



RAINMAKER.FM

Behind the Scenes:
The Launch, Membership Sites,
and What Punk Rock Has To Do
with Content Marketing



TRANSCRIPT

NEWRAINMAKER.COM



Robert Bruce: This is New Rainmaker from NewRainmaker.com. I am Robert Bruce. Today, Brian Clark and I are discussing a number of things including this very podcast, the launch of the Rainmaker Platform and a brief overview of the potential of the membership site as a business model. Brian, first of all, happy 27th birthday to you man. It's amazing what you've accomplished in so little time.

Brian Clark: Exactly. Twenty-seven, forty-seven, it all feels pretty much the same. Except, you don't feel old until you do something like pull your chest muscle raking leaves. And you're like, "wait a minute, that wouldn't happen to a 27 year old." So it's only small differences.

Robert Bruce: I can't believe you just admitted that on air.

Brian Clark: I know, I know. Well, I'm showing my vulnerable side. It's a very strategic thing.

Robert Bruce: Let's get into this first by talking about the first public launch of the Rainmaker Platform this week. How do you feel it's going so far?

Brian Clark: Just so you know, we are recording this on October 1st (2014), my birthday was technically yesterday. The launch ends in two days but once you're hearing this, it will be over. I can tell you I don't know exactly what the last day will look like. They're always huge.



We've never taken away anything with regards to Rainmaker so it could be pretty epic. I'd say it's a smashing success so far from what we've seen. It's been a really, really strong response and we've had a lot of positive feedback. That's from the 2.0 version of the platform that was literally the result of all the wonderful feedback that we got during the pilot program. I can't say enough about how invaluable that was.

There's stuff that we improved that we weren't thinking of originally. For example, the whole landing page builder. We weren't even going to build that.

That was an inspiration that happened in part to feedback and in part by Bryan Eisenberg's *Ten Critical Elements of a Landing Page*. Right? I asked, "Why don't we just have a builder that builds those ten things?" And there you go, it was born. I'm probably going to have to pay Eisenberg some sort of royalty.

Robert Bruce: Don't say that. Don't say that.

Brian Clark: Things are going really well. We'll know more Friday, but as you are listening to this, the pilot program is over. Hopefully you got in if you were inclined to do so.

Robert Bruce: If you didn't, one of the things we talked about last week is how you wrote this great article, [looking at the future of Rainmaker](#). Some of the features that are upcoming for the platform are included in that article. Let's go through some of those really quick for those who are still taking a look



at Rainmaker and thinking about dropping into the free trial. What's coming in Rainmaker?

The Future of the Rainmaker Platform

Brian Clark: We already added an affiliate program, which is indispensable to some of the stuff we'll be talking about on this podcast in the next six months. That will be while these other features are built.

All of these things were things we knew we wanted to build. That desire has been reinforced by the feedback and the enthusiasm we're receiving about them. In general, there will be more themes, more landing page templates and the things that people would expect.

The improvements to the analytics with the customization and advanced power that you can get out of Google Analytics is really cool. I think some people feel like that they have to go to a third party analytics program, and that's not necessarily the case. I think we'll also be looking at future integration partners with some of the obvious players out there for small business people. What else do we have, Robert?

Robert Bruce: We have a lot of stuff on the social media posting and scheduling and incoming content front.

Brian Clark: I know that those are features driven by Mr. Robert Bruce as much



as anyone else because you want them. You want the social media scheduling and posting from inside the CMS, which I think makes a lot of sense.

Robert Bruce: Yeah.

Brian Clark: If you would, please talk a little bit about these curation tools that both you and I are going to geek out about.

Robert Bruce: The idea was to take some of these things that we really think are just features. It's mostly three pieces right now that we're looking at and talking to Chris Garrett and our Dev Team about, which is basic social media posting and scheduling.

So you've got something, whether it be links or basic status updates. You want to be able to connect to your social networking accounts and schedule posts to go out at certain times of day. There's going to be a lot of cool stuff in there.

Again, it will be integrated in the dashboard and connected to every other part of the Rainmaker Platform itself. One big piece of that is also then, how do you find great stuff to share and talk about things within your industry that you want to post? So we're going to build the Rainmaker Reader. Google Reader died about two years ago, I think.

Brian Clark: I think it's one year, but I'm not sure.



Robert Bruce: I can't keep track of anything anymore. When that went down, that left a huge hole in that aspect of finding great content. And a lot of great readers have popped up.

But again, we're going to do it right. We're going to build the reader that we want integrated into the Rainmaker Platform itself. One of the things Garrett and I have been talking about and with you as well Brian, is this idea of these services are really cool, but you end up using 25% of it, or only 10% of the actual features.

These are the things that you actually want to use in a lot of these services, so that's where we're going to focus. We're going to focus on the stuff that we need and want at first. And then of course, we'll listen to all of your feedback about what might be better, what might work better, and what you want. We're really focusing in on the very best of all of these types of services being integrated into the platform.

The last idea of what we're working on and going to execute eventually is this curation to content tools. This group of tools will allow you to bring stuff in an RSS feed, post it and schedule it within the Rainmaker dashboard. For instance, if you are doing an industry newsletter, you want to easily be able to copy, paste, and grab all these links. Then you've got to go back and grab the headline so you can work with dumping it into a post.

This is going to most likely be a set of smaller tools that will allow you with



basically a click, to send it to either a new post or a new article, which is your newsletter, or to add it to an existing newsletter article that you're compiling over the week. This is going to do a couple of other things as well, but the Rainmaker Curator, as I'm calling it is going to help in collecting that information.

We've seen this boom the last few years again. What is this? The third or fourth coming of email, I think? Email marketing?

Brian Clark: Right.

Robert Bruce: But these newsletters are powerful. A lot of businesses are benefiting greatly from putting together a really solid newsletter, both for the audience and for feedback on what they're doing. This will make it so much easier to compile that and put it together.

Brian Clark: There's a smart way to curate so that you're creating original content. You're also creating a new webpage with it. You're making it sharable.

These are the best practices if you're going to do email curation, but there's no tool out there. The only one I've seen is a custom tool that actually Andrew Norcross built. So we're going to make that standard in Rainmaker.

There are a couple of other things. Of course marketing automation has gone from this very expensive big business thing, and now it's just becoming the



way things ought to work. It's creating a better experience for your audience, for your prospects, and for yourself. We're going to make that a part of Rainmaker in a very affordable fashion as opposed to some of the expense we see out there right now.

Finally, which is pertinent to what we'll be talking about on the podcast, is evolving the internal course creation tools in Rainmaker into a true learning management system. Going back all the way to 2007 in Teaching Sells, we're teaching people true instructional design for e-learning so you can create these high value paid courses. This is where you need an LMS or a learning management system to go with that. So that's also coming. We'll talk about all this stuff later, but it's pretty exciting. It's hard not to geek out about it.

What You Can Learn from the New Rainmaker Podcast

Robert Bruce: Alright, let's move on by doing a little talk about this very podcast, New Rainmaker. You know, things that we've been doing or in some cases not doing. Let's look at the approach we've taken with it so far and what we're thinking about in the coming weeks and months. And more specifically and most importantly, what it might mean for listeners of the New Rainmaker broadcast.

Brian Clark: So we've done two shows before this one for the so-called Fall season. I think we're just going to be powering through every week from here



on forward. Right, Robert?

Robert Bruce: Yeah, I think death or dentist are the only thing that will keep us from our appointed episodes. Yes.

Brian Clark: I'll do a podcast before going to the dentist any day.

Robert Bruce: Yeah.

Brian Clark: So the first two episodes were our very short storytelling format, and we [have a guest authority](#). I would basically interview them and we'd get a transcript. Then I would edit that down, write an intro and Robert would usually edit from there because he was the one narrating. They were really fun to do. For seven or eight minute episodes though, it takes a decent amount of time.

I don't think we did enough of them to have a workflow where we could just crank those things out, but it was fun. I don't know if people like them because it doesn't really seem like we're getting a lot of the response we got in the Spring with the initial Rainmaker podcast.

Robert Bruce: It was a little bit of a cricket situation, which is fine. That's a part of the nature of exactly what we're doing is to do it and then report back to you and see what works and what doesn't.



It was interesting to me because you hear so much about, “Hey, it’s got to be short, it’s got to be this, or it’s got to be that.” There are heavy duty opinions about the way things need to be, but you never know until you try it.

Brian Clark: Especially looking at how popular [This American Life](#) and the [NPR podcasts](#) are.

Robert Bruce: Yeah.

We Want to Hear from You!

Brian Clark: But who knows? Okay, so here’s what we want from you guys who are listening right now: stop by in the [comments](#) and tell us what you thought about those. “I was busy. I didn’t listen to it. It was okay.”

We want to hear from you because when we have guests in the future, I might want to stick with that format. I think it’s more interesting to me (I could be wrong), only that you have that short story format as opposed to your typical interview.

We’re really interested in what you guys respond to and that’s why we don’t worry about experimenting and being inconsistent. That’s because we try things so you learn. That’s pretty much our goal here. We’re willing to look completely foolish if necessary if we can figure something out from it. So stop by, let us know what you thought about that.



We launched the podcast in January 2014, and then we had seven educational lessons. We had three behind the scenes episodes and then we did three webinars. We outlined in the course that was a strategy to create week to week content, and then turn it into something else. In this case, it was the first New Rainmaker training course which was really popular when we assembled it that way.

That's still our long-term strategy. We want to create content in a serial form that is telling a bigger story. When we're through with that part of the story, we can always package it up like we did that time. We could do some webinars and it could lead into a paid launch, and all sort of things.

The initial thing obviously was leading up to the pilot program and the public launch of Rainmaker. That has happened. So Robert, it feels like we're at this bright line moment where we can go forward and do whatever we want.

Robert Bruce: Yes, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

Brian Clark: Nice.

Robert Bruce: Not necessarily.

Brian Clark: Never mind what I said about feedback, Robert.

Robert Bruce: Forget that. Comments off.



No, that's exactly right. We talked about having the bigger picture in mind, but also back to more of this informal talking that you and I have done in the past that folks seem to enjoy. The other day you and I were talking about opening it up for good old fashioned Q&A, and answering questions directly mixed in with whatever form the interviews take in the future. That's the big idea.

But yes, the idea of having a strategy for a period of time where we layout several episodes that then we can bundle up later is there.

What Henry Ford Can Teach You About Reimagining Content

Did you ever hear the story of Henry Ford and the crates that the motors came in for the Model T?

Brian Clark: I don't think so.

Robert Bruce: He did a deal with whoever the engine company was to build the motors for the Model T. In that contract, he wanted them to build the crates that the motors would be shipped in. These crates had to be oak and they had to be cut in this certain way and they had to be assembled in a certain way to very specific specifications.

So the motors would come and they would be taken out of the crates. The



crates would be disassembled in a very specific way. Eventually, all the parts of those crates would then go into and become the floorboards of the Model T.

Brian Clark: Nice.

Robert Bruce: The motor company didn't care because they just wanted the contract for the motors and they think, "Oh, yeah, we'll give him his crates." That illustrates this perfectly. We're looking for ways to package this up into something bigger down the road or useful that might be broken out in different ways.

Brian Clark: Nice, nice.

Robert Bruce: A big part of the future of the Rainmaker Platform is going to be this reseller program. You had a chance to talk publicly about it on a great [Carrie Dils Genesis Office Hours show](#) last week and we got a really nice response from that. Quickly, would you share what this reseller program is going to look like and who should care?

Brian Clark: It's really interesting because Carrie invited me onto her show, Genesis Office Hours. Basically, we have this amazing community of designers who build on the Genesis framework, which is kind of the backbone of StudioPress. Then StudioPress is the backbone of the design aspect of what is now Rainmaker.



I was like, “Yeah sure, I’d be happy to come on.” Then it turned out we got the public launch going and then my brain immediately shifted to this reseller program. That’s because we are building out this amazing technology for resellers that allows you, as a consultant or a designer or as a small digital agency, to create these really sophisticated sites with all the features that you know about it in Rainmaker.

You can do this literally at the push of a button. There are going to be all sorts of ways to build out specific types of sites. It’s really cool stuff. We’re aiming for November 1st to release that technology, which is really the backbone of the reseller program.

We can’t launch the reseller program really without that. So we’re building that and we’re finishing it up as we speak. But in the broader concept, during the initial podcast run and the first course, that is still available if you guys haven’t checked that out. Robert what is the URL for that?

Robert Bruce: That is newrainmaker.com/training-home.

Or, if you go to NewRainmaker.com, click the “More” tab up in the top nav and you’ll see “Training”.



Are You a Producer? Our Reseller Program Might be for You

Brian Clark: Effectively, what that course was about was a different way to think about content marketing. Right? Media instead of marketing.

I think we got our best response in all the years of trying to teach this stuff. It seemed that a lot of people had the light bulbs go off. They got the difference between keyword stuff “content,” as opposed to really trying to build an audience and tying that in with your business model.

And then thinking about what’s my “Love It or List It” for what I sell? What makes me authoritative while also giving people what they want? One of the models I touched on in that context is that yes, there are a lot of capable people who can do this stuff themselves. I think those are a lot of the people that are now rushing into Rainmaker because it’s the perfect tool for the person with that kind of skill set.

The broader market out there is people for whom WordPress is out of the question. And even Rainmaker would not be something they want to really get into because they don’t have the content creation skills and they’re just not going to.

We’re really seeing an entire industry that already exists. It’s the idea that you have professional content creators, and media producers effectively who are



aiding the small to medium size business, and the real money is actually in the recurring content creation fees.

They may come to you for a website or design. That's where Rainmaker comes in because that takes the Dev headache completely out of it. "Yes, I can build that sophisticated site for you with membership capabilities and all that stuff."

So the designers, the writers, the other content creators in other mediums, and then the general entrepreneurs who see the need to serve these businesses, they're what I call "producers." Right? These are the people for whom this reseller program is for.

At the heart of it is this great technology, but you're going to hear both on this podcast and in very specific training, that we're going to put out that we're going to teach people the business models, the skills, and how to make the connections with the team you need.

How the Media Producer Model Works

Let's say you're a designer and you're the point of sale. You usually charge money to create a website or at least the design for the website. And that's it except that they keep coming back to you for tweaks and free work and all. It's terrible, you know?



Really what you are is the point of sale for what they really need, which is content creation. So you could be partnered up with writers and you could have a small formal digital agency. It could be a completely ad hoc thing. It's like the Hollywood model where the writers, the designer, and the strategist come together for a project and then they disperse.

I really think that's how it's going to work. And we see Rainmaker and this reseller technology at the center of that to make everyone more money. Yes, we get to make money too, but that's how it's supposed to work. Right?

Robert Bruce: There's a lot of talk floating around about membership sites in the last year or so in particular. There has been a spike in interest in this model. This is something that you've actually taught and practiced in business for what, seven years? What's the big idea here with membership sites?

The Membership Site Business Model

Brian Clark: Yeah. So the membership site goes back to the 90s with our friends in the adult industry, who at one point were the pioneers of everything. But when you think about what a membership site is, it's a way to keep people away from content until after they pay you. And then they're allowed access in.

That's a really big and important concept, which is the concept of access. So yes, back in 2007, the very first thing that was launched off of Copyblogger



was Teaching Sells. That is a massive course that teaches every element of from designing meaningful courses, business models, marketing, the technology you need to effectively make it all happen.

Ever since that time, people have been saying, “Awesome thanks, give us the turnkey platform to do this with.” It took us a little while, but you can see how far back the roots of Rainmaker go. We really got serious about it in 2010 when we formed Copyblogger Media. So Rainmaker in one sense is the solution and the missing part.

We used to have to patch everything together ourselves. I remember Tony would explain, “Here’s how you take aMember and here’s how you work with Moodle and here’s how you do it with WordPress.” It was a mess.

I think a lot of people were more than able to do the content creation, and the technology just buried them. And that is unacceptable anymore. The premise back in 2007 was online advertising sucks, you’re not going to make any money with it, and you need to sell content.

A lot of people believed me and a lot of people didn’t. That was okay because at the time that was very unorthodox thinking. Where are we now seven years later, when The Guardian isn’t going to ditch ads because they need to make revenue any way they can. Their primary business model is going to be virtual events and membership programs.



Effectively, it's patronage of your subscribers instead of everything is free, and we'll make up for it with advertising. That's what Teaching Sells, the original report, predicted in 2007.

Again, some people thought I was crazy but e-learning is a real thing. Everyone knows online is the future of all sorts of education. A lot will be free, but a lot of it won't be and that's still the best way to get into a business if you are not currently. Whether you're working for someone else, or maybe you have a client model and you want to move on, this is what we're going to be talking about a lot on this podcast and in other venues.

I read another great article that basically said, the modern journalism site which of course we're talking about BuzzFeed and the like, they treat content as a service. That's not the way newspapers have technically thought. In other words, they actually are taking into account who their audience is, which are the things we've been preaching since day one. And it's just the reality of what things are.

The flipside of that is that you don't have to be the guardian. In fact, they've got bigger problems than most people because of the legacy issues getting started. Now that the technology is taken out of the way of creating these membership sites and online training programs, it really just comes down to finding your niche, as it always has been.



The Evolution of the Membership Site Model

And there's some really cool stuff about how the concept of what we think of as a "membership site" is really evolving. It's any sort of barrier to access that facilitates doing business with people. It does this in a way that's a higher value, or premium, and that kind of thing. The most interesting thing about this Guardian article, which is why I use it as an example, but they're going to be doing these virtual events with a membership concept. That is something we covered in Teaching Sells years ago.

I can give you a great example of someone who built an amazing business out of this approach, which is [Mike Stelzner, Social Media Examiner](#). He used to be a Copyblogger writer. I remember he came to me one day and he said, "I'm thinking about this site. It's like Copyblogger, but it's about social media, do you think it's going to work?" And I'm like, "I'm sure it's going to work." That was an understatement.

His business model was putting on (he now puts on maybe the largest social media event but certainly a big one), a live event. He started with virtual events. Basically what Mike did was he built up his initial audience and then he went to everyone in the industry and was putting together a conference. This was like you would do with a live event, except it was virtual.

He took the webinar approach and it was a very logistical planned out executed thing. He got all these people to contribute and he had an affiliate



program, so all his speakers promoted the event. It was a success. The next virtual event he did is where he really started to make money because he had a thing.

So what does a virtual live event become when you do the next one? Well, that becomes archived membership content. You can see that what Mike did before he got into live events, he built membership sites. But it was positioned so differently that you didn't see it that way. I immediately recognized what he was up to and I think I had him share about it, specifically in Teaching Sells, to talk about it.

I want to talk a lot more about that event because we're going to start doing those for very specific reasons. I think that will be tied to the training for the resellers on business models. It's also of course, a demonstration of the Rainmaker Platform because we can do all of that from our affiliate program to everything with Rainmaker, which is cool.

I want to talk about that as a business model for people who are considering Rainmaker, but maybe haven't pulled the trigger yet. That's because people out there who've got organizational skills, they've got drive, and they've got ambition, but they're like, "I'm not an authority about anything." One of the business models, or many of the business models on Teaching Sells talk about, "You know what you're good at? You're good at building these type of sites. That's what you're good at."



The “Impresario” Concept Explained

This is a concept that I refer to as the impresario approach, which I love that word. It’s an Italian word and basically it means organizer or producer. We’re right back to that producer concept, but in this context, historically that was a person who put on operas and plays.

[Seth Godin](#) loves to use the word now to mean a person who makes things happen. Right? And really, what is the internet except for connections bringing things together? It can be a really interesting model when you realize that every time you arrange one of these events, you are creating content that you are then able to build on going forward. This is just like Teaching Sells grew over time.

I think we’re going to focus on that topic quite a bit as we go forward with the podcast and try to give you some really useful ideas about, “Okay, how would I go about starting that type of business?” Right? So I’m pretty excited about that.

Robert Bruce: What about live events that say, take place in like [Denver perhaps in May of 2015](#)?

Brian Clark: Hypothetically speaking?

Robert Bruce: Hypothetically speaking.



Brian Clark: That is an excellent point. We did put on our first live event, so we graduated from virtual to live as well. And if you have those aspirations, then you can certainly do that with this impresario concept that we're going to be talking about.

But we put on our first Authority event. [Seth Godin](#) opened it up, [Darren Rowse](#) another keynote, [Bryan Eisenberg](#), [Ann Handley](#), [Lee Odden](#), it was everyone I wanted in the last eight years to one day be able to invite to speak. I don't know Robert, what was your impression of how the crowd reacted?

Robert Bruce: Maybe the best thing to do is just take a look, if you search the hashtag on Twitter [#authority2014](#), you can see for yourself. I think people had a really good time. The single track idea was "particularly loved" I think.

Brian Clark: Yes.

Robert Bruce: It was where everybody is seeing everything all at once and to a certain degree, no matter where you are in the conference.

Brian Clark: Our man Kelton put together a nice little highlight reel from the last event, which was pretty small. We limited it to 400 people. Again it was a single track where we're all together, we all learn together, we all experience together and we all go to the parties together. People really seemed to like that, I know I did.



I really don't like how dispersed everything gets when you have these massive events and you have to pick and choose, "What do I want to learn more instead of just getting everything?" In an integrated format, which I think is also important too. There's a logical beginning and end in the way that we build things.

So yes, we're doing it again in May in Denver again. This time, we are going to a larger venue, which is the Ellie Caulkins Opera House. It is a magnificent and beautiful venue. That was the vibe we were going for. If we're going for single track, we wanted to have this beautiful room that was made for large audiences to participate together in (speaking of impresario, right?). I didn't even make the opera connection there.

Robert Bruce: You're actually 147 years old, aren't you?

Brian Clark: Yes, that's exactly right. I guess this podcast will be the first time we mention this because we're putting together the early bird pricing and all that good stuff as soon as we can.

Robert Bruce: Are you really going to say this?

Who's Speaking at Authority Rainmaker 2015?

Brian Clark: Well, yes. Okay, let me say what I know for sure. [Dan Pink](#), who is a wonderful man and author of too many amazing books to count, actually the



first book I ever appeared in, [Free Agent Nation](#). Dan and I met in Austin back in 2000 and I introduced him to MIGAS and he interviewed me for his book. That was when I had just figured out how to use content marketing to sell legal services so I wouldn't starve. His last book, *To Sell is Human*, is obviously right on point for the theme of *Authority Rainmaker*, as it will be known this year. He is going to open up the show.

On the second day, the opening keynote will be [Sally Hogshead](#), who not coincidentally you just heard from on the last podcast. She is an amazingly smart person. Her work on fascination and focusing on your differences as your ultimate strength, which was just barely touched on in the podcast, is something we're going to expand quite a bit on that.

Then I've been working for three weeks trying to get a specific closing keynote. Today I got a "yes." I do not have a contract, but I don't think there's going to be a problem. I'm going to try to get the contract done before this airs (if not, you will not be hearing this because Robert will edit it out), so our closing keynote is a personal hero of mine, and Robert's as well. [Henry Rollins](#), the former lead singer of Black Flag, spoken word artist, self-publisher, film, radio, and television star. He now has his own show on the History Channel titled [Ten Things You Didn't Know](#). Look at that. It's a list format. I wonder why they chose that, Robert?

Robert Bruce: You know what? I'm so sick of lists. No, we were just laughing about this. It's that the complainers that hate these list posts, they need to



bring it up with Mr. Rollins.

Brian Clark: Well, they're going to have a chance in [Denver, May 13-15, 2015](#). So May 13th is a Wednesday. That will be similar to this year, where the opening reception was legendary in itself. We do like to throw some good parties, and this year will be no different.

The 14th will be the first day of content and that will be the one Dan Pink kicks off. The 15th will begin with Sally. And Henry will close and take us into the weekend, which I can't even believe I get to introduce Henry Rollins. I'm done, this may be it.

I guess at this point, we're going to sign off. Make sure you stop by the comments and give us any thoughts you might have as far as the podcast, or the platform. We'd love to hear about the direction we're going in, questions about membership sites and online training courses that you'd like to see specifically addressed. I can almost guarantee you we're going to cover everything pretty comprehensively given that again, Teaching Sells was the original thing, and it is just as relevant today as it ever has been.

Robert Bruce: Thank you for listening to New Rainmaker everybody out there. We appreciate it if you do like what's going on here as always, let us know by dropping by iTunes. You can give us a rating there as well. As Brian said, please drop any notes you have about the discussion in this episode in the comments of this post.



And maybe even more importantly, if you want to go even further into the things we've talked about on New Rainmaker and will continue to talk about as we go forward, head over to NewRainmaker.com. Sign up to get those two weeks of training that will likely change the way you think about online marketing. It's absolutely free. It's at NewRainmaker.com. In the nav bar, hit "More" and then click "Training." Brian, thanks man. We'll talk to you next time.

Brian Clark: Thanks everyone.