



RAINMAKER.FM

7 Ways to Find a Topical Market that Will Fuel Your Digital Commerce Business



TRANSCRIPT



Robert Bruce: This is Rainmaker FM, the broadcast that provides you with the knowledge you need to build your own digital marketing and sales platform that works. I am Robert Bruce here with Brian Clark.

Today we're going to answer a couple of your questions before we get into the main topic, which is seven ways to inexpensively find a topic market that will fuel your digital commerce business. Brian, here's our first question.

Jane Doe asks, "Is it really that big of a deal to build an online platform on properties you don't own?" She says she sees lots of successful people doing it in places like Tumblr, Squarespace, Twitter, and Facebook but what's the true danger here?

Understanding the True Danger of Digital Sharecropping

Brian Clark: We're still getting this question.

Robert Bruce: How many years has it been?

Brian Clark: I don't know. The evidence keeps mounting and we don't have to do anything because you've got the big Silicon Valley platforms that are constantly screwing people over. And people still wonder, "But what's the harm?"



I will say that she included Squarespace. Squarespace is a website suite of tools, so it's your site, it's just the way you build it, so I wouldn't include Squarespace. We distinguish between Squarespace from Rainmaker in that Rainmaker is way, way, way more sophisticated and powerful. Most of the people we're talking to especially on the topic of membership sites and digital commerce and all this, they've graduated beyond Squarespace. But otherwise, I don't consider that sharecropping.

Robert Bruce: Well, we know the stories of Facebook. And you just brought something about Tumblr this morning to me that I hadn't heard about yet.

Brian Clark: Facebook of course, did the biggest bait and switch on people ever. They basically let people build audiences there, and you had a lot of bad advice from short sighted social media consultants who said, "You don't need a website, just build on Facebook." Effectively, Facebook has changed the rules so many times since that time that it's ridiculous.

The biggest thing of course is that the audience that you built, you now have to pay to reach. And you're still missing out on all the value of owning your own media property, which has real value. You can sell a site. You're not going to sell your Facebook page. No one is going to buy that. They may buy it in conjunction with your overall media business, but no, you're not going to sell your Facebook page.

I'm still a little perplexed about how entrepreneurs or business people could think that way. There is a huge tide of people, like everything from Cory



Doctorow's new book to most people in the startup world. It's like, "You've got to own your own platform."

So Tumblr, you know when Yahoo bought Tumblr, they said, "We're not going to screw you over Tumblr people."

Robert Bruce: Well, they never do. These companies never do that.

Brian Clark: No, of course not. Well, what did they do last week? They basically decided that Tumblr is going to be a YouTube competitor, so they did a bunch of stuff including resizing the image field on everyone's post since the beginning of time. It broke all the images, and the response is "too bad."

That doesn't happen to you if you own your own property. I think most people get it right now. The fact that some people have this question I think is because they somehow think it's easier or that it's a shortcut.

Number one, it's no easier to build an audience on property you don't own than one you do. And secondly as Sonia says, "Don't take shortcuts. They take too long." You end up getting screwed by the company that you thought was doing you a favor at the beginning because your interests and theirs are not aligned.

Robert Bruce: I think one of the things you brought up, is that people miss most often or don't get or it takes them time to realize, is the idea of building



the digital media asset itself. You can't do that on a sharecropped external third party site, which is because of things like exporting your content and all of that.

There are workarounds for that, but the one thing is the building of value in that asset that you actually own. And for some reason, that just skates across the ice.

Brian Clark: It's because people aren't thinking like media entrepreneurs. No media entrepreneur doesn't own their own intellectual property. That is the asset.

I haven't had a chance to read Cory Doctorow's new book, [*Information Doesn't Want to Be Free*](#). It's about how all these platforms are exploiting creators. To a certain degree I'm sympathetic, but it's our own fault if we don't control our own platform. That's why the [Rainmaker Platform](#) is our passion. We're giving you the tools to do things easier and more powerful and better, but it's still yours.

How Does Content Curation Fit into the Rainmaker Media Content Strategy?

Robert Bruce: Alright, question number two. John Doe asks how content curation fits into the Rainmaker Media content strategy. Since it's not your



own media that you're publishing, should you use it at all? Should you curate at all?

Brian Clark: You and I have been talking about curation forever.

Robert Bruce: Well, allow me to elaborate just for a moment here. I believe it was late 2010 or early 2011 (I'd have to look at the dates), but somewhere back then I started a little weekly publication called. The Lede. The Lede is now Copyblogger's podcast.

It was a simple curation play. And I've got to say Brian, at the time I got a little flack from you for it. Now to be fair, you had been doing this from the very beginning like so many others. Once in a while, you would post links, but you did it in a much more casual kind of fun way. But what if you look at it as an actual strategy? What if you looked at it as a centerpiece around a whole media operation? What do you think of that?

Brian Clark: Well, back when you first started The Lede, I thought it was an interesting little addition to our original content, and as you know, our original content does so much better. A link post isn't going to go viral.

Basically what happened since that time is content marketing went mainstream and we've got this exponential increase in the amount of content out there. There's a lot of good stuff out there but who can find it?



I'm really starting to find curation as a primary strategy to be much more appealing. In fact, I'm working on a project that is something I've wanted to do for a while and it's going to be straight up email curation. It'll be using Rainmaker and the new curation tools that will be coming soon.

I've got to say that I'm coming around on it and there are certain things about it that are important. Number one, you're driving. It's got to be email, right? If you own the list, number one, does it matter what the content is as long as the audience wants it? Number two, you curate and you summarize. Dave Pell's newsletter is great. It's just the most interesting stuff that happened that day. What's it called?

Robert Bruce: [Next Draft](#).

Brian Clark: Right. But Dave writes his own narrative. It is original content with links. So you're getting social sharing and you're getting search value in there.

Robert Bruce: And you're getting *Dave*.

Brian Clark: You're getting a human being with a sense of humor and a perspective instead of an algorithm. That's the big thing I'm seeing right now. Computers are choosing what you should see. I think there's a real hunger out there for humans to say, "Hey, here's what I found and it's fascinating and here's what I think." That human connection works, but the key is email. Dave Pell has a huge audience that subscribes to email, which is the Holy Grail, but he is a curator.



It is doable and I'm going to make myself an example of how to do this. Some people are like, "Well, you've already got an existing audience, that's not fair." I don't know. This is what I want to do and it has nothing to do really with Copyblogger. Our friend [Chris Brogan](#) tried to change directions and a lot of people resisted. I don't think it's a lock that you have an existing audience if you're going into a brand new area, so we'll see.

Robert Bruce: Well here's the other thing about that. We both, you and I, and many of listeners to this show follow a few curated areas, either newsletters or folks doing stuff on third party services like Twitter. One part that keeps coming up between you and I, is that we have yet to see a really smart and powerful revenue model applied to it.

Brian Clark: You know what's interesting to me when I look at that? And I do agree with you. It's that I've got the revenue model.

Robert Bruce: Right.

Brian Clark: It would be membership based. I hate to say that's the easy part, but it is. What's interesting to me is whether or not I can find the great stuff. Can I create a voice that is appropriate and engaging for this audience? It's those types of things you would think some people will say, "Oh, that's the easy part." But is it?



Robert Bruce: We'll find out. Thank you for these two questions, folks. To get your own question featured on Rainmaker FM, just head over to [Rainmaker.FM](#), drop it into the comments of one of the episode posts there.

Rainmaker FM is brought to you by the Rainmaker Platform, which in our opinion is the best and easiest way for content marketers and online entrepreneurs to build a powerful content driven digital commerce website.

The thing I want to talk about the Rainmaker Platform today for just a minute is landing pages. We all know there are great landing page solutions out there for sure, but as with everything else Rainmaker, these are all integrated into the platform. One place, one price.

In this case, I log in to Rainmaker and with two clicks from the dashboard, I'm immediately given a choice of whether I want to go with one of fifteen beautiful landing page templates there, or whether I want to easily roll my own with the Rainmaker landing page builder. It goes without saying, the templates that we have available to you here are not only beautiful, but they're tested. Everything you'd expect on that front is there for you. All you need to do is drop in your own copy, hit publish, and get to work.

Of course there are many, many more templates on the way. The point here is that easily built landing pages that actually work are just one small feature within the integrated Rainmaker Platform. If you want to take a



look at the whole thing for fourteen days without charge, head over to RainmakerPlatform.com right now.

Quit horsing around trying to build your website and your landing pages and get back to building your business, RainmakerPlatform.com.

Understanding Digital Commerce: How to “Be the Market”

Robert Bruce: Now, into the main topic for today’s broadcast we go. One of the big questions that comes up again and again and again is around the topic of finding a profitable market. How do you do it? How do you know that it’s potentially profitable and where do you start?

Let’s talk about the headline you’ve come up with here, 7 Ways to Find a Topical Market that Will Fuel Your Digital Commerce Business. Way number one is, “Be the market.”

Brian Clark: First of all, let’s just refresh everyone’s memory when we use this term “digital commerce.” It’s a newer term that we’ve adopted. Essentially it means selling premium content.

As we talked about last week, it’s a little bit more than that. You’re really selling the benefits of knowledge and a complete experience of access to others. It’s also selling yourself and other subject matter experts and all that good stuff.



In its simplest form though, what is an area where people will invest in online training or some other sort of member fueled paid content community?

As you mentioned the first one, “Be the market.” Somewhere around 2001 or 2002 I had somehow educated myself in the world of direct response and direct marketing historically and had been applying it to the internet. There was permission based email lists, and all that kind of stuff.

I started seeing opportunities everywhere. You get to that point where you pay attention and you’re like, “Oh, you could do this and that, and that’s how you’d make money.” Right? That’s what I mean when I say monetization is easy for me. What is not easy for me is passion and interest in those things.

There are a million ways to make money and most of them I do not want to do. Sometimes even things that interest me, I don’t want to do. You have to give me a pep talk and then we move on. Right? But you get what I’m saying when it’s like if you’re not interested, if you’re not passionate in something, it is very difficult to do the work, to carry on and to keep going.

Think about it this way, if you want to be the leader of a tribe, you’ve got to be a member of the tribe. How often is it successful for an outsider to come in and take over? Usually it doesn’t work and it rarely works in online communities. So you need to be interested and passionate and you need to be the person with the problem or desire.



Then you can take that leadership role into helping people who are similar to you. That's very much why I started [Copyblogger](#). People think, "Well, I'm not an expert yet." But just merely going on your own journey and sharing what you know and bringing people along with you puts you in that role.

Look at [Darren Rowse's](#) story. No one started out as an expert. They just knew a little bit more than the other people. Right? It goes back to the curation thing. Like if you can find this stuff that you are genuinely interested in your own life, and this project that I'm talking about, it's where I'm at right now. Just like in 2005, I was at a place that resulted in me starting Copyblogger, so this is a tried and true one for me. From a content standpoint, I'm not saying you can't just go in ruthlessly and learn everything about a market and own it. You can. It's just it would be hard for me to keep going.

Robert Bruce: I'd like to add to what you brought up a moment ago, in that I think there's a road block that people have in their mind by saying, "Yeah, I can't talk about this stuff. I'm not an expert. I'm not a PhD in XYZ topic."

I don't know if you remember, but growing up it seemed if anybody was on the radio or on TV or in a magazine being interviewed, it seemed like they were all experts. It was as if they were all people of great authority.

But like you said, when Darren Rowse started Digital Photography School, he was not nearly an expert photographer, but he very clearly fanned his position as "I am a diehard to the end fan of photography. I want to learn more. Will you



come along with me?” And that’s the way to position it when you’re in that position.

Brian Clark: Yes, be an enthusiast. I’ll be the first to tell you that when I started having to try to teach people copywriting and content marketing, my own level of sophistication exploded. That’s because I was forced to truly examine these issues at a level to where I could communicate it to others.

Teaching is one of the best authority builders in the world not only in the way people view you, but in enhancing your own expertise. So again, the new project I’m going to be starting, which I am by no means an expert in any of it, but I am passionate about applying these principles to my own life and therefore I’m taking people along with me.

Get Thee to the Newsstand

Robert Bruce: Alright. Number two, one of my favorite things, I’ve talked about this a bunch over the years after hearing you and Sonia bring it up, and that is get thee to the newsstand. Go to a magazine rack and look at the magazines on the rack. What do you mean by this?

Brian Clark: Even if you are in the market, you are an enthusiast, and you are a member of the tribe you want to lead, you still have to do research. You’re not starting from zero when you are similar to who you’re trying to reach.



In any scenario, research is crucial and I do this all the time. I did it again with my most current project. Go to Barnes and Noble, anywhere where there is a big selection of magazines and look around. Find out if you have an idea for a membership site or some sort of digital commerce premium content site. Is there a magazine on it? How many? How are they positioned? That's because that's what it comes down to.

You need to find a topical market that is big enough to bring you enough people. You're not going to reach them all and that's always the danger of going really niche. Hey, no one is talking about this yet. What did Sonia call it? Naked mole rats?

Robert Bruce: Naked mole rats. Yes.

Brian Clark: So looking at naked mole rat enthusiasts. There is no magazine for that. If there is a paper magazine for a topic, then it is a viable niche.

Robert Bruce: It means there's advertising in it and people are paying not only to buy it, but people are paying to be seen in it.

Brian Clark: Exactly. And then you look not only at the content, but you look at who is advertising.

Robert Bruce: Right.



Brian Clark: That's really informative to figuring out what's happening. It really helps inform your own strategy because you're getting more specific with every step you take in your research to understanding what the audience wants currently and what they could want in the future that is slightly unique.

Robert Bruce: One side note on this, if you're building any kind of a hyperlocal website and making that kind of play, if you go to your local newsstand or grocery store or bookstores (and sadly so many of these great newsstands are gone now) but you'll see that not only are the big magazines there that are always there, but you'll see interest from your community.

For instance, I'm in Oregon's wine country. There are all kinds of wine magazines at a local grocery store that we go to, but there's also an entire rack of hunting and fishing magazines that are not going to show up in newsstands in Portland. That awareness might inform those of you who are working on local websites as well that there are all kinds of angles to approach it with.

Brian Clark: Absolutely. The free lifestyle magazines in any area are amazing at giving you a big head start. You know? My Boulder site, YourBoulder.com, there are several free and paid competing local Boulder publications and I'm killing them all online. That's because they're focused on print and that's good for them, but they're very bad at online. And that is an opportunity.



What You Need to Know About Niche Positioning

Robert Bruce: Number three is a big topic with niche positioning.

Brian Clark: I touched on this, but you're going to want a huge and competitive topical area. I always talk about the big three, not counting technology, which is obviously a huge one and super saturated.

There's health and wellness, money and investing (wealth if you will), and personal development. Those are eternal. There will always be room for more, especially if you are coming at it with a unique perspective. And how could you not since you are a unique human being?

That's only the beginning though. Again, it comes down to being part of your market. That helps because your personality cannot be duplicated. But you also have to look to position yourself in a way that is perceived to be something completely new. A lot of people struggle with positioning but it is the most important thing. I could point out countless examples of blogs or newsletters or magazines that are essentially talking about the same exact thing and yet they are completely different in the eyes of the audience.

Robert Bruce: Right. And not only that, but their reprinting the same exact articles and headlines on maybe a 6-8 month to a year schedule.

Brian Clark: You're thinking of the old *Men's Health* thing, right?



Robert Bruce: Exactly.

Brian Clark: You might want to explain that if people don't catch it. Basically *Men's Health* does a different cover photo and the same exact headlines for stories once a year or something like that.

Robert Bruce: I don't know what the cycle is, but it might be even longer. I'll drop a link to [a post Demian Farnworth did](#), with a look at this.

He found this great picture that you can probably easily find online, but it's up of four different *Men's Health* covers. The picture is different, but it's almost word for word on the headlines for the same articles over a period of a couple years at least. It's very interesting. And you know what? I don't read *Men's Health*, but I was never aware that was happening.

Brian Clark: Of course not because people tend to come in and out of those types of things depending on where they're at in their life.

Robert Bruce: Right.

How to Tap into the Essential Elements of Content Marketing

Brian Clark: The topics are pretty much the same at any given time. You want to lose weight, you want to gain muscle, and improve your sex life. It's the



same thing. I would be very surprised to find that there are people who have been subscribed to *Men's Health* for ten years unless they're really just not paying attention.

Robert Bruce: Yep.

Brian Clark: The goal here is that you tap into existing desire with these things. You're not creating desire. What you are creating is the impression of a unique approach to satisfying that desire. That's essentially what marketing is with regard to content.

It's voice. It's editorial positioning. It is how am I coming at this topic that is not quite the same as everyone else? I know from being one of these people and doing copious amounts of research that this is something that's right on the cusp of the way people are thinking about this topic.

Trend or Fad? Know the Difference for Your Niche

Robert Bruce: Number four, you have down trend watching.

Brian Clark: Exactly, that's how you do it. That's how you create an editorial positioning which is unique. It's fresh and it's innovative, even though you are talking about timeless topics. There are always new fitness research trends or fads. There are always new ways to make money or new ways to lose money. Mostly in the stock market, that never changes.



Trend watching is just as it sounds, except I want to make sure I distinguish between a trend and a fad. A trend is a long-term shift. It's a movement in a direction within a broader topical area.

The green movement is a trend. It is not a fad. It is something that has been happening for a long time and is accelerating with certain people. It is being pushed back against by other people, but those people are not your audience. Maybe it's like gluten free, but I don't know this one yet. It almost appears like it is going to be a trend.

Robert Bruce: It's interesting, yes.

Brian Clark: That's even though I thought it was a fad, but that remains to be seen. That's what you have to determine though. You could start a wellness site that has a broader positioning that includes gluten free, but you don't have to call your site Gluten Free Community. That's because at that point, you are betting everything on that one trend.

I did see a magazine, Gluten Free Magazine, which may be why I'm thinking it's a larger trend. Or they're very into cashing in for a brief period of time and then going to do something else which there is technically nothing wrong with that, but I like long-term things. I like things are going to keep going and you can evolve your content with it as opposed to "Oh, I've got to start over."



Robert Bruce: I do too. There are a lot of people that make a lot of money on fads. To me, that always seemed like a really exhausting deal, which is my number one point. But number two, look at your comment about trends.

A trend is something that you're working on, writing about, and that is more long-term. Again, we're talking about building an audience here. Fad to fad to fad to fad is a tough area if not an impossible way to build any kind of meaningful audience.

Brian Clark: There are some people out there who think content marketing is a fad. I'll tell you right now, it is not. It is a trend because no one is going to raise their hand and say, "Ehh enough with the useful information, just pitch me." It's not going in that direction.

Robert Bruce: Right.

Brian Clark: The empowered prospect is the engine of the trend towards content marketing. You're looking at the results of broader trends and the internet empowered people to take things into their own hands as opposed to the companies and corporations being in charge of the sales process. That's a huge trend. It's not going away.

[TrendWatching.com](https://www.trendwatching.com) is a good site. There's free and paid content there. If you're really serious, you can buy research reports that take a really serious deep dive. I do think there are certain scenarios where it's worth the investment.



A couple of trends I identified, I'm going to forget, it is LOHAS basically. It's basically people who are kind of like hippie yuppies. They're like those of us here in Boulder. They're into organic, they're into sustainability, they're into conscious investment, spirituality, green live and all of this kind of stuff. It's a very well defined market segment that is big and growing.

So understanding that market has informed my content strategy. It's not about that, but that's an aspect of it. Here's another thing, which is healthy aging. Now you're thinking, "Okay, that may apply to people like you in your forties and up." But no, actually when you dig into the research, the millennials are very interested in healthy aging. Why do you think that is, Robert?

Robert Bruce: It's because they think they're going to make it to the singularity.

Brian Clark: Yes. They're the first generation (well, hopefully not the first, I'm still going for Gen X), but the millennials have a decent shot at living a lot longer than any other human if science and technology keep breaking through in areas of longevity.

At a minimum, people will start living over a hundred years routinely. That has been increasing on a linear path throughout the last hundred years or so. With that, the better you take care of yourself when you're young, the better shape you're generally going to be in when you're older. That was fascinating to me that healthy aging is not an old person topic.



If you're already old, you're probably kind of stuck with the decisions you made when you were younger (which I'm trying to get over).

Robert Bruce: Yeah. I'm not sure I can take this shit for a hundred years. We'll find out.

Brian Clark: I know, it's like living a long life and is it actually worth living?

Robert Bruce: Right. That's the real question.

Brian Clark: Yes, that's the real question.

Robert Bruce: See, when we get into philosophy and you and I get going. Okay, anything else on trend watching?

Brian Clark: Yes, [TrendHunter.com](https://www.trendhunter.com) and there is a site called [Springwise](https://www.springwise.com) that deals with trends specifically in the context of startups. Check those out.

Again, there is some combination of paid and free, but there's a lot of great information that's on their free stuff.

Why You Need to Be Aware of What's Already Selling

Robert Bruce: Let's move to number five in this list of 7 ways to find a topical market that will fuel your digital commerce business. This one is to find out what's already selling.



Brian Clark: You can see how all of these interrelate. Again, don't be afraid of competition. Don't be afraid that someone else is selling something similar to what you have envisioned. That is actually a good sign. It shows that people are willing to pay for something. If they're willing to pay for it and you connect with them better or provide more value or just take that unique angle that really resonates with people and yet effectively it is kind of the same thing, you still win. You've still got a viable business.

It is important to go into big markets. It is important to find out what is already selling and then use that information to make yourself unique or more valuable or as the case may be, make it something that is going to resonate with people in a way that your research has revealed.

This is where it gets squishy because people are always like, "Well, what's the bright sign I'm looking for?" If I could tell you that, we wouldn't be doing this podcast. It's in there, that's all I can say. It's in there if you look.

And the Survey Says ...

Robert Bruce: Number six, you've listed something here that you have an interesting take on and that is doing surveys.

Brian Clark: Yeah, certainly. If you are very smart about surveying and you have an existing audience or you tap into someone else's audience through



some sort of native advertising or pay-per-click or something, you can get very valuable information from people.

The tough thing about surveying with multiple choice is it is almost always not going to be as valuable of information as you'd like because you're restricting the response for your own convenience. You're probably subtly suggesting or influencing the answers. People will tell you what you want to hear and never buy from you.

What people say they'll buy and what they do buy are two different things. There's only one marketing genius in the world and that's the guy with the credit card who pulls it out and says, "Yes, I want that." So surveying with open-ended questions is best.

There used to be this internet marketing thing called Ask. It was this really simple software, but that was the deal. It wasn't multiple choice. They had to type in the answers.

Robert Bruce: Oh, none of it was. Yeah.

Brian Clark: Derek Halpern does Social Triggers. He does something when you sign up for his list. He asks what your number one problem is right now and he wants you to respond freeform. That's because it's not as neat or able to be put into a box. It is more authentic and it is more likely to provide you with insight.



Here's a lesson with that is that Derek asks about problems or desires, right? He does not ask you what you want to buy. As Steve Jobs says, "That's up to you to figure out what they want to buy." Everyone thinks Jobs was such a genius and that he just created desire for something that didn't exist. No.

Everything that Apple sells, with the exclusion of maybe the iPad, which was probably his biggest gamble, were just improvements on existing things. The iPod was not the first MP3 player; it was the first one that was beautiful and functional.

Robert Bruce: It was the first one with amazing marketing behind it, by the way.

Brian Clark: It had all of it. Right?

Robert Bruce: Apple is actually a great example of improving on what's already out there and just owning it as opposed to trying to create something completely unique. The other thing about Jobs is he was great at identifying existing desire and satisfying it. That does not mean he created desire.

Robert Bruce: Right.

Brian Clark: It's a firm belief that desire is out there. It's up to the entrepreneur to recognize it and then to create something that satisfies it.



With surveys you don't ask them what they want to buy, you identify problems and desires. That's what we did on Copyblogger for nine years now. We just didn't do it by surveys. We just watch.

Again, that's one of those things that drives people insane. "What do you mean listen or watch?" It's just that. It's all out there in social media especially. Unscripted, unfiltered, and probably more than you'd like and it's very real.

Your Minimum Viable Membership Site

Robert Bruce: And finally number seven, the minimum viable membership site. This sounds interesting.

Brian Clark: I do have to admit, we have never done this. That's because by the time we launched Teaching Sells, and by the time we'd launched Third Tribe and then [Authority](#) later, we're right there. We understand our people and that's why we've never developed a product that failed. This comes from the whole lean startup world and the minimum viable product.

Here's one thing I do when developing any sort of paid content play. I start mapping out headlines and copy before I create the thing because that tells me what I have to create. It goes back to why I write a headline first. It tells me what I'm promising and therefore what I have to deliver.



It's the same thing with paid content. The copy has to effectively tease at the benefits of knowledge in a way that you then have to satisfy. Right?

This may be dicey to some people, but I could see how it would be an amazing market research thing. You basically create your outside of your membership site with copy and everything based on what you'd like to create. This is something that's done all the time in the lean startup world.

You basically throw paid traffic at it and when people get to the sign-up part, you have to let them go far enough to where you have a firm indication that they actually want to buy that. If you haven't created it yet, you either have to give them a notice that "we're not taking members at this time" or whatever. You've got to be careful not lie.

Robert Bruce: Right.

Brian Clark: I think there are people that aren't careful and they just flat out lie. I don't believe in that. You have to do something that's obviously going to disappoint someone who was going to buy from you.

But the fact that someone wanted to buy from you, what did I say? That is it. That's the only way you'll ever know. How do you know what someone wants to buy? They bought it.



Building the front end of your site and then seeing if your hypothesis that people want this type of training program or membership site is very important. Then you go into product development. When we first launched Teaching Sells, that's all it was. It was a report and it was outside copy. We got people to join up and we delivered the content over the next year, so there's always that method too. That is something we've obviously done.

You know what you want to create and can you go through your whole launch process. Once I put out the first Teaching Sells report, I knew that I had identified the right thing.

At that time, Copyblogger made no money. I had been going for a year and nine or ten months making money in other ways, while building the audience on Copyblogger. Then we launched something and we got paid to create it. So that's the ballsier approach to the minimum viable membership site, which is to actually sell something that doesn't exist yet but people are paying you. You have to deliver, but in a way, it is like a Kickstarter thing.

Robert Bruce: Right.

Brian Clark: I forgot the Kickstarter thing, which people are used to this now. Right? You promise something that doesn't exist, they give you money, and then you have to deliver it. Right? We did that in 2007 on our own with our own audience.



Robert Bruce: The beauty of doing it this way as opposed to even the nice shiny new Kickstarter way is that not only are they paying to get this thing going for this thing that you have (the course in this case planned out, the membership site planned out), but I remember you telling me that once you got going, those first customers as they were working through Teaching Sells actually altered the course of Teaching Sells. This happened by the feedback they were giving you. And by the listening to those paying customers, it got better.

Brian Clark: It's just like we talk about with content marketing strategy when you're giving away free content. You've got to iterate. You've got to see what works and what doesn't and what people are saying. It's a constant process.

I liked that we did Teaching Sells that way because I had the core concept correct, but not the implementation of that. I started realizing "Okay, people need more than I thought they did on the groundwork." Right? We've released Rainmaker, we've released every single product we ever have this same way since Teaching Sells all the way to Rainmaker. "We're giving you our best deal, you give us feedback, and we promise to listen." It has always worked.

Robert Bruce: Thanks for listening everybody. If you stumbled onto this broadcast and you'd like to get it delivered to you, the best way to do that is to go to Rainmaker.FM and sign up via email. When you do that, you'll also be given free access to two weeks of training that will likely change the way you think about online marketing.



You can also grab this show in [iTunes](#). If you like what's going on around here, please leave a comment or a rating for us while you're there. Those are always much appreciated. Mr. Clark, I'll see you next week.

Brian Clark: Thank you, Mr. Bruce.