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BOOK MARKETING: How to Grow Your Author Platform Interview with Mark LeBlanc

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books. Today my special guest is a small business development expert. Mark LeBlanc is the architect of a unique business development philosophy that zeroes in on the core issues that small business owners face daily. Little did he know that, at 21, how inspired he'd be by his employer's words, "You don't have the work ethic to make it in your own business" and just six months later, Mark would venture out on his own and never look back.

Thirty-three years later, Mark shares his expertise on how to grow a business using nine best practices. I've known Mark for more years than I can remember. We share many memories, both good and not so good. He lives with his dear wife Ann in Minneapolis and has been a speaker and business coach for over 25 years. His Achiever Circle Business Retreat is the anti-bootcamp for independent professionals who want to grow their business and put more money in their pocket. He wrote the book "Growing Your Business" which has become an underground bestseller and his most recent book "Never Be The Same" was inspired by his short 500 mile walk across Spain and the proceeds from his book sales go into his foundation for young entrepreneurs and to date he's given nine \$3,000 grants to kids with a dream.

Mark, what an absolute pleasure it is to have you as this week's guest expert and mentor. So welcome to the show.

Mark LeBlanc: Thank you so much, Susan, for having me.

Susan Friedmann: So Mark, if anyone knows the trial and tribulations of growing and entrepreneurial business, it's you. And since so many of our listeners are either entrepreneurs or solopreneurs, I thought that they would really benefit from learning about some of your best practices. So let's start with what is one key skill you believe we need to really grow our business?

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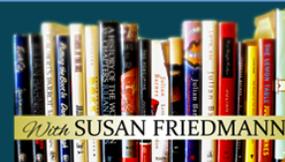
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- Mark LeBlanc: There's obviously many because we wear so many different hats when we run our own business and so many of your listeners, I think, are like me. We're independent professionals who sell our time and our talent, our experiences, our expertise, and we wear a lot of hats. I've been on my own, virtually, as you said, my entire adult life. I owned a creative graphics printing and mailing company for ten years from 1982 to 1992 and then I grew and sold that business and became a full time speaker and business coach and author of several books.
- I named my company Small Business Success in 1992 and got off to a roaring start. In fact, I did not earn a nickel in my first twelve months. It was a goal that I don't remember setting. And when your company name is Small Business Success that certainly is a gap. I've probably never met an excuse that I didn't have an intimate relationship with myself. And today, when I look back, I think for most small business owners, it's the money side of their business that must come into focus. When the sun and the moon and the stars lines up around the money side of your business, then things start to click and to fall in place.
- As you mentioned, I've got nine best practices and I like to live in a world of two or more right answers, except for best practice number one. I often refer to it as my own and only demand-ment. And best practice number one is track your numbers properly. Track your numbers properly. And I have developed a proprietary numbers tracking system including a numbers tracking tool that I'd be happy to make available to anyone listening today.
- Susan Friedmann: That's very generous. Numbers is not my forte and so I'm with you with that. It's like, okay, we need to track those numbers, but how do we do that? So offering that gift would be lovely, thank you.
- Mark LeBlanc: You're welcome.
- Susan Friedmann: So how would you recommend that an author build a strong foundation for a successful business.
- Mark LeBlanc: I think it begins with a strategic decision. You either become known for something or you become known to a particular target market. I'm known for growing your business. I'm not specifically known to any sliver of the marketplace, I'm known for. And that's a very difficult decision for people to make because we believe in our gifts, our talents, our abilities, and we just want to share them with the world. But the more focused you are, the easier everything becomes. You hear that

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phrase, 'focus is everything' and quite frankly, I don't believe it is. I think today extreme focus is everything.

Even if you have multiple topics or multiple products or multiple services or multiple profit centers, what I would encourage people to do is what is your primary topic or area of expertise?

Susan Friedmann: I find, Mark, with many of the authors is they have a book and they don't necessarily realize that this book could be a business for them. What recommendations would you give in that arena?

Mark LeBlanc: Unfortunately, today, Susan, as you well know, the good news is that never before has it been easier for people to self-publish their own book. But that's also the hard news. Unfortunately, too many people publish a bad book. But even worse than those who publish bad books are those who publish good books with the wrong title or the wrong subtitle or the wrong structure in their table of contents or the fatal flaw is they see their book as the finish line. They put their blood, sweat, and fears into getting the book down as if the book is the finish line, when in fact, when you open up the box of books, that's really the charting line. And they don't think about what can happen as a result of the book. They've invested so much in getting the book produced that then this period of; well now what? And how do I sell more books? When in fact I believe that's the wrong question.

To me, the right question is what will this book lead to? Will it lead to more consulting assignments or more coaching engagements or more keynote speeches or presentations? It's very difficult today for people to get an ROI on selling \$20 books or \$10 books. It does happen and it certainly has happened for me, and I'd be happy to share how and why my books have been profitable, but I would much prefer that an author use his or her book to get \$2,000 bills or a \$20,000 consulting assignment because there is no better credibility tool. In fact, I think a book ... It's the best business card you can have. It's also the best marketing tool that you can use to execute your strategies.

Susan Friedmann: I'd love you to talk about your Grow Your Business. You talk about it as an underground bestseller and I know that so many of my listeners aspire to be bestselling authors. Talk to us about how they might tap into that underground network?

Mark LeBlanc: It really began when I had four different areas of expertise and I wasn't getting very far. And one day I woke up and I thought, 'if I could do 50

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Growing Your Business at my fee level,' this is back in 1997, 'I'd be happier than a pig in mud.' And I essentially threw away the other three and I bet the farm on Growing Your Business and positioning myself as a business development expert. Now at the time I did not have my book done and of course many of my colleagues and peers and friends started saying to me, "Mark, you're a pretty sharp guy, you should write a book."

But my confidence as a writer wasn't very high. It was fairly high as a presenter. It was even higher as a business coach. And of course, when your confidence is low as a writer and you're not in shape for writing, you start asking people, "Well, what should my book look like?" And there's a lot of well-intentioned advice out there: "Well it should be 50,000 words" and "It should be 10 chapters" and "It should sell for \$22.95 to \$34.95" and "You know, Mark, if you don't charge a lot for it, nobody's gonna take it seriously."

So I did that. I wrote a 50,000 word manuscript and when I got done with it Susan, I thought, 'Man there's a lot of crap in there.' And I cut 43,000 words. And I was left with a little mass market, paperback size book title Growing Your Business and it came out in late 1999, almost 17 years ago now. And I'm just as proud of that book today as I was 17 years ago. I've moved almost 70,000 copies of that little blue book. It sells for \$10. But what I'm more proud of is the fact that I continue to get a quantity order every single week, 17 years after it was first published.

People always say to me, "Mark, how does that happen? Your book came out before Al Gore invented the internet? There's nothing in your book about social media." We hadn't even uttered the words Twitter or Facebook. And it goes back to something I shared earlier. Number one, I'm known for Growing Your Business, and I continue to speak 50 plus times a year every year on Growing Your Business. That's what I'm known for. It would only make sense that I continue to sell more books every year.

But the second reason is, I developed an accidentally brilliant quantity pricing plan. And what I came up with was if somebody orders 25 copies or more, I'll give them 25% off. I can remember that. And then I thought, if they order 50 copies or more, I'll give them 50% off. There's always somebody in an audience who says, "Well, gosh, does that mean if I order 100 I'll get 100% off." And I continue to get a quantity order of 50 or more ... I think I have some 800 quantity buyers at 50% off, for \$5.

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Some times you can barely get a decent pen with your name on it for \$5. And so I have accountants who give them to their small business clients. And I have mortgage brokers who give them to real estate agents.

And you know Susan, I don't mean to be self-deprecating, my little blue book is no literary work of genius. It's just a breath of fresh air, it's got some good tips in it, it's got a monster story in chapter two that is somewhat inspired, and it just clicked. And so the idea of publish a book first, or, if you're already published, maybe your next book could be positioned as the book that supports your primary area of expertise.

Something I always like to share is what I call the trifecta and that is: book title, presentation title, and domain name the same. My email address is mark@growingyourbusiness.com, my book title; growing your business. I've done over 1,000 presentations titled what? Growing Your Business. I've done over 125 Achiever's Circle Business retreats on what? Growing Your Business. And if I'm ever gonna write an article, I'm gonna write an article on Growing Your Business or some aspect of business development. That's what I've become known for over the last 25 years.

Susan Friedmann: I think that's brilliant and I think one of the things that you've done so well is that you wrote a book that's evergreen and that's why it's stood the test of time. And I know I've been one of those people who I love giving your book away and I've ordered quantities of them to give away to people. As you say, it's nice, small, it's very to the point, but it says what it has to say, literally, about growing your business. So, congratulations.

Mark LeBlanc: Oh thank you.

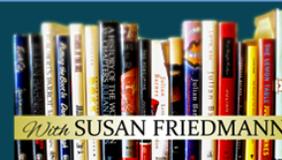
Susan Friedmann: Mistakes. I love talking about mistakes. We've all made them, we are all aware of other people who make them. What would you like to share? Would you like to share what you've done or what we can learn from you or what we can learn from other people you know? You've been around so many entrepreneurs.

Mark LeBlanc: Well, I call it the half a million dollar mistake. And I might start to cry.

Susan Friedmann: Do I bring out the tissues now?

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Mark LeBlanc:

Yeah, I think so. In 1999 when I first published *Growing Your Business*, I was very excited about it. I had pre-sold about 1,000 copies and so the books came in, they were delivered, we started shipping the books and collecting the money, I started to get some quantity orders. But I had an idea. For those of you that are not familiar with my book, my book is less than 100 pages and the size of it is about four inches by seven inches. It's considered a mass market paperback size book. And I had every intention of creating a companion manual or journal, call the implementation manual or the execution manual of my book. As is always the case, for you and for me, time goes by so fast and a couple of years ... Sometimes life happens along the way.

A couple of years after my book was published, I found myself separated after a 19 year marriage. That separation would last a couple of years. I was advised not to develop any intellectual property during that time period. During that time period, I was elected vice president of the National Speaker's Association, a volunteer four year leadership commitment, and served as president in 2007-2008, and I came back from being president of NSA, I shaved my head bald, I went on a 500 mile walk across Spain, took about five weeks off, and I came back and I hit the ground running, all to say I never got the manual completed.

My idea was to create an implementation or execution manual, maybe 70 or 80 pages, I might sell it for \$79. And Susan, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you've heard me speak a number of times. If I would've had a \$10 book and \$79 spiral bound manual, I think you've got a pretty good idea of how many I would've sold over the last 17 years. I conservatively estimate that I would've sold 5,000 at a minimum, if not about 10% of the 70,000. So even if you go 5,000 manuals at \$80, that's \$400,000 that I let slip through my grasp because I did not take action on that.

So I would strongly encourage people to look at their signature book, their flagship book, and look at it as what I call a franchise. I don't mind franchise or franchisee, but if that's your area of expertise than how can you build around a book?

And example; I have a book coming out later this year titled *Growing Your Business When You Are the Business* and I will have the \$20 book, I'll have the \$200 execution manual. I'll have the \$50 wall map business plan, I'll have the \$20 laminated cheat sheet guide, I'll have all these pieces around the book. Now it sounds like a lot of work, but the reality is, if

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you're out there doing the good work that you are called and compelled to do, these sales will happen.

Susan Friedmann: That's a very touching story and having seen you go through that, I sort of know that in my heart, what you went through. Thank you for sharing that. We leave so much on the table because we're fearful. I love the word, when you said blood, sweat, and fears. I think that sort of stands out as that we're so fearful of moving forward so many times that we stand in our own way. I'm sure you've seen that with so many of your clients. Can you talk to us a little bit about maybe some of those stumbling blocks that you've seen?

Mark LeBlanc: Oh, for sure. I think one of the traps that stop us is what I call the perfection trap; a very common trap for writers and authors. You want to dot every 'i', you want to cross every 't', you want it to be perfect. And for those of you that are challenged by the perfection trap, I have a little chiropractic adjustment for your brain, and that is; done is better than perfect. Done is better than perfect. In unscientific polling that I've done, so many people that I've asked who have a book, I've asked the question; how long has that book been inside of you? It's amazing to me how often I hear the answer five, seven, nine years that a book has been inside somebody before it was born.

I firmly believe the best books are not out yet. They're still inside of us. I want people to now think in terms of publishing a book. I would encourage people to think in terms of a books plan. IT should be what is your next book and what is the book after that and ... I have ten books outline that I want to publish over the next ten years.

Interestingly enough, I just had an interview with Don Hudson out of Memphis, Tennessee who co-wrote a book with Ken Blanchard. As you know, Ken Blanchard is the author and co-author of The One Minute Manager. He's also co-authored approximately 60 books in total and an interesting fact is that Ken Blanchard has never published his own book. He has always co-authored. He's co-authored 60 books with 60 co-authors, and he told Don, he said, "I always learn more when I co-author with someone." And since I had this interview with Don just two weeks ago, I already reached out to somebody and we're co-authoring a book and we're gonna have it done by March 31st. We're gonna do this book in 30 days.

And so it opened my eyes to getting out of my own way thinking that I have to have the light on me. I can co-author with somebody and

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together we can get that work out and be of good service to the people that we serve best.

Susan Friedmann: I think that's such great advice and you're absolutely right. We always think that it's only us and we get so us focused whereas the brilliance comes from other people. I know that that was the nucleus for this podcast because I could never see myself just being the person who constantly gives messages week after week whereas I've interviewed such wonderful, experienced people, like yourself, and that's where the magic comes. So I'm totally in favor of that collaboration.

So Mark, how can our listeners find out more about you and your services?

Mark LeBlanc: They can send me an email direct at growingyourbusiness.com. My assistance is Kylie@growingyourbusiness.com. If any of the listeners out there ... Obviously you can go to Amazon and order my book *Growing Your Business*, but if any of you would like a complimentary, the e-book version of *Growing Your Business*, I would be happy to get that to you as well.

Susan Friedmann: That's very generous. And it's well worth it, listeners. Get it because it's a gold mine of information if you're even thinking of growing your business so thank you so much. And Mark if you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be?

Mark LeBlanc: Two things. One, develop in as much detail as you can, the profile of your perfect fit reader. What will serve the best of what your perfect fit reader needs and wants? Too often we think too general with our expertise and while it might be valuable, if we really do not have the reader in mind, we often will not get as far as we want to go.

But the second thing is, I call it my storm started strategy, if you want more consulting or more coaching or more speaking, mail one book a day to a targeted prospect. And a guy out of Oklahoma, Nick Bittle, started mailing ten books a week in the hopes of landing half day workshops in his target market and he's tripled his business in the last two years simply by mailing ten books a week to targeted prospects. And so whether it's ten a weeks or one a day, five days a week, think of it like your vitamins. Just mail one book a day to a targeted prospect and before you know it, you're gonna have more interest and more business than you know what to do with.

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Susan Friedmann:

I think the key words there are targeted audience, targeted prospects. That's brilliant advice, so thank you. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom.

If you want to take your author marketing to the next level of success, make sure that you go to bookmarketingmentors.com and sign up for a 15 minute complimentary coaching session with me, Susan Friedmann. Thank you all for taking precious time out of your day to listen to this interview and I sincerely hope that it sparked some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.