

How Doug Cunnington Helped Flip an Amazon Affiliate Site for \$235k

Daryl Rosser: Hey guys, Daryl here. Welcome back to another episode of the Lion Zeal show. In this episode I'm sitting down with Doug Cunnington, and we're breaking down his business as an Affiliate SEO, doing stuff like Amazon, and guest posting and stuff like that. It's very fascinating to see this.

What's really cool, is we're breaking down a site that he's been working on very recently, that him and Rob Atkinson just sold for, in the region of over \$200,000. So breaking down how exactly they made this white hat to sell it for more money. So originally they built it up with just PBN links, then they switched it over, all the links, to get rid of all the PBN links, built Guest Post Links instead, made it White Hat SEO, and then sold this for a much higher multiple than they would have got beforehand.

We're breaking down how exactly he did that, why he did this, and really just breaking down what he does in his business to rank Affiliate sites and make money from that, using white hat link building techniques. With that said, let's get into the interview. I hope you enjoy it, there's a lot of nuggets here. Let's get straight into it, enjoy.

Doug, hey man. Thank you for joining me on the show today. You're recommended by quite a few guys actually, so it's great to finally have you here.

Doug Cunnington: Daryl, it's a pleasure to be on, it's really an honor to be on your show. So appreciate it.

Daryl Rosser: That's cool man. So I always start the exact same way. For anyone that doesn't know you already, can you give an introduction as to who you are and what it is that you do?

Doug Cunnington: Sure. I write and blog over at NicheSiteProject.com, and I got into the internet marketing world by accident. The gateway for me was smart passive income, the podcast.

Daryl Rosser: A lot of people started from that.

Doug Cunnington: Yeah. I wasn't even looking for business or entrepreneurship, I saw Pat Flynn on my podcast app and fired it up, and I was hooked.

Daryl Rosser: Nice.

Doug Cunningham: At the time I was working as a software project manager for a consulting company. I really had no interest, I thought it sounded really scammy way back then.

Daryl Rosser: That's fair enough, I had the same kind of thoughts.

Doug Cunningham: Yeah. Once you consume enough of the information and you see it around, you understand you can make money online. After, I really binged on it. I listened to all the episodes I could within a month or so. I launched my first terrible AdSense site, which was based on bad keyword research and I basically did everything wrong, but we'll just leave it at that. I allowed me to learn about WordPress, using hosting package and buying that kind of stuff, plus the keyword research, the SEO and so on. That's how I got into it overall.

Daryl Rosser: That's super cool. I'm glad that you owned up that your first site was an abysmal failure. I think most people's is, and a lot have this terrible perception that their first thing needs to be perfect and it's gonna be amazing, and it's gonna just work out. But it doesn't.

Doug Cunningham: No. I was gonna say, I observed the same thing where most people, it's a long path of you learn one aspect, you incrementally learn a little bit more, and then along the way you're making fewer mistakes. Tons of terrible issues that I had, and then one of the biggest things, I'm pretty sure everyone does this. I launched my first site, and then I thought, "Oh I found these other keywords that are great, I'm gonna go ahead and lock down those domains so no one else gets them." So I bought five other domains, started to set up those sites, and of course I never touched them for years. And then they go away.

Daryl Rosser: Alright. What about the second site, did you get some better success with that?

Doug Cunningham: Yeah, the first series of those five or six didn't go so well.

Daryl Rosser: Okay, yeah.

Doug Cunningham: Then eventually, a few months later, if we rewind this is the summer of 2013 and I watched an Amazon Affiliate site, it did really well. This was around the time that Spencer Haws in Niche Pursuits was doing his Niche Site project.

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunningham: Which I went and borrowed the name, so thank you Spencer for that.

Daryl Rosser: Fair enough.

Doug Cunningham: I launched that site and it did really well. So at that point, four months ahead, I was able to put together something that worked, and I think if I remember

correctly, by December of that year, 2013, I hit 6,200 for December. Which is awesome, right?

Daryl Rosser: Nice.

Doug Cunningham: That's full-time income for most people. Of course you have artificial growth from the retail season.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah. Interesting.

Doug Cunningham: Like all good internet marketing stories, I was making \$400 a day, next thing you know my site gets penalized. So in January of 2014 I lost my rankings, my site got penalized. I was doing a lot of PBN stuff, my friends were quite sloppy in the way that we were sharing links, so we all went down burning.

Daryl Rosser: At the same time? Yikes.

Doug Cunningham: I think it may have been staggered. But a lot of us got hit, or one or two sites, and then by the end of 2014 there was a lot more de-indexing of the PBNs, so.

Daryl Rosser: I remember, around that sort of time. What was the difference between how you approached, say site number two, it's not actually site number two cause you had the other ones, but site number two versus the very first one.

Doug Cunningham: It was really focused on the end goal in mind. When it comes down to it I was looking at buyers keywords for the second site. In the first site there really wasn't a commercial basis for it. On the second site I knew it was gonna be an Amazon Affiliate site, I knew the products I was going to be reviewing, I knew that there was a lot of informational content that would go with it. All that worked well. The other thing was, I was getting really into PBNs at the time, so I threw a bunch of links at it, Web 2.0s, you know the story on that kind of stuff.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunningham: But like I said, it was pretty slippery. It worked really well, but not for that long.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. You think there was some luck in there then? If it was kind of sloppy and still worked so well?

Doug Cunningham: Probably. There's probably always some luck and timing involved in that sort of stuff, for sure.

Daryl Rosser: Okay, so let's continue the story. You started using some PBNs and stuff, you started making some money off that site, and then early 2014 it all tanked.

Doug Cunningham: Yeah. That wasn't cool, I was pretty sad about that.

Daryl Rosser: Understandably.

Doug Cunningham: At the point where the income was coming in, I thought I was going to be able to quit my job. I had a high paying, management consulting job, like a skilled person. I was making good money. That's getting close to where, you know, "I can work online full time." My friends thought I was crazy, they didn't know what I was talking about, they couldn't believe this site could make that much money. Yeah, so it tanked, and I regrouped, I think that's probably another thing that's similar with people who are successful. You hit some sort of road block, something happens, and you keep going, you figure out how to not do that again.

Daryl Rosser: For sure.

Doug Cunningham: However, I didn't hit that point yet, so I launched I think four to five new sites a month or two later, after I tried to recover some. I think I tried to do 301 redirecting, relaunch the site somewhere else, all that stuff.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah yeah.

Doug Cunningham: And then I thought, "You know what, let's just start clean. I'll start four new sites." I was still thinking the PBNs could work pretty good, but I was still too sloppy and didn't do what I should have done, so within five months in the September, October of 2014, all four to five sites were penalized again.

Daryl Rosser: Oh wow. That's bad.

Doug Cunningham: Yeah. Thousands of dollars invested, hours and hours. So they got penalized again, and it was sad.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah. Do you think you were up at this point? Or down? In terms of overall from starting out. Because you earned some money, but then you obviously reinvested and wasted it a lot.

Doug Cunningham: It was probably about dead even or so.

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunningham: I made a few thousand along the way. One of the sites that I did launch, I sold it with Empire Flippers. I actually pulled in some money at that point. It was probably even if I had to guess.

Daryl Rosser: Nice.

Doug Cunningham: If you ignore the value of my time.

Daryl Rosser: Which we tend to do.

Doug Cunningham: Yeah. When you fast forward to the September, everything was penalized, so at that point I was like, "You know what, I'm going to just do some thinking. Do I want to do PBNs? Is it worth it? Do I enjoy running a network?" I really don't.

Daryl Rosser: Nobody does.

Doug Cunningham: In the greatest respect to people. You can set up systems and you can automate certain things, but at the end of the day you're managing a network of sites and there's only so much fun you can have with it.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, for sure.

Doug Cunningham: So, basically I realized, I don't want to work with PBNs and I'm gonna just go white hat. In the fall of 2014 I launched a site that I still have today. It's doing really well. I can take a little bit longer to ramp up a white hat site I believe, a PBN had the power built in, but if you're doing guest posts, you're doing white hat outreach, it takes a while. And it sucks in its own way. It's different from the PBN headaches, but it has its own type of headache I guess.

Daryl Rosser: Sure. I guess there's a lot of big differences. With PBNs the one thing ... I'm with you. Managing PBNs sucks, it's not fun on any level. But I guess the cool thing is that, I was speaking with someone yesterday and I was saying that PBNs are the perfect link. You have full control over every single factor, which I guess is much more difficult when you're doing guest posts and outreach links and stuff like that.

Doug Cunningham: Right. Yeah. I found that, through a lot of guest posting, and practice, trial and error. You can get in some pretty good links. You can't control everything on the site, but if you do the guest post right, you can make sure it's highly relevant. Even if the overall hosting site is not super relevant, you make sure that post is relevant, you can also link out from just the right areas using exactly the right anchor text that you want to use. If you're friendly, usually they'll leave it in. I've had really good luck getting links to my Affiliate posts directly.

Daryl Rosser: Nice. That's cool. When you picked the niche for that site, I'm not gonna ask what a niche is, but did you pick that based on your previous success? Like just copying one and doing the same thing again?

Doug Cunningham: Yeah. I had a few to choose from, but I knew that the niche was a profitable one. Yep.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. I presume you've built more sites since then. Is there a technique to that? Or is it just testing and figuring it out and making some failures like you did before?

Doug Cunningham: Yeah, so I have refined the technique pretty well, I think. When I first got started, a lot of people were advising us to target larger key word volumes. I've

pulled that in. I target much lower search terms now, just in general. Probably 25,000 local monthly searches. The other part, I target really really low competition key words. We didn't mention this before when we chatted, I have this key word golden ratio that I developed from talking to people like Quinton Hamp, Shawna Newman, Rob Atkinson, Lewis Ogden. We were all chatting about certain things some months ago. Through the knowledge with those other people I developed this little formula, which I could explain to you if you want to hear.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, go for it. I think it would kill me if I didn't let you.

Doug Cunningham: So there's the key word golden ratio. It's a little hard to explain in words, but I actually wrote it out beforehand so I would hopefully not screw it up. However, there is a video that I have on YouTube that we can link up and make sure it's easy for people to find. So the key word golden ratio is the all in-title number of results, so that's the Google Advanced search, if people aren't familiar. All in-title, so it's all one word. Then you put in the key word, a phrase, it's usually a longer phrase with no quotations, so all in-title, colon, your key word phrase and then it will tell you the number of results. Then you divide that by the local monthly search volume. So the LMS. You have to make sure the LMS is 250 or less to get the best results, and you want this ratio to be below .25, that's the golden area of this ratio, right?

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunningham: I'll repeat it back and you can correct me if I said it wrong. Number of all in-title results divided by the local monthly search volume, that'll give you a ratio, you want it to be .25 or less. If you publish that post you'll probably rank in the top 50 or so, in hours.

Daryl Rosser: Yep.

Doug Cunningham: As soon as it's indexed, it ranks. And then if you have some authority on your site, it will probably rank in the top 15 or so.

Daryl Rosser: Cool man. I don't do much Amazon Affiliate stuff or anything like that, but I agree. If your keyword competition isn't too crazy, you should already start ranking decent enough, just from throwing up a page.

Doug Cunningham: Yep, for sure.

Daryl Rosser: That's interesting.

Doug Cunningham: And when people were telling me, like I said, I talked with all those people, and I don't want to take credit for the idea. This is old school key word research from a decade ago when it was really like, if you published something it would probably rank because there was no competition.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunningham: This is old school, before I got involved. I didn't believe that it would work. Most people that I tell, I mean I know you believe me Daryl. Most people that I mention this to, they're like, "Oh it won't work." They don't take action. They don't try and publish the post, they don't try to do it, they just say, "Oh, it's probably not going to work. I've never ranked anything that fast." But I'm telling you, it works and readers are ... I should stop telling people about it because people are starting to do it, and it actually does work. Pretty amazing.

Daryl Rosser: Fair enough. So you search all in-title, then some sort of key phrase. How do you get the key phrase?

Doug Cunningham: So that part is something like, a person has to develop some intuition on. One of the best ways is to look at the bigger key word, I'll just use an example. I have a pen in my hand, I'm not creative, so, "Best pen for writing in a notepad." Something like that. You may type that in and see it doesn't fit the ratio, but then if you scroll down to the bottom of the search results you'll see the also suggested section, or you may be interested in these related searches. Those are really good, if you use a plug in like Keywords Everywhere, you can see the search volumes right there on your search. From there those are good to look at, you can also use tools like UberSuggest to get a whole lot of them and then sort through all the suggestions that you can get from a broader key word.

Daryl Rosser: I'm gonna write these down. Keywords Everywhere, UberSuggest.

Doug Cunningham: Yeah. Those are really good. If you're lazy or you have access to SEMRush or a similar tool, you can just go to a competitor site, or some big site that you would like to be in competition with, pull down all their key words, and then look for everything over 250. You'll get ideas from there. It works because it's manual. There's no good tool to do this because all in-title gets flagged by Google. They don't want you to automate it so they set up captures, and make it slower. They actually return the results slower. It works because it's manual and people can't just build a tool easily, I'm sure it could be done, but it's not easy.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. Fair enough. Let's talk about white hat link building. I know you switched your focus from PBNs to white hat link building. I'm curious for my PBN guys out there who don't know much about what white link building is, or how to go out there and do it. What's the essentials of what you're doing?

Doug Cunningham: Really broad, I would say in high level, it's really relationship building. People don't want to hear that answer probably, but it's really relationship building. I'll mention why I think that. It's getting to a point where so many people are trying to do white hat link building in outreach, and people like Brian Dean talk about it, the Authority Hacker guys talk about it a lot, I try to talk about it also. I'm getting my own templates back. People are trying to pitch me, on my sites, to guest post, using my own templates.

Daryl Rosser: That's nice.

Doug Cunningham: The point when that happens, I know that it's catching hold, it's hitting a tipping point, and when I get those pitches they're not good. There needs to be some person behind it, but I can tell it's a pretty weak pitch.

Daryl Rosser: Sure.

Doug Cunningham: It is relationship building. So the way I go about it is, comment on someone's blog a couple times, maybe sign up for their email list, and maybe email them a couple of times before you even pitch them.

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunningham: And eventually you pitch them, you ask about the guest posting stuff that you're interested in, to get that link. But when you look at the conversion rate that you get from relationship building versus sending out hundreds of emails, the time and the outcome is really better if you spend the time to build a relationship. And if they know who you are, and they kind of like you a little bit, they're way more likely to leave in your link to your Affiliate article, which is your whole goal. At the very beginning that's what you need. You need a link to the post that you're trying to rank. You don't want it to your home page. You want it to your money making page.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah. Okay. That makes sense. I'm curious then, for PBN people. We're super systematic in how we view our links, it's the whole idea that we're in full control of everything that makes it so great. How do you scale that? If you go to Google search for pen companies, comment on everyone's blogs and reach out to them later, how do you actually build this in a scalable way.

Doug Cunningham: Sure. So generally, I'll try to go to ... if I was doing the pen example, I would go to, I call them shoulder industries, shoulder niches, because if I go to the pen industry, I'm competition. They don't want to work with me really.

Daryl Rosser: Absolutely.

Doug Cunningham: I would go to paper companies, I would go to notebook companies, Post-It, that sort of stuff. It's a compliment and people who are interested in paper are also interested in writing utensils. It's a fit. Of course, our example is pretty arbitrary because we don't want to out anyone's sites. That can be translated to anything. One area is to make sure you're not going directly to competition. Your real question is how to scale this. It's a little bit more difficult, but you can use templates, like I said. I distribute templates, people can get these templates, I think we'll share a link at some point, just to give it away.

Daryl Rosser: Sure, yeah.

Doug Cunnington: The key is to customize it, make these templates, and your emails real. You could put in little facts that you know from reading that person's blog. It's a little harder to scale but I do have a specific example.

I was working on a site which we may go into the broader details of. I was working on a site with a business partner of mine, he was also on this show, Rob.

Daryl Rosser: Cool guy.

Doug Cunnington: Basically we were moving from a private blogging network supported site, all the back links were PBNs, Web 2.0s, stuff like that. We were going 100% white hat, so we could sell it. At that point, big long term project, I was going to have to get in the neighborhood of 45 guest posts, which is a lot.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunnington: And not just any old guest posts, they needed to be pretty good because those PBN back links are pretty strong.

Daryl Rosser: For sure.

Doug Cunnington: So at the point where we needed to scale it, and we needed things to happen, I pulled together a team. I had two outreach managers working with me, and it was the formula I had mentioned to you. So comment on some blogs, they commented like three times, and then they would email a couple of times, and then they would ask for a guest post after the blogger knew who my outreach managers were.

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunnington: The conversion rate was something around 35%, which is insane. We did four to five touch points, this is not sending out a blast of 300 emails, this is a crafted email. So one key thing, I didn't give my outreach managers templates because I wanted them to write it from a pure, real standpoint. If I gave them a template, that would go away. So I didn't give them a template, and I didn't give them as much instruction. Essentially, I would recommend if people are looking to go that route, to hire an executive assistant or some sort of communications manager, not an SEO. You and I are SEOs, we think we know more than anyone else about SEO, we have our own ideas about what to do. If you hire an SEO they're gonna second guess your plans.

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunnington: Have you had that happen before?

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, I kinda get what you mean.

Doug Cunnington: I knew if I hired someone who knew outreach, or knew what I was trying to do, that they would undermine what my plan was. The people that I hired did a really good job, they could communicate well, they wrote emails well, so everything worked out and we were able to replace all those PBN back links with guest posts. So to pull it all together, you can scale it, but not in the way ... kind of like the key word golden ratio, it's not in the way where you can plug it into a tool.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunnington: I have tried it that way, so used some mail merge apps, just free on Google Sheets, and Gmail, and you can send out hundreds of emails. That kind of works, but it's very sloppy. There's a lot of waste that happens.

Daryl Rosser: Sure.

Doug Cunnington: And it's definitely not fun to do. To send out hundreds of emails knowing that you're annoying 90% of the people.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, yeah.

Doug Cunnington: Or they may not even read it. When you take this longer approach, that frankly people don't want to do the long approach. It's a much less crowded channel.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah. As you kind of said right at the beginning when we started talking about this topic, it is relationship building. You're hiring people that are good communicators I presume?

Doug Cunnington: Yes. For sure. And that's the key thing. They need to write clearly, be able to make little micro decisions. I don't want them to come to me and ask, "I commented on a blog but they didn't approve it." Of course it's in the documentation of what they should do, but they need to be able to think on their own. I want to look at a spreadsheet that has all this stuff, and see in aggregate what's happening with each one of the outreach managers.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. How long did it take to rebuild all those back links as outreach links or guest posts instead?

Doug Cunnington: Too long. I think it took about five months or so. So on average, a few links a month. Now ideally, we would have completed it in half the time.

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunnington: That was the first time I did a project like that. Knowing what I know now, I would be able to do it in about two, to two and a half months or so. Pulling together a team, now I know that it's effective to pull together a team like that, and not only could I pull together two, but maybe I could pull together four to

five people and have it run smoothly without freaking out. I usually start small and then grow it out for the next time.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. And these people you find on Upwork and stuff? How do you find these people?

Doug Cunningham: Yes. I primarily use Upwork and the best example is, it's a writer that I hired months before. She worked with me for a little while just writing. She was a Masters student in Computer Engineering or Software Engineering, something like that. She had an English background. So she was a strong writer but she also had some techy understanding, and a coder, and that sort of thing. She wrote for me for a while, then she did content management, then I said, "Hey, I've got this other thing, if you're interested I'll pull you on." So I think I paid her nine to ten bucks an hour, US based, college graduate. Really professional and I think I got lucky in finding her. I've worked with a lot of people that are not that good. I think if you find the right person it can work out well.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunningham: I believe finding an executive assistant, who maybe they used to work in the corporate world, but then for whatever reason they want to work from home? A gig like that you could probably get a good bargain. I mean, I think paying someone up to 20 bucks an hour is probably a decent value to make that happen.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. Is that just for scaling or is that essential for ... if you're starting out you probably don't have 20 bucks an hour to pay someone to do this stuff for you.

Doug Cunningham: Right. It's only for scaling, or if you happen to have the budget to do it then I think that would be appropriate. You could totally do this on your own. That's how I was doing it in the beginning, and learning to do it. In fact, I would say, before you can really outsource something well, you need to know how to do it yourself. Otherwise, you can't teach someone to do something that you don't know how to do.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunningham: At least not very well.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. Interesting. I just had a good question, it slipped my mind. That's what the question was. I got the question back. Is it just guest posts you do or is it other types of links?

Doug Cunningham: I have experimented in other areas, so the Scholarship campaign is on that's quite popular. I think it may be getting to a point again where it's so popular that it may lose some effectiveness.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunnington: However, I will say, I think that having a few EDU links is probably a good thing for someone's back link profile. Have you done one of these campaigns before?

Daryl Rosser: I haven't, no.

Doug Cunnington: Okay.

Daryl Rosser: I know what it is but I haven't done it.

Doug Cunnington: They are pretty simple to run, as long as you have a budget. The funny thing is, when you start looking at scholarship pages for universities, you'll see all sorts of silly scholarships, like payday loan scholarship for whatever. It's so crazy, marketers get in there and ruin everything. It's putting kids through school so you can't feel too bad about that.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, for sure.

Doug Cunnington: I think probably having a handful of those back links are great, if your site is, thinking of an Affiliate site. If your site is making money and you have the money to invest it's probably a great thing, you could probably spend a couple hours a day for a week and you could end up with five to 10 EDU links. It's not super difficult to go and reverse engineer someone else's campaign. And then you get those links and you can move on. I'm trying to think of other links. As I mentioned, blog commenting, you don't get great links from that, but I think having a lot of referring domains from different IPs within your niche, is a really good thing to have. Even if it's not a follow link, even if it's not passive link juice and stuff like that.

Daryl Rosser: Sure.

Doug Cunnington: Of course, you get the added benefit of the networking aspect. You make friends with people in your niche by commenting and being active on their blog.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, it's a good point. The next question kind of ties into what I'd like to get into the next topic, actually, which would be your background, everything like that in project management and stuff. I'm curious, so when you build up an Affiliate site when you plan on using PBNs, the ranking process is fairly simple. You build some links, you see how effective links are, then you map out a plan, "We're gonna build two or three links a week," or whatever it is. And you just keep building the links until your site ranks, it's simple. When you're going for average links, what's the thought process of how you're gonna link the site?

Doug Cunnington: For me, personally, it's partially based on the key word golden ratio, those are probably gonna rank without the back links. I do prefer a blend of content that doesn't need back links, and then some larger goals. Out further in the future,

they do need those links. It's basically what you said, I usually divide it up ... I set it up in sprints, in project management terminology. I would focus on ranking a specific page and I would focus on getting 10 to 15 guest posts to that specific URL, and then I'd probably move on. 10 to 15 links can be pretty decent, depending on how competitive the term is, it could rank for that. As I said before, it can take longer for these guest posts to actually kick in and give their boost to the page.

Daryl Rosser: Yep.

Doug Cunningham: What you can do, and I don't know why more people don't talk about this. You're familiar with tiered link building right? From the PBN world.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, I think so.

Doug Cunningham: Some of my audience is going to watch this. If you're not familiar with tiered link building, you have some links down here, lots of them, and they'll point up to higher links up here. So in the case of guest posts, you could build back links to your old guest post and your new guest post. You're building a tiered structure on other people's sites. It's totally clean, if you link out to your own site a bunch of times, they're gonna be like, "Come on, don't link to your site that much." But if you link to a bunch of other sites, that happen to be your guest posts, that works. They're not gonna remove those links. You can boost your own guest post and do tiered link building through guest posting.

Daryl Rosser: It makes sense. So basically you write a guest post for one site, and within that maybe you'll link to your site just once, but you'll also mention some of your other guest posts that you've done on other sites and they all link to your site as well.

Doug Cunningham: Yep.

Daryl Rosser: Nice one.

Doug Cunningham: That's it.

Daryl Rosser: That makes sense.

Doug Cunningham: Yeah. Just like with PBNs, or Web 2.0s or whatever, you boost them, basically you hit some tipping point where you build up that first tier so well, and so strong, that it pushes everything up and you end up with a nice network again. Which are on other people's sites, so the risk is less.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah, you are linking them, but then you're never really hiding that you wrote the guest post or anything like that.

Doug Cunningham: No. And they probably just check to see that the link works. They're not gonna read it.

Daryl Rosser: Okay, that's interesting. So that starts bridging us towards the next topic of interest. Which is how your background in project management influences the way you manage things today.

Doug Cunningham: I think part of it is just mapping out everything that I intend on doing. A lot of times in project management, just being able to come in and think of what the goals are, and then the steps to get there. When you break down project management that's pretty much it, and then figure out who's going to do it. That portion of it really helped. When I was coming up in 2013 there wasn't anything quite organized that I found. It was just two dozen blog posts, and a bunch of podcasts. It didn't really fit together, it was just a lot of information.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunningham: When I struggles thorough trying to figure out how to do this stuff, I really did just map it out, like a big task list on a sheet. Notebooks and write it out, then move it to a spreadsheet. You kind of see the phases of building a site, or ranking a site. Whatever it may be. When you break it down like that and you start looking at individual tasks, well one, it's way less overwhelming, you know?

Daryl Rosser: Absolutely, yeah.

Doug Cunningham: Especially if you're comparing yourself. You're starting out and you're comparing yourself to someone who's been doing it for five years or so, and you look at what they're doing. You can't figure out how to get there from where they're at. But if you break it down step by step, if you go out and do five blog comments a day, that's pretty easy. It probably only takes you 30 minutes to do. If you start layering on a little bit of work each day, all of a sudden, not only are you learning each of the steps, but you've put together a series of incremental gains over time and you end up with a lot of progress.

I think, to tie it all together, I'm able to put systems around all the stuff I learned in a way that's easier for me to implement. It's also for other people to see things organized where most people do not have things organized on their blogs, or if you try to watch a YouTube channel.

And I'm the same, my YouTube channel has tons of information, and it would be really hard to put it together in the right way. All the information's there but it's not in the right order or anything like that. One other thing I'll add is around effectiveness. There's a lot of things that people can do that may help. I've never done this, it's the if this, then that social sharing network things?

Daryl Rosser: Yeah. I have TTT. TTTT? It's a lot of Ts.

Doug Cunnington: I thought about saying it and then I was like, "I'm gonna mess it up. So I'll just say this then that." Do you use those, by the way?

Daryl Rosser: I have used them, yeah

Doug Cunnington: Okay. You have used them. So that tells me that maybe they're not so effective. The thing is, I hear people asking, "What do you think about this social sharing networks, I heard it can really help?" And I'm like, "It's probably not gonna help. If it's something that you can automate, it's something that anyone can go and buy the service to do it." It's just not gonna work. I haven't tried it, but I'm confident that it probably doesn't work, and I haven't talked to anyone who's like, "Yo, my site was only making \$1 a month, I was hardly getting traffic. I put in this network and then boom. Number one." I never hear a story like that.

So, anyway, the point is, there's a lot of stuff, it could maybe help. But it's not effective and it's overwhelming when you start looking at the hundreds of things that you could do, that maybe don't help at all. I cut out a lot of stuff that's unnecessary, and I think it's from my systems and project management background where if it's not helping, cut it out. If it's not 100% necessary, relentlessly applying 80/20 to every task, and then figuring out, well you only need to do two or three things to make big strides.

Daryl Rosser: I've had in my systems and stuff, done a lot of useless stuff that doesn't really help that much. That's easier for me to say now cause I've been doing this for a while, I've tested things. If some newbie, beginner is watching this beginner, how do they know what to cut out? Is it just by doing the crap first? Or is there a way of doing that?

Doug Cunnington: I think yeah, so experience. If you have no budget, there's two scenarios. If you have no budget you gotta go out and do the work, and figure out this stuff doesn't work, this stuff does work. The other part, if you have budget, or you're going to invest in your education. Buy a course or get coaching. And maybe you and I are biased right? I have a course, you have a course right?

Daryl Rosser: Yep.

Doug Cunnington: You can shortcut so much crap if you can talk to someone who's been through it, you have to listen to them too. You have to invest in a mentor or a course and then listen to what they say. Basically you can shortcut that whole process, and get there much faster. Again, we're biased, but I paid \$4000 for a course before. Best money I've ever spent.

Daryl Rosser: Nice. I've spent thousands across many, coaching, all sorts of stuff. Massively helpful.

Doug Cunnington: There's no way to get that experience and compress it in any other way, either get a mentor, or you gotta work through the long part of it.

Daryl Rosser: Absolutely. So, going back to a topic, cause I've got some more questions on it now. You started doing the guest posts for the site with Rob, and at the same time you were removing PBN links. How did you time that together and match it up?

Doug Cunningham: This is one of those things that ... we really didn't have enough input data. A lot of entrepreneurship is making decisions with incomplete data, with a lot of risk, and you just gotta go for it. So that's what we did. The way we planned it was, and this is roughly a 10 month period or so. We wanted to get about a third of the guest posts published, or maybe a little bit left, but roughly 10. We'll say 10. 10 guest posts published before we even thought about removing any of the PBN links. The site was making 10k-ish when we started. I'll come back.

The revenue went up a lot, by like 3x, super fast, which I'll explain in a moment. Basically, we wanted to get some guest posts in place before we removed any back links, we didn't want to lose the revenue. It was a big risk to hurt the revenue. We got about 10 out there, started to remove a few of the back links each month, and then once we had a basis for new back links we mapped out ... we had 45 PBN links, and we said, "We'll remove 15 each month." We'll look at how strong they are from a Domain Authority perspective, or Trust Flow, I can't remember which one we used. We probably looked at both, and we probably took a blend each time so it's a nice cross section, and then remove, over three months 45 back links, and then at the same time I'll be pushing hard to get those new guest posts in place, all the while doing the tiered link building through guest posting.

Daryl Rosser: Okay. And for anyone that doesn't quite understand. Why did you do this? I forgot we hadn't covered that yet.

Doug Cunningham: This is one of the best questions. This was one of Rob's big earning sites. It's Rob Atkinson, I can't remember if we mentioned his last name, but go check out his other video, Daryl interviewed Rob.

Basically, we wanted to sell the site. We wanted to see what it would be like to move it over to white hat, how is that gonna impact the multiple? Is that gonna make the site more valuable, is it gonna sell faster? We've never sold a site that big before, we didn't know. I can share right now, the multiple that we got was 33x, so that's pretty good, I think.

Daryl Rosser: Yes.

Doug Cunningham: That's definitely on the high end. The other part is, we sold it for 235. Yeah we sold this simple niche site for 235. That's the headline.

If I remember right, it was listed for a month or so, and it sold. We completed the transaction within six weeks if I remember right, so from my perspective that's like buying a brick and mortar business. That's a lot of money. If someone

is actually gonna buy it they would have to finance it or do some kind of crazy stuff. I'm sure it was an investment group or something like that. That's a serious amount of cash, it's more than the town home that I live in.

Daryl Rosser: Absolutely, yes.

Doug Cunnington: So I teased you a bit with the content, and increasing the revenue. When I joined up it was making 10k a month, this site was. It was all from Amazon. I took a look at the content, I was brought in as a partner to move it to white hat, look at the content, stuff like that. Things I'm good at. Rob had the site, the asset in place. Basically I was like, okay, content's kinda crappy, let's improve the content. Let's add more content, if we want to sell this site for mid, low six figures, we need to make the content better and we need to add more of it.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunnington: So we used the key word golden ratio, published about 80 or 90 new articles, something like that. And slowly over time, I mean yeah that's a big project.

Daryl Rosser: You say that casually, that's quite a lot of articles.

Doug Cunnington: Yeah, I mean I hired a team of writers through UpWork. Had a content manager in place and had all that published over the course of a couple months or so.

Daryl Rosser: Okay.

Doug Cunnington: Basically the site went from 10k a month, to 14, to 19, to 32. This was over the Christmas period, it wildly exceeded our expectations as far as revenue.

Daryl Rosser: That's super cool. I know in terms of outreach links content is huge. Does content have a very big importance in the process and are you using all of that for outreach links or just certain pieces?

Doug Cunnington: The first part, I think content's pretty important. On my sites I typically will publish the KGR content, get it out the door. Get it good enough. I'll circle back around, I'll go back and improve that content. It can be overwhelming. 80 or 90, 100 articles or whatever.

Daryl Rosser: Yeah.

Doug Cunnington: If you're like, "Well I need to make it really good. Make sure I'm hiring really good writers." It's a little tough. But if you get it just good enough you're able to really publish it, and then you can come back and fix it later. That's really what we did on Rob's site that we improved the content on. We went through, edited it, and I was like, "Okay, here's our top seven traffic pages. We're only gonna improve those." Again, 80/20 right? So I looked at the top 20% of our content and basically made sure that that was really good, and then through that,

through adding more content, we were able to boost the revenue and traffic. The traffic went up in a similar way, so 40%, then 25, 25. I'm not sure.

- Daryl Rosser: Okay. Would you say quantity is more important than quality then?
- Doug Cunningham: I don't know. I think there's a minimum threshold. At the point where the article isn't valuable, that probably isn't going to help too much. I would say, if you're in the mid grade of quantity and quality, that's probably okay.
- Daryl Rosser: Okay.
- Doug Cunningham: I won't take a stand on that, I guess.
- Daryl Rosser: Fair enough. Final few questions to wrap it up, cause we're going quite long now but, hey it's cool. What tools or resources could you not live without, like your business relies on? You said Upwork actually, I need to add a link to that.
- Doug Cunningham: I'm sorry I'm not sure I understand exactly.
- Daryl Rosser: Tools, resources, things that you need to run your business.
- Doug Cunningham: Cool. So I keep it pretty simple and lean. Like you said, Upwork is one of the main places where I hire freelancers, and then Google Docs, just Google sheets, and everything was managed through that. All the content the writers would submit, Google Docs, then I'd have the editors pick it up from there. I believe, as far as key word research, I've been using Keyword Keg these days, but honestly I don't do a ton of key word research. Oh and SEMRush is instrumental. If you pull the reports from SEMRush for competitors you basically end up with -
- Daryl Rosser: So much easier.
- Doug Cunningham: Yeah. It's like all the keywords you'll ever need. Keyword research is kind of addicting so I try and stay from it, it's not moving the needle at this point.
- Daryl Rosser: Okay.
- Doug Cunningham: I'm trying to think of other tools. Even though I'm like a tech geek and a project manager, we use Google Sheets because it's the simplest tool for us to use. And there's no need to add more complication. So we didn't.
- Daryl Rosser: Okay, what about your lifestyle. What's the average day like?
- Doug Cunningham: Average day. I usually go for a walk or two during the day to take a break, I live in the mountains so it's super nice outside in the summertime.
- Daryl Rosser: Nice.

Doug Cunningham: I usually work out. My ideal day would probably be working four to six hours a day, maybe four days a week. But I work six or seven hours a day, maybe four or five days a week. I'm not a workaholic but every now and then I'll sit down and really dig in. I'll spend 12 hours at the keyboard, and then realize, "Hey I need to go live my life."

Daryl Rosser: Fair enough. Especially for people that don't already know you. What is something they don't know about you that you could share?

Doug Cunningham: People that know me super well -

Daryl Rosser: Readers and stuff like that.

Doug Cunningham: They may already know that I drink a lot of beer, so I'm a home brew beer guy, and I'm a certified beer judge.

Daryl Rosser: Cool.

Doug Cunningham: I'm one of the highest ranked judges in the state. The population here is only about a million people. So you could say I'm one in a million, but it's only applying to the beer judging part. I drink a lot of beer. That is another part of my day.

Daryl Rosser: Cool. I'm out of questions. So where could they all find you if they want to go ask you some questions, check you out, learn more about how you do this stuff?

Doug Cunningham: One place to check out is my YouTube channel, I'm trying to do more on YouTube and I have tons of videos and training, and I'm working on putting out more good content there. I blog at NicheSiteProject.com, so you can check out the written word over there. And additionally I do want to share the templates and the tools that I use and I referenced multiple times, so there's a worksheet for the key word golden ratio, there are worksheets for the outreach, the templates that Rob and I used to grow that site, sell it, all that stuff. And got to NicheSiteProject.com/lion and it'll be there, you just have to give me your email address. I'll send you stuff, I'll tell you that I'll send you stuff. You can always unsubscribe if you don't want to get valuable information.

Daryl Rosser: Awesome, I'll stick a link to all of it below the video on the site, so you guys can go check all that out.

Doug Cunningham: Awesome. Thanks a lot Daryl, appreciate it.

Daryl Rosser: Alright man, thanks for joining me today. It's been fun, I'm sure we could have continued speaking for another hour or so, but gotta cut it off somewhere. So yeah, thanks for joining me.

Doug Cunningham: Cheers.

Daryl Rosser:

Hope you guys enjoyed the upload and I'll see you guys next week.