and I think it was you and another co-host of like high energy, giving me this behind the scenes tour in Springfield, Ohio. And I was like, I gotta meet these guys. And tell us like, what was that video that kind of springboarded your company?

Ethan Dewhurst 05:01

Yeah, so we started a media company in 2015, and then also 2015, 2016 era, we started a channel called Springfield, USA. The thought process behind that is there's like 50+ Springfields across America that all have their unique stories, I've watched The

Jason Duff 05:19

Simpsons.

Ethan Dewhurst 05:19

Yeah, but are often overlooked, right? And we felt the same thing was happening in Springfield, Ohio. So how that channel started is we wanted to be a voice of positivity, you know, so, so be the positive that you want to see. There's so much negativity in small towns. It's very easy to say something's not right, I'm gonna, like, point that out, but what's missed is all the potential all the currently good. So when we started Springfield USA with me and my friends, we wanted to just showcase the assets, natural assets, business assets, whatever that may be right here. Because like we said in the beginning of this podcast, I grew up in Springfield and knew nothing about Springfield. So that was really the launchpad to what Springfield USA was, which is just a voice of positivity. 2 guys, 3 guys, a group of friends having fun, right here in Springfield, Ohio.

Jason Duff 06:12

Well, I think what came from that video is you started seeing the comments roll in of like people that were either like surprised or excited or like, you know, finding a way to engage with that video of giving them their version of the story they want to tell. And then the power of that, once those comments start coming in, people start hitting share. And I happened to be one of those people that was seeing and thinking of Springfield in a different light. And reflecting on the work that we were doing in Bellefontaine, I also desired a better way to storytell not only the starting of my company, but also being able to highlight the great things happening here in town. And that's when we met. And we did a really— a video here on our YouTube channel in downtown Bellefontaine called the Bellefontaine Fun video. And I love because Mackenzie, who is one of the people in the video, she opens up in this video saying, how do you spell Bellefontaine? F-U-N. And then Ethan with his team helped us create like all these fun things that we did. It was like a day in the winter when it snowed, like, like it was perfect snow, like 3 to 6 inches of snow. Your team showed up. We had multiple cameras, we had a sound crew, and I think in 12 hours we recorded more stuff than maybe you have ever done in one day. We packed a lot. into one day that day.

Ethan Dewhurst 07:32

Now, it was fantastic. So really the goal was everybody knows negativity sells and negativity starts conversations online, but so does positivity. And positivity is just a little bit harder, but it's also way more refreshing, way more rewarding. So that's what we're doing at Springfield USA. And that's the first thing that when you called us up that you wanted to do is like, hey, we have so many assets here in Bellefontaine, we just need to showcase them. And We were even, even though it was a really long day, we weren't like scratching for things to do. We were like cutting things out. We're like, we can't fit this in, we can't fit this in. But what it really was, it was putting together a cast where everybody could see themselves in it. So an older member, a younger member, a crazier member, whatever that may be. So that way the viewer can say, okay, there's something for everybody in Bellefontaine. And we had a blast that day going all over showcasing. what to do here. And what was really cool is when you released that, you connected with different viewers in different ways. Some people really resonated with this location, this activity, and now they're sharing their positivity, their story, because you were the fuel that started the fire. But what's so great about social media is the fire spread, and especially when it's a positive fire, that is very encouraging.

J **Jason Duff** 08:48

So let's walk us through what happened next. That company Champion City Media, it still exists, but out of that you started listening to your customers and there were new needs and new opportunities that you wanted to explore and also some things personally that you were just passionate about. Like what came after that?

E **Ethan Dewhurst** 09:05

So that launched a whole kind of brand of how to help other cities do that. So we had, you know, kind of very similar to Small Nation but only for media. So we were helping Buffalo, we were helping different towns that maybe had the heydays in the past, but how do you revitalize that? But Champion City Media was very much a commercial company. We were focusing more on corporate businesses. But the reason it's called Champion City Media is because we started in Springfield, which is the champion city. But we were quickly grew to be one of the largest. We were top 3 largest municipality companies that focused on making positive content or educational content for cities. And so that's how Champion City evolved. We were a government business that serviced small cities to how to share their story and connect with their audience. So it went from what we were doing to now helping cities and small towns share their stories and connect with their audience.

J **Jason Duff** 10:05

And you spoke about government, like, working with a city or a municipality, or in some case with your next business, an airport. Like, what— how do you get and connect with those people? Sometimes for a small business owner, it can seem really, you know, intimidating, all the processes to actually go through. What was kind of your steps of actually connecting with government companies and organizations?

E **Ethan Dewhurst** 10:29

Yeah, the number one thing that I had to keep in mind, these are just people. They can be very intimidating thinking about, hey, I'm sitting down with the mayor, the city manager, the council, etc. But these are just community members that hopefully love their small town. So you can find that connection point. So yes, do they have some level of power? That can be intimidating. And maybe I don't I don't feel like I should be in that chair. But if you can figure out how to connect with them, in our sense, it was through positivity and loving our community and how can we help. That's the best way to sit down with them. But they want to help their city. Mm-hmm. So what are their goals? How can you help them with those goals? That's why those conversations became easy. And positivity, which is gonna be like the theme of everything I try to do, is how do you have a positive voice through your content? To have that. So we were getting so many inbound leads just because our content really stood out for being positive.

J **Jason Duff** 11:23

So to generate that content that's not like the same things that everyone else is producing, what's your process with that?

Ethan Dewhurst 11:29

So when it comes to like what we did with the fun video in Bellefontaine, you start with what you wanna showcase and then what is its character. What we say at Champion City Media is we don't make a Champion City Media video, we make our clients' videos. You really gotta learn what makes you special, what makes this town special, or what makes this business special, hear their stories. Then what we're good at is how do we share their stories in a way that's gonna connect with the viewer? So we're really addicted to consumer psychology and understanding, you know, our client might care about this, but we know our audience cares about this. How do we accomplish those goals in a way that's gonna resonate with the audience we're trying to reach? And that's why each video feels so different is 'cause that's our approach.

Jason Duff 12:14

And to develop something that's different, like the day that you go into schedule and shoot, you know, how do you really create the magic? And that is like something that you can't script out. Sometimes it's gotta be spontaneous. Like how do you show that side of the lens to have that psychology connection with someone that's watching it?

Ethan Dewhurst 12:34

Yeah, so whether I be in front of camera or behind camera directing, Energy is everything. That's my style. So if I want the cast or people to emulate a certain emotion or energy, like, I gotta bring it. So like, remember that it was a 12-hour day, but like, I was like—

Jason Duff 12:50

You were hyped up.

Ethan Dewhurst 12:51

I was hyped up that day. And right, and that's contagious. And so people, when they— even when you're talking to them on the phone, you can hear a smile. That's even more so on video. So like, the people on camera have to be contagious. So my style is I'm gonna bring it even though I'm behind camera. I'm gonna bring it so that way Everybody, in my opinion, can make a video. We're in 2026 right now. Everybody can make a video. What we really focus on is making it the most fun experience of making the video, because that will translate to making it a good video if the people on camera had fun.

Jason Duff 13:23

I love that. You know, it is kind of hearing the, the power of developing content, creating a process and building a team that helped you start this company to spotlight and, and really allow communities to shine in a positive way. This, by building this business and having that lens, has helped you create other businesses. And so much, in fact, that you've got, you know, what became a startup that grew into, you know, being in all of these airports around the country. So tell us a little bit about how did Vaunt find you, or how did you create and find and build Vaunt?

Ethan Dewhurst 13:57

Yeah, so Vaunt is an on-demand valet car care solution. So it has nothing to do with my background in media, But the— it really started with we were really frustrated with car care. And I hate—

Jason Duff 14:10

You mean you don't like cleaning your car?

Ethan Dewhurst 14:11

Yeah. I don't like servicing my car. Who likes cleaning their car, right? I don't like cleaning my car. And more importantly, I don't like going to the industry standards to get my car done where if I go into an oil change, I'm gonna get upsold on all these other services. So it was really— there's a lot of industry friction already, and we felt it as busy business owners or entrepreneurs. When do we have time to do that? So the model of Vohnt really started with, how do we make this the most convenient? So before we were in airports, now we're in airports, but we started downtown Columbus, and we were in each of the Skyline buildings. Yeah. People would go to work. They'd book on our app. They could select a car detail, interior, exterior, an oil change, tire replacement, whatever that may be, and it'd be done and ready for them by the time they get back. So they book it. They drop their key in our digital locker. We— our valet would pick up their key, pick up their car, service it, return it. And so by the time they're done with work, they would just pick it up. So we really solved the convenience side, and we never upsold once because you're not going in— if you're doing an oil change, we're not going to say, hey, you really need your brakes done, or this, that. We just— we want the customer to think like they uploaded their car to the cloud, and that's how it feels. And that's when it launched into the airport. And that's where the company really took off is in the airport business. So when you go to take a flight, now instead of having to get that card done on the operational side in 3 hours, we have statistically around 3 days to get that service done. So our output input exploded, and then we can expand to different airports.

Jason Duff 15:47

Well, it's really impressive. So I fly in and out of Port Columbus, which now is John Glenn Columbus Airport, and I think it's level 4 that you see, it is all purple. Yeah. And it is branded with Vohnt. And even in the airport, the banners, the kiosk, you can see someone really thought through that to make it as convenient and easy for people that parking at the airport that don't want to do those things, like you said, that we know have to get done but don't want to do. And so that company is a company you have scaled and grown. learned a ton from, but that has also led you into other ventures. Is that right?

Ethan Dewhurst 16:24

Yeah. So really how we grew Champion Columbus and our media company has helped all the other businesses. So when we were growing Champion City Media, we got connected with One Columbus. Yeah. And, and we worked with them on the economic side because we're on the municipality side. They connected us to the airport, and that's where we really sat down with the team there and have built a really good relationship with those airports. And what's great about Vohnt is we were the first ones to do it with a tech solution. There's a lot of car care companies out there, but not with a 24/7 contactless solution. So once we were in one airport, there's only really 150 big airports in the country, and that's where it spread quickly. But what I look at when we start other businesses now is I consider every business to be a media company, or it needs to be a marketing powerhouse. So Champion City Media's real goal now is, okay, if we're gonna launch business X, how are we gonna stand out on the market side? If we're gonna launch business Y, how are we gonna really stand out that way? So Champion City Media has been the fuel to my entrepreneur itch.

Jason Duff 17:36

It's really incredible watching how you started. with that first video, video got into the municipality and the government side, and then took an idea of a frustration and grew that and scaled it with a company. But like you said, everything goes back to media and to content. And I wanna circle back to your passion about like bricks, right? 15-year-old version of Ethan, like get us in, in the head of like building Legos and that passion and how the idea and bubble went off. You know, you're doing all this work for all your clients. helping them build their channels, create content for them. Where was the— when was the light bulb that went off that say, I wanna do this for myself?

Ethan Dewhurst 18:18

Yeah. So, uh, growing up, I was the first person in my family not to be like, uh, an engineer, doctor, scientist, whatever that may be. Um, but where all of our creative, uh, juices did connect was building Lego. Um, so growing up, we would always build. We just had bins, very little. We didn't really, Like, I personally didn't have the money to buy Lego sets, but we'd have bins and bins of Legos. We would just be creating from scratch. Some of my best memories are doing that. And so, as we are helping other businesses grow and make make them famous, make them rich, etc. Through our techniques, I was really seeing the opportunity in social media, and I was like, I need to do this for myself, my own brand, not only for my own success, but also to use as a model for future clients. And so I do believe riches are in the niches. So when it comes to that, what was my niche? What did I want to focus on? And I did pick LEGO sets and the LEGO community to be my niche. And so we started Do Bricks, which is just a social page. Started that about 2 years ago, and we really wanted to stand out in a very saturated LEGO landscape. A lot of LEGO creators out there that are doing great things. So we wanted to stand out there, but it's been really incredible how that has grown over the past 2 years and the opportunities that a LEGO channel has been able to open.

Jason Duff 19:47

For people that haven't been to your channel yet, first off, you need to check it out. But can you give some of your, like, favorite backdrops and favorite LEGOs that you've built and where you built them?

Ethan Dewhurst 19:57

Yeah, so when we first started during COVID even before we started the channel, I was just building all the time. It would be like maybe 3,000 to 5,000-piece set a day.

Jason Duff 20:07

That's impressive speed, by the way.

Ethan Dewhurst 20:09

Yeah, as far as speed goes, yeah, I'm probably one of the fastest builders. That's insane. That's really good. But we build, we build a lot, and that's with doing work too. It wasn't like I'm just doing LEGO. But the, the collection just grew, and then it became one of the most collection— most impressive collections online and in the world. And so I was like, I got to start filming this. And that's where it really came together. So we started just doing display videos and different walkthrough videos. It blew up. We were one of the fastest growing toy channels in the world, and then the fastest growing LEGO channel in the world. And then my wife and I love to travel. And after starting Vaunt, we used to travel, but Vaunt took a lot of our time. So we didn't travel for a whole year. Saying that out loud doesn't sound like that long, but it felt like long to us. So we started a series called LEGO On Location. Totally—

Jason Duff 21:02

LEGO On Location, I like that.

Ethan Dewhurst 21:04

Yeah, it was fun. It had a ring to it, it was natural. And so we self-funded that. It was all out of our pockets to kind of travel to different places and then build the sets that we were there. But it has now gotten picked up to be a series, and it's been a really fun job. We get to travel We built the pyramids in Egypt. We built Eiffel Tower in Paris. We built Himeji Castle in Japan, Trevi Fountain in Rome, and just been working with a lot of tourism boards, working with a lot of governments and local businesses and national businesses, airports and airlines. So what's really cool is like, yes, we have this Lego channel, but it's really been bringing all the businesses together. My municipality work and learning how to do government contracts. Well, now the French government is one of our clients. We're working with the embassy out in Cairo, Egypt. Like, that background has really helped. Then we're in all these airports. Well, one of my biggest sponsors when it comes to travel is an airport that works with Vant. So now, for our travel location, we will fly out of the airport, talk about the airport, But that happened because we launched Font. Then we sit down on the Champions City Media side, and now we can negotiate with all these hotel brands, travel brands, et cetera. And we're kind of making our own little ecosystem.

Jason Duff 22:24

It is so impressive. And just for those of you that haven't visited, you've got to check out this channel to actually see some of these impressive places that you're literally with the pyramids behind you in Giza, and you're building a model Lego pyramid, which is just super cool.

Ethan Dewhurst 22:40

And what's super fun in my opinion is anybody can do. But if if you watch any of my videos, I didn't want to talk about the Lego. I wanted to use the Lego as a a channel to educate. So if you watch any Lego on location videos, we're building and we're building the Eiffel Tower in front of the Eiffel Tower. But the whole time we're just talking about the history of France, history of Paris, or history of Eiffel Tower. So it really has become a travel show. an educational thing. So that way, we're not just creating brain rot, we're creating content that you're gonna have fun watching, learn from. But now, because, you know, we do some MOCs, which stands for— it's MOC, stands for My Own Creation. But where we really want to focus is in pre-built or pre-designed LEGO sets. So that way, as you watch it, you're like, I can do that. Yeah. You know, it doesn't— it eliminates the barrier of entry. where a kid can then go by the Pyramid of Giza, learn, listen, or watch the videos as they do it, and then feel a part of that journey.

Jason Duff 23:42

That's a great way to help people that may be new to building Legos get there quicker and teach them about that. For people that are maybe starting in that content creation journey and building their own channel, can you speak a little bit of how some videos like get zero traction to other videos? Like, what are the differences to the ones that get millions of views?

Ethan Dewhurst 24:04

So something that we have been able to learn through our client work is how to go viral. And so a lot of people say, guys, I'll teach you how to go viral, be lucky. And I could not be further away from that as possible. It is an algorithm. That means it is an equation, and that means you can solve it, okay? So you have to know the data of each algorithm. YouTube's gonna be different than TikTok. TikTok's gonna be different than Instagram. People treat it like I'm just gonna post it on anything. It's not, that's not the case. So you gotta know the algorithm. Instagram's gonna really focus on skip rate retention even more so than shares. Shares used to be the big thing just a few months ago, right? And so when it comes to what works, if you want to do content creation in social media, my number one thing is you first have to do content forensics. And what that means is like, don't be ashamed of just doom scrolling, but you're not just scrolling and moving forward. If a video goes viral that's in your niche or not in your niche, you got to figure out why that went viral. So you got to analyze it. And my number one thing is like, oh man, how did that go viral? People just like cast it off random. My number one advice to people that are new to this is that the answer to its virality is always in the comments. People will tell you why it went viral. They will be saying something happened in the background, or I thought this was that. If you just read the comments, it'll tell you 5 different things that caught people's attention. Was it educational? Was it something they didn't know? Was it something that was weird, random, scared them? Whatever it may be, people are gonna talk about their experience with that video, so the answer is there. That's the easiest way to start on content forensics. Then you got to learn that and just say, okay, well, how do I make a video that captures the attention, has a low skip rate, retains that attention, so it has a long duration watch time, and then drives action, a like, comment, or share. It really is a science.

Jason Duff 26:04

I think that's really helpful, and it keeps evolving, that science does. Like, for you, how do you stay fresh on a lot of those forensics that keeps you sharp as a creator and a practitioner?

Ethan Dewhurst 26:18

Yeah, how you stay fresh. To do forensics, you have to have new bodies, right? So you have to keep being addicted and watching what's working. Yeah. And following up with trends. So when it comes to analyzing what is working, you have to spend time on the apps. You can't just come in and say, well, I'm gonna create this 'cause I wanna create this. That's fine, and sometimes that will work, but then you're kinda getting into the, is it lucky or is it not lucky? Whereas we can craft a video that we know is gonna go viral 98% of the time.

Ethan DeLeon 26:47

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Jason Duff 26:58

Today we are walking around in a physical historic downtown in Bellefontaine. Um, you were here 10 years ago. You've seen a lot of shifts, and of course in that time, a lot of thing in content creation and media has shifted. What are some of the themes for small business owners that may be thinking, that you think they should really be working on in their businesses today?

Ethan Dewhurst 27:20

Yeah. So it's, it's pretty interesting walking down Bellefontaine. I, I know we were here a couple years ago, but let's use the example of when we were here 10 years ago. Facebook was king. Right? So YouTube was good, but very—

Jason Duff 27:32

You could post an image on Facebook, and it would get that engagement.

Ethan Dewhurst 27:35

Right? And so even when we were doing a tour downtown, it was very much, oh, man, you could go viral here. You could go— you could really tell the story here. You could connect the audience here. That's just how my brain's always working now, right, for wrong. Like, sometimes it gets annoying. But the, um, when it comes to small businesses, you got to first think, who is your target audience? That could be ethnicity, that could be age, that could be demographic, whatever that may be. Then the data will tell you, well, that's on this platform or that platform, or be on these 3 platforms. Okay, then once you determine who your target audience, which platform it is, then you got to decide what is working on those platforms. So it goes back to the content forensics. Search your industry. What is going viral? What is not going viral? Just search in general, um, what is going viral. And then the easiest way, the easiest way to go viral if you're not, uh, with a background of content, you're like, it's very overwhelming to do content creation if you have no, uh, experience on how to use a camera. The number one comfort is everyone's using their phone, so use your phone. Okay, then pick what is already working. And make it your own. Don't look at a video and say, I'm going to copy that frame for frame. There's no respect in that. Could work, but there's no respect in that. But what you want to do is say, okay, what was their hook? How do I adapt that? How do I take that trend and make it relevant to my business? And so we will work with businesses locally and across the country, get tens of millions of views per month by doing what we call trend flipping. There's already a trend out there. We're going to be one month to 2 months late on that trend, but flip the ending. So people have enough familiar— familiarity to know what the trend is, but then we catch them off guard with a different flip.

Jason Duff 29:18

Can you give an example of that?

Ethan Dewhurst 29:19

Yeah. So when there was a trend where outside a storefront, a walkerby would be passing 2 workers, a worker would trip them, they would bring out a POS system, the credit card would hit, it would ding, and they would hand them that coffee or that book, etcetera. And they're like, well, I didn't buy it, but Okay, so that was going viral for months. And so we were late to the game, but I tell our customers, do you want to be on the game and always stressed? You can do that. It's a whole different model, but you have to be quick on that if you wanna do that trend. Or you can, what we call a trend flip. And so here's an example of trend flip. We did the same model. You're walking by, you get tripped, you swipe the card, And they hand you this thing. We just made that thing very expensive, $600, $1,000 thing. And he's like, it's the exact same model of the trend. He's like, whoa, what happened? But then the credit card gets declined and he just sprints off, right? So they know what to expect. And then we triggered something different. It's funny. Now he's not forced to buy something. They said it's yours. And then he runs and they chase him. As simple as that. They got 10.7 million views in a week. Wow. And it 3x, not just that video, but it 3x the, the business's revenue for monthly revenue by the second month.

Jason Duff 30:41

What, as you look into the crystal ball, what, what do you think's going to be happening, you know, in the digital space for content creators? I, I know Gary Vee, a lot of us listen to Gary, and Gary has talked a lot about TikTok and, you know, shifts and changes there. But I'm gonna ask Ethan, like, what, and you look in your crystal ball the next year to 3 years, especially as AI gets introduced more, what is, what does content creation look like?

Ethan Dewhurst 31:06

Yeah, the more authentic you can be, the better, to combat AI. There's gonna be so many different AI influencers out there that you won't even know are AI. It's getting to the point right now that you can't really tell. Just wait 6 months to a year, you will not be able to tell. So the more authentic, the better. Can you be you? That's gonna play very well. Live shopping is huge. You mentioned Gary Vee. He's been saying that for a long time now, but We're seeing that huge on, on Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms. Live shopping is huge. That's the number one thing for small businesses. Yes, make your fun content. The fun content's what we call top of the funnel. That's the brand awareness. Well, that doesn't drive to sales, right? Yeah. So then you gotta do middle funnel, lower funnel, and conversion sales. Live shopping is a great way to mix both where your content will have conversion. So TikTok, TikTok Shop is huge for that. And if you are a brick-and-mortar store, I would consider really thinking about yourself as a media company and an e-commerce store just from the back of your real store.

Jason Duff 32:11

Great advice. And for those of you listening, those are a lot of points to really double-click on. And I think we're even testing and trying out and experimenting with a lot of things at Small Nation. Just even this podcast itself, I wish I would have started a few years ago. But as we're getting content out there, you're engaging with new users that want more. They want to opt into your email list. They want to follow your digital and social channels. And there is a niche for everyone. And you kind of mentioned that earlier. And there's a way to monetize that niche. And so you built these companies. LEGOs became a passion that kind of launched the channel. And through the channel success that you've built, you're helping other brands and other clients do the same thing. But there's this whole concept of fun that has come up in your life. And I think for someone that has spent 15, 20 years, a lot of computer time, a lot of device time, there's a lot of people out there that are questioning, like, hey, I live in this virtual world. I live at my desk all day long. But am I having fun? Walk me through the next chapter in your life that you're really excited about.

Ethan Dewhurst 33:20

Yeah, when I think about what I do for a living, I like to say, as corny as it is, I just have fun. That's how I always want to look at it, whether it be the boring tasks or the fun tasks. It's a lot easier now because we, we travel the world building Legos. So it's pretty easy to say you, you do fun for work. But I think everybody's like itching for that. I think everybody wants that fun. So with that said, um, how do you give it to them? Um, and be a positive voice through content, I think is huge. But like you said, as we built Duprixx up, um, I didn't realize the power of social media to that extent. I didn't realize the profitability of social media to that extent. So I really sat down with my friends and said, you guys gotta do this and go pick out your niches. And so it's been really cool seeing my circles be successful in social media, life-changingly so, where they're making 3x, 5x their W-2 jobs just from posting videos a couple times a week. And then what we've done, we've been working on it for a year and a half, but we just launched it this summer, is almost like a game show competition show channel where it's just 5 of my friends are just competing against each other 'cause we're past athletes. We love competition and we love having fun. So we put that together to make a competition show and it's just us playing wacky games and just having fun. We built our own little playground studio, et cetera. And that's been really cool to see. We started that 2 months ago, already up to 100,000+ followers, maybe 200,000 across the board followers. People are hungry. for just good, positive, clean content and fun content.

Jason Duff 34:55

And this group is called Deuce?

Ethan Dewhurst 34:57

Yeah, Deuce Crew.

Jason Duff 34:58

Crew?

Ethan Dewhurst 34:59

Yeah, Deuce Crew.

Jason Duff 35:00

Deuce Crew. And YouTube is the primary platform?

Ethan Dewhurst 35:04

Yeah, so Instagram is probably the primary, but we're on all Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. But we are— we're not just doing Shorts, we're doing full-on productions and full-length episodes that is on

Jason Duff 35:19

And give us an idea of some of the things that you guys have been doing together.

Ethan Dewhurst 35:22

Yeah, so the wackier the better. So one of our episodes, we're like, hey, we want to play paintball, but there's a lot of paintball content out there. What if we played blindfolded paintball? So it's just, we got in 2 professional paintball players, we came in, we had bells on our hands, we had 750 rubber chickens around. And so you would hear as people walk and you'd hear if You stepped, everyone's blindfolded. So we're just like popping bullets everywhere. Is there screams occasionally? Oh man, and these were like 300+ FPS. Yeah, very fast. Welts everywhere, adrenaline's pumping, and it was just obnoxious hearing bells and hearing rubber chickens. I still have haunted dreams about those. So things like that, we'll do a lot of trampoline episodes, old nostalgic like camp games. But yeah, we're just having fun, you know, scratching that competitive itch and inviting the viewer to kind of like be inspired. So anytime they watch our video, we want them to go, I should go try that. And we're not selling anything. We just want them to go do it with their friends, right? So there's a stigma as you get an adult, you have a ton of responsibilities. I'm not a kid anymore. And it's looked down at to have fun. We want to almost give permission, not that we have any authority, but it's give permission to adults to just, guys, have fun.

Jason Duff 36:40

It is something, as I was involved a lot in music and the arts going through school. And there are these adult music camps now of like— and just scrolling through, it looks like so much fun of random people for a week getting away and hanging out with other people at camp celebrating great music. And I think it's similar with the athletics. It's like something that you really had a lot of passion about. And you still want to enjoy that. Yeah. And you not only get the good exercise, but the camaraderie and just like you said, the competitiveness, like being able to do that. And I have to think my newest interaction of experiencing that has been through pickleball. Like I played tennis, but I'll be honest, I'm now 45 years old. So getting out there and playing tennis every day, I don't wanna— it's a little more rigorous than probably what I wanna play. But my first introduction to pickleball, I have seen all types and all ages play the game, and I know it's something you're passionate about too. So how did you first get introduced to pickleball?

Ethan Dewhurst 37:38

So pickleball for me was exactly that. It was, I am no longer competitive when it comes to like an organized sport, but I missed that edge and the gym wasn't really doing it for me, right? Because anytime I worked out, I used to work out all the time, but it was to be better at something. So it was never like to work out to be healthier, stronger, like so I could jump a little bit farther, be a little bit faster, whatnot. So when pickleball was growing, one of my friends was doing it and I started it. I was like, okay, this might be something that is just fun. It's really easy and it's super contagious. So I can, I can play with my competitive friends or I can play with just people that just want to hang out. It was a great community and it got that competitive itch out. So been doing that for maybe 4 years. We used to, when we, for Vaunt, we had like a 15,000 square foot warehouse. And so we would just duct tape the lines. And once the operation shut down, we'd play some pickleball. And then it grew from there where I was training probably every day for it, maybe take Sundays off, but like not just playing, but drilling. And it grew from there. But I got, pretty addicted to pickleball for a while.

Jason Duff 38:50

So that love and that passion and maybe a little bit of an addiction led into another business idea.

Ethan Dewhurst 38:56

Yeah. So like when we were launching DewBricks and starting the idealization concept for Dewz Crew, we were looking for a studio. And so we got connected to people that were building a pickleball studio. And so we sat down with them and heard their vision. They were making the world's largest pickleball club. Cool. Right here in Columbus, Ohio. And I was like, I have to be a part of this. Right? So that was their passion, their mission. I was like, how do I connect my ship to this one? And so we built the Deuce Crew Studio attached to the world's largest pickleball club. And then we opened Match Point Pickleball Columbus in November of 2025. So it's not even been a year yet. But it is the world's largest pickleball club with 38 Cushion X courts, and it's been pretty cool to see that community build. As a part of that, there's 38 courts, there's 5 TrackMan golf simulators. We're about to open up a full-on gym attached to that. Our Deuce Crew studio is there, and then there's also table tennis or ping pong, 20 professional table tennis tables?

Jason Duff 40:09

It is a whole facility. Like, I haven't yet to be there, but I have friends that just rave about it. I've of course watched these very high-quality videos and experiences. You don't have anything to do with any of those, probably, do you?

Ethan Dewhurst 40:21

Yeah, yeah, so we do do the marketing there. And so when it comes to like the videos you'll see, our team makes that. And that's our goal with Champion City Media is anything that we kind of like, whether we invest in it or be a part of, these different businesses, how does Champion City Media help grow those businesses? So for the gym, yes, we're operating a gym, but we're even treating the gym like a studio and a marketing company. Same thing with Match Point, same thing with our other businesses that we're doing. How do we put fuel on the fire through organic marketing?

Jason Duff 40:54

You're doing stuff with your friends. You've had business partnerships as you've kind of scaled and grown. For those people that are listening and maybe have a little fear of like creating a business partnership, do you have any advice for them?

Ethan Dewhurst 41:08

Yeah, partnership is a marriage. But the other thing is it's really easy to be friends with somebody who's exactly like you. It's not easy to have a business partner who's exactly like you. So when you think about what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur and maybe even more importantly what it takes to run a business, There's going to be 10 to 20 things on that list. If you guys all want to do the same things, that's not a good partnership. So if you can be the yin to the yang, if you say, hey, I can take these 5, you take these 5, and there's very little overlap and you still work together and like each other, that's where a partnership can make sense. But you got to make sure, am I bringing enough value to operate this business? Are they bringing enough different value to operate that business? And as long as there's not overlap, it could be a good partnership.

J Jason Duff 41:57

How do you help see the things that most people don't see?

E Ethan Dewhurst 42:00

In what category?

J Jason Duff 42:02

So I love your example of like a business partnership is finding people that have yin and yang or maybe different styles of approaching things. There's a lot of content creators out there. There's probably very few that have achieved the success that you have. There are a lot of great entrepreneurs out there. There are probably few that have had serial entrepreneur, meaning they've created multiple businesses and found a way to tie them together. Is there something that you have, like, a superpower of seeing things that a lot of people don't normally see?

E Ethan Dewhurst 42:32

Well, I think is it, um, with— when it comes to my background with content creation, I like to look at businesses. Will social proof help this business?

J Jason Duff 42:43

And for people, what is social proof?

E Ethan Dewhurst 42:45

So, so if I drive by a donut shop and there's a line, I don't know if those donuts taste good, but there's social proof that those donuts taste good. I've never tasted that donut, but there's social proof. So if a business has X amount of followers, if a business has X amount of views on their videos, there's social proof. And so will social proof impact this business or not? If I were going to go into the government bidding job, there's no social proof needed, right? So maybe I wouldn't be helpful in that business. But if there is going to require social, social proof, I know for a fact that my expertise with media, my expertise with knowing how to go viral, is it gonna add to it? I know I'll be a quality partner or not, because there's always, as you grow more businesses, there's 2 things to look at. Am I gonna be a silent partner just through capital, or am I going to be a vested partner through action? And I won't get involved in a business on this latter unless it requires social proof.

J Jason Duff 43:42

Some rapid-fire questions for you, if that's good. What's one thing that most small businesses should do, but they, they're not doing?

E Ethan Dewhurst 43:51

They're too afraid to start content because it's very easy to get overwhelmed. So figure out what works and then do what works, but tailor it to your business.

J **Jason Duff** 43:59

If someone's thinking about starting their first business but don't have the courage to do so, what's the first step they should take?

E **Ethan Dewhurst** 44:06

Run the numbers, then take the leap of faith. So I'm not a big believer in taking the leap of faith blindly. You got to run the numbers, you got to have a business plan and get some eyeballs on it. But it does take faith. So I'm not a big believer in starting slow and growing it because you'll never really take the leap. I'm a big believer in jumping in, but only jump in after it's backed up.

J **Jason Duff** 44:24

If you've got a really good idea but you lack capital, what should you do?

E **Ethan Dewhurst** 44:29

There's 2 things: grow it small or find somebody who has what you don't have. And so there's a lot of people out there with capital that are looking for the ideas. They don't have the ideas or the time, but they want diversify their, um, portfolio or investments. That's one option if you want to take outside money. Or if you're looking at capital, I think there's so many options to think creatively where you'll never need capital. And what I mean by that is if you can become, um, famous or have a large following on social media, you can get what you need for free from the companies that you would have to purchase from. So if you wanted to start a business but you don't really have the resources to do it, I say become a content creator first, build the following, and that following will tell you what you should be able to sell. So are you gonna sell a t-shirt? Great, everybody does that. Or are you gonna start this— if you're a fitness influencer, you're gonna start a gym, and now everybody wants to be part of Susie's gym because I've been following Susie for 3 years. Content creation can lead into so many different things, but I would say that's the best place to start, but that's because that's my background.

J **Jason Duff** 45:40

Is there something that if you could tell your younger self today that you might have done differently, is there anything that you'd like to tell that younger version?

E **Ethan Dewhurst** 45:48

Yeah. As you build businesses and become more successful in those businesses, it's very easy to get lazy, complacent, or cocky, and to think you can do business anywhere and do anything. So if I were to tell myself something differently is don't just try things that sound like fun or a challenge. stick to what you're good at. So for me, I'm gonna stick to marketing and content creation, and every business I start, that's my role. I wish I stuck to that a little bit more. I would've had a lot of, uh, less losses in my portfolio. Uh, thankfully it's, it's worked out where there's way more wins than losses. But, uh, now I have a rule. I'm not getting involved in a business unless my bread and butter helps that business.

Jason Duff 46:30

I love that. What do you do to fill up? So on the business side, I love that you've been able to incorporate a lot of your passions and things that you're good at. For people that are driven and entrepreneurial, there's points where you hit burnout. And I've been there. I think a lot of founders kind of go through that. But with what you have learned, what are you doing in your own kind of personal practices on the personal side of your life to stay healthy and stay full?

Ethan Dewhurst 47:01

Yeah, so for right or wrong, I am very good at making my hobbies profitable.

Jason Duff 47:07

That's great. That's a great skill.

Ethan Dewhurst 47:09

So like, what used to be my way to refill up is now another business. So like LEGO, making LEGO content is very profitable. But back in the day, I just did LEGO as my stress relief. I was so stressed in business that I'd go home with my wife, I'd watch a movie, and I'd just be picking at my thumbs because I'm like, I can't really focus on this movie. What Lego really helped for me is I could build, it would like just be enough of a thought that it would distract me from stress, but not enough thought that I couldn't enjoy time with my wife or the movie, etc. But then I turned that into a channel and business, etc. But I would say if you can have something that fills your cup That doesn't distract from the business. That has worked for me. Now that we own multiple businesses, I think it's really rewarding for me to help my partners or employees accomplish their dreams. So you bring them in and just say, hey, you can run with this business now. Give whether that be through equity, whether that be through compensation, etc. But that takes the stress out where I can still have a focus point in this business. Hop And then hop around. So I'm constantly filling my cup in different ways.

Jason Duff 48:20

So kind of wrapping up this, this episode, you've shared such great content and ways that we can, you know, from people like you said that don't have money, like start to create content and build that channel to have that influence and that authority and your reputation of what you do. If you had $1 million, like you just have $1 million, what would you build with $1 million in a struggling Ohio town?

Ethan Dewhurst 48:46

Yeah, what I would do is I would figure out what, what does that town need, um, and then what is going to not only make a return for me, because I do believe, you know, once you're in the 7 figures, 8 figures, it is a lot easier to have the money make itself. But if we're using the example of, of a million dollars, I would look at what is the biggest need in my town, what is my skill set where I can come in and make that million dollars feel like $8 million because I'm adding that experience. So we've been talking a lot this during the tour where my background's social media and, you know, online sales. This town is thriving with brick and mortar businesses. Well, how do you take what's thriving here plus something that is untapped potential? How do you have brick and mortar that is also crushing on TikTok Shop, crushing it on you know, WhatsApp or Facebook Live, whatever that may be. So like, this is a very specific answer, but I would make a studio for small businesses to be able to learn how to do social media because it's so overwhelming to do, have a place to do social media, and be able to take— I'm not coming in and saying, here's what you need to do. What, what I like about the studio side is it allows me to provide my skills with letting their skills thrive. Because I'm not coming in and telling them how to sell their product. I'm just giving them a new platform that, you know, 10x their revenue could be online versus in person. So they— their passion is in-person brick and mortar, but when the doors are closed, the lights are off, and everyone's asleep, what else is printing you money, right? So the whole goal about business is you don't want to be trading time for money. You want to have the business operating without you, and that's when you can have true freedom. But that's what I would do, but that's because that's my background.

Jason Duff 50:38

Great advice. Final question: 10 years from now, what do you hope that people say Ethan Dewhurst built?

Ethan Dewhurst 50:46

I, I don't want people to even think about what I built. I want people to go, I started my channel because I saw Ethan doing it. And so it's not what did Ethan build, is what did Ethan inspire other people to do that gave them financial freedom, them freedom with their time. I think that's more important to me, where it's what I built. I'm not looking for that legacy anymore, but I do want people to take advantage of what is out there with social media. It has never been a lower barrier to entry to have complete financial freedom. Just through an iPhone. So I want more people looking like I got out of the W-2 prison. I got out of the corporate hustle because Ethan gave me enough information or enough inspiration to take that leap on myself. And I'm so thankful I did that. And now I have full freedom for my family.

Jason Duff 51:41

I love it. Stop scrolling, start building, start playing.

Ethan Dewhurst 51:46

Or keep scrolling, learn how to do it, and then make content to make other people stop scrolling.

Jason Duff 51:52

There you go. Thanks, Ethan.

Ethan Dewhurst 51:53

You're the man, dude. You too.

Ethan DeLeon 51:55

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