Creating Valuable Affiliate Programs that Sell

Transcript and 10 Point Checklist
Shawn Collins

Want to gain as much knowledge as possible out of Marketing Speak? Read on below for a full transcript of this episode, as well as a **10 point checklist** that gives the next, real steps you can take to take your marketing to the next level.

MARKETING SPEAK 🎙

HOSTED BY STEPHAN SPENCER

""Different affiliate networks are saying that, from year to year, they're seeing more and more of their visitors coming through mobile. So if affiliates aren't adapting to that, they're in big trouble.""

SHAWN COLLINS

10 STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TODAY

Want to step up your marketing game?
Here are 10 steps that can move you closer to your goals – today.

- [ ] Considering your target audience, come with a few creative ideas on how to add value to your desired client base. What will draw them in and leave them wanting more?

- [ ] Research your local tax nexus and FTC guidelines to make sure that you are compliant with your state laws.

- [ ] Attend Affiliate Summit East July 31st to August 2nd in New York City for three days of networking, learning, and fun.

- [ ] When adding a photo to a social channel, add a link to the image for more traction on your website. Use a link shortener, it's an easy way to create a URL that's easy to remember.

- [ ] If you are using a coupon code or website, be careful about over-sharing. Consider how you are going to track your efforts and make sure the code only goes to the consumers that you want to have it.

- [ ] If you are just getting started and don't have the funds to attend events, Check out the free Affiliate Summit videos from their conference at YouTube.com/AffiliateSummit.

- [ ] Check out local conferences to test out vendors like payment processors or other tools that you may want to use in your business.

- [ ] Check out online tutorials on how to create landing pages that convert. Pre-selling your affiliate offer will help you to generate high commissions.

- [ ] For a free resource to learn more about affiliate marketing, check out FeedFront.com. You can even apply to become a writer for their magazine by submitting a one sentence idea!

- [ ] If you use WordPress, download plugins that can help with aspects like SEO or opt-ins. Building a large list should be your first priority!

Transcript

Stephan: Hello, and welcome to Marketing Speak! I'm your host, Stephan Spencer. Today, I have with us Shawn Collins and if you haven't heard of Shawn Collins, you must not be at all involved in affiliate marketing because he is basically the godfather of affiliate marketing. He's been an affiliate marketer since 1997 so since the very early days. He is the co-founder of Affiliate Summit, THE conference for affiliate marketing and that started in 2003 so he's been heavily involved in the industry for quite a long time as an author and speaker. He is also the co-publisher and editor-in-chief of FeedFront Magazine, which is about affiliate marketing and related to different areas like social media, SEO, and so forth. Shawn is going to join us to talk about the latest stuff in affiliate marketing strategies, tactics, what's working, what's not, how things have changed, and how things are going to be changing in the future. Welcome, Shawn!

"…creating the systems and structures and processes and all the back-end that makes marketing information work"

Shawn: Thank you, Stephan! Great to be here!

Stephan: Awesome! So, let's start by talking about what the changes have been over the years because a

lot's changed since you got into affiliate marketing in '97. Where has affiliate marketing come from and where is it heading?

Shawn: I guess way back then, it was very primitive so the first program I joined was Amazon and I was one of the few around back then. Back then, people complained sometimes about the reporting not being updated within 24-hours. Back then, there was no online reporting, and you, literally, just get a quarterly email with your stats. When I first got started, I was sort of operating in a vacuum. I had no idea if what I

was doing was working or if it wasn't and it turned out that it wasn't for the first couple of those quarterly emails. Certainly, that was way before any podcasts, or forums, or blogs, or anything so you're really sort of operating in the dark and making it up as you want to long back then. It was a big challenge but it was also fun to test things out. I guess, to a degree, things get easier and harder each year but back then, when GoTo.com first came out, a lot of affiliate programs used to pay by click so you could find an affiliate program that paid ten cents per click and buy penny clicks on GoTo so those were some good days.

Stephan: Right. So, affiliate arbitrage.

Shawn: Yeah. Back in the 90's, which sounds so ancient.

Stephan: Yeah. So, let's define "arbitrage" for our listeners who aren't familiar with that term because a lot of people made a lot of money doing arbitrage not just in affiliate marketing but with-well, I guess, affiliate marketing would be the primary way to monetize the clicks that they're buying as long as they're spending less than they're making. What are some of the other ways that you've seen arbitrage happen successfully?

"they weren't asking you to put it to a landing page or to a website so it was just kicking straight to the merchant or advertiser site back then. Since then, a lot of companies, they felt like, and I guess, recently saw that it's not really adding any value so they want you to add some kind of value to the that whole sequence and maybe pre-sell the product or service by having some kind of landing page"

Shawn: The only time I was really doing it was back then when you were simply just buying the traffic from search engines and pushing it straight to affiliate programs and that's before anybody was asking you to-they really didn't have very complicated terms of service back then so they weren't asking you to put it to a landing page or to a website so it was just kicking straight to the merchant or advertiser site back then. Since then, a lot of companies, they felt like, and I guess, recently saw that it's not really adding any value so they want you to add some kind of value to the that whole sequence and maybe pre-sell the product or service by having some kind of landing page or a whole site that's built out dedicated to selling whatever that product or service is.

Stephan: Right, exactly. So, adding some sort of social proof in the form of maybe product reviews, testimonial, and additional details-maybe your own experience with the products, technical specifications, and things that are not part of the product page that you would have sent, in prior days, directly that visitor to. Let's say, the Amazon product page. Now, you got to add value first, not lose them, send them to the product page to place their order with whatever merchant, and then you make a commission.

Shawn: Yeah, exactly. I suppose, there are probably some affiliate programs and advertisers who are still sort of asleep at the wheel when they're letting that happen now but I think, there isn't really any value added there but just some affiliates who are insinuating themselves into the sequence.

Stephan: Mm-hmm.

Shawn: But I guess that's the unfortunate thing where some companies don't really-they make the spend on the tracking, the footwork, and everything but they don't really invest in an affiliate manager so some unscrupulous affiliates take advantage of those unmonitored programs.

Stephan: Right. What are some of the more innovative ways you see affiliate marketers adding value so that they are essential to merchants? Because this is an area that doesn't-it's not dying but some people are like, "Oh, I've not gotten into affiliate marketing and we've been a successful business so far so I don't see us doing it in the future. Why should we get into affiliate marketing?" I mean, what are some of the value adds that affiliate marketers provide that make this a viable channel?

Shawn: Well, to me, some of the best affiliates and there are really long-tail because they're not as scaleable but there are affiliates who are doing content creation and they'll just write quality content to their audience and when it makes sense, they'll include an affiliate link to whatever relevant affiliate program. I'll do that myself-if I'm writing some tutorial about hosting or domains and so, I would link off to, say, the WP Engine or GoDaddy. When I'm just teaching people on how to do a certain process but with that, I wrote the content with people in mind and then I just found affiliate programs that made sense to include as the links later on. Content like different tutorials, whether they be videos or text, I think, they are beneficial to the advertiser and the end-user so do so those kind of affiliates are adding value.

Stephan: Right. So, essentially, going to a recognized authority where traffic and thought-leadership is already happening and piggybacking on that?

> **"affiliates really have their pulse on mobile and have a mobile responsive site if they have a site. I see some of the reports from the different affiliate networks saying that, from year to year, they're seeing more and more of their visitors coming through mobile so do so if affiliates aren't adapting to that and they're in big trouble."**

Shawn: Yes, exactly. For the content that I write, so I never promote any products or services that I don't personally use. I have just been on various sites and I have been doing it for so long that people appreciate that and so, they'll take my word for it if I say to go with a certain hosting company or use a new plug-in or what have you.

Stephan: Yup. Got it! Where do you see the industry heading? So, affiliate marketing has changed a lot-kind of how SEO changed. In the early days, it was spamming and jamming for a lot of people and they'd just be able to do some really stupid stuff like create separate landing pages for separate search engines. Those were ridiculous times! Sounds like affiliate marketing started in some early and kind of very basic rudimentary times as well and then it evolved but where do you see it heading into the future?

Shawn: I think it's pretty disputable that affiliates really have their pulse on mobile and have a mobile responsive site if they have a site. I see some of the reports from the different affiliate networks saying that, from year to year, they're seeing more and more of their visitors coming through mobile so do so if affiliates

aren't adapting to that and they're in big trouble. I've been hearing people say that the next big thing in affiliate marketing is video for-it feels like-the last eight or ten years and I'm not sure why that hasn't happened yet but I guess, for consumers, they still aren't used to clicking video to see a product in there or aren't just really interacting with it. They just use it more to enjoy it. I guess, a lot of the more popular

environments now to see video, they aren't really made for clicking and for purchasing like on instagram or Snapchat.

Stephan: Right. What about Snapchat? Where do you see the opportunities there because a lot of people just don't get it? They're like, "Well, that's for sending nude pics, right?"

Shawn: Yeah. That was my perception for the longest time. I had it installed on my phone and there was nobody that I knew that had it and that I could even try to use it with. It's sort of a weird environment so it seems like a lot of corporations are doubling down on it. I guess it's good for branding and sort of like a behind-the-scenes kind of thing to show what you're up to and more of like maybe a personal brand but you can't like a video or picture on there and you're not supposed to share it, I guess, unless you screenshot it, which is sort of against the whole intention of the thing, and it's so fleeting since once somebody sees something, it's gone. To me, it's more of a relationship-builder and a soft sell maybe than something that's some kind of direct result or direct marketing.

Stephan: Right. It seems strange to me still. I mean, I have Snapchat installed. I'm playing with it. I'm sending snaps to friends occasionally and when I remember, I'll build up my story but it's just so ephemeral--as you say, fleeting. With instagram, at least, you can post a few seconds of video or a picture and have that stick around and not just disappear in some number of hours or days. I think Snapchat is going to be harder for a lot of people to wrap their heads around. For the video though, I see lots of opportunity there. For example, Kickstarter is a great place to have highly-produced, really viral videos of your products. If you don't do effective video marketing on Kickstarter, I think you're going to have a really hard time raising the capital.

Shawn: Whenever I go to Kickstarter and consider buying some product there, the first thing I do is watch the video. If they have some sort of junky, homemade, whiteboard video or something versus having a more dazzling video definitely has an impact on me.

Stephan: Yeah. What do you think about video sales letters because you hear a lot of talk about VSL's? Are they the next big thing or have they kind of seen their heyday and we're moving on to other things?

Shawn: The tough thing there for me is that I'm so conflicted because that stuff doesn't work on me at all and I get worried that I have tunnel vision and think that it wouldn't work on anybody. The same thing goes with like the long form sales letters that some people will use and it baffles me that anybody

would sit through in such a long process but they'd probably work for some people. I guess, I'd be hesitant to say that sales letters don't work and don't make sense because they do for some people. It's something I want to play with more but I haven't really bothered with to date but jumping back to Snapchat real quick-the thing that I've noticed is that, a lot of people, after they see a snap or, I guess, they take their own, they will screenshot it and then share it on instagram, Facebook, or somewhere. I can tell just from the filters they have on there that has a Snapchat kind of look to it. One thing, I guess, as far as personal brands and maybe more for events, I just came from an event, Social Media Marketing World, and so they'd purchase filters throughout the conference so that you could put those on your pictures and I know that a number of the speakers who were speaking at the conference also purchased filters that were available during the time they were speaking. I saw Joel Comm and some other folks doing that so that when you're taking a picture of them as they're speaking or if you're doing a selfie with them, you could slide over and put their filter on it so at least that's one way that corporations are using it. I saw a number of companies doing that-South by Southwest too, not only the main conference there but a lot of the big sponsors were buying filters for people to use in the pictures.

"they'd purchase filters throughout the conference so that you could put those on your pictures"

Stephan: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I've seen people do that before. That's a great innovative idea.

Shawn: Yeah, we're doing a one-day event in Chicago called Performance Marketing Summit. It's sort of a separate brand for us and so we're trying that out and just buying the filter for the one day there. I guess when you're setting up, you set up like a fence in the given city of where you want it to trigger and so, the entire hotel will have access to this filter for about 48 hours.

Stephan: Mm-hmm. Is that expensive? What kind of costs are involved with Snapchat and doing those custom filters?

Shawn: I think for this one we did, for about a day-and-a-half to two days, it was about $100,000 and so it's sort of hard to see if there's any return at all on that or if people even use it. The tricky thing there is that, unlike searching hash tags, I think there's no way for us to even know everybody who does use it unless we're following them. To me, it's sort of burdensome to even-I've followed a lot of people who are different thought

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leaders and things in different areas and I never get around to watching all of the stuff they're putting out each day.

Stephan: Right.

Shawn: So, I wouldn't necessarily see who's using what we put out there.

> **"they do all the work for me there and they just either you can create custom audience there are so that they take your e-mails and they match up them up with Facebook accounts or else you put a pixel on your site and then you can remarket to the people who have visited your site recently or within some set amount of days."**

Stephan: Right.

Shawn: Which is sort of frustrating.

Stephan: Yeah, it's hard to pin an ROI to Snapchat filters. Like if you had $100,000 to spend, I mean, a lot of affiliate marketers are spending a lot more than that but let's say, it's $100,000-what would you recommend the best use of that $100,000? Probably not Snapchat filter, it would have been maybe StumbleUpon advertising because buying "stumbles" is really cheap-maybe five cents a click or whatever. Or, would you spend it on Facebook advertising with some maybe retargeting? Or, some other thing, I don't know, where would you spend $100,000?

Shawn: I guess my favorite place right now is to do the retargeting remarketing on Facebook. I like it more than Adwords and some other places because it has a lot of details where you can target people pretty precisely. Also, it has a very easy interface. I feel like the Adwords interface is sort of convoluted and there are probably too many options for a newbie that's just trying to break into it whereas, Facebook just makes it very intuitive or at least more intuitive than Google does. I just love the ease of it that I can just update a database and they do all the work for me there and they just either you can create custom audience there are so that they take your e-mails and they match up them up with Facebook accounts or else you put a pixel on your site and then you can remarket to the people who have visited your site recently or within some set amount of days.

Stephan: Right. What would be some example of innovative uses of retargeting remarketing? So, they've

been to your site and now what happens? Or, they've been to a particular page on your site? What are some innovative ways to get people moving through the sales funnel?

Shawn: What I was trying was an idea I heard recently that there was a guy who has a product that's a plug-in and he was looking to promote it. He felt like he wasn't really getting people to have much interest when he tried to drive ads straight to his business. He was using a links shortener and I feel bad because I'm blanking right now but I can get back to you with it. He basically points to stories and say, The

Washington Post website or some other authority site and it was about a similar topic and then he would include his retargeting link in that process. The links shortener enabled them to do that so he was able to remarket to these people after they showed an interest and in a story in The Washington Post or The New York Times or some other authority site so he was able to get them to do that click on Facebook.

Stephan: Oh wow, so he was advertising a, let's say, New York Times article on Facebook but he was using a URL shortener that allowed him to modify the page that people ended up on so it allowed him to pixel them from The New York Times article? Or, he was pixeling them before they ended up on The New York Times article?

Shawn: I guess there was maybe framing the page? I actually didn't go through the process so I'm not sure if he was actually doing it during the redirector if it was framing the page so I would have to clarify that but it was one of those processes so that those people are getting the content as promised then he was able to pixel them.

Stephan: Right. Because he wouldn't be able to-he'd have to hack into The New York Times website.

Shawn: Yeah.

Stephan: Put a pixel code on the NYTimes.com site so it would have to be either in the interim or by framing it through an iframe or something. Yeah, interesting! Very clever!

Shawn: And he said he was having a harder time getting clicks directly to his site but then, after they showed interest in a similar concept through a major media source then all sudden he's able to market them a lot more effectively.

Stephan: Mm-hmm. Very cool! So, let's say that you're advertising a digital product, let's say an e-book or an online course, what would be the most effective way to use Facebook advertising to get people into your funnel to buy your, I don't know, $200-$300-hour course?

Shawn: I guess that so much of affiliate marketing is sort of borrowed from the adult industry and that was really the origins of it. I think a good learning from them is to give people free samples to try to hook them in so just sort of like, so many adult sites will give you a page of free pictures something and try to get people to join for a membership. Do the same sort of concept and give them the free chapter or some kind of free piece of it to try to engage them and then bring them into the funnel there and after they, hopefully, enjoy the content they have sampled then they move on in and go and make the big purchase.

Stephan: Right, so Frank Kern calls this "results in advance." If you have a course such as, "How to Learn the Guitar," he'll give the segment on how to play the F chord for free. They'll get that mastery of the F chord, they'll feel really good about that, and it'll be a lot easier to sell them on the paid course. So, yeah. What would be some other things that are kind of leading edge from the adult industry or things that have come from the adult industry and become more mainstream that are cutting-edge marketing tactics and strategies?

Shawn: Oh, yes. Some are going farther back but the recurring billing for some kind of monthly membership happened there long before and also having quality video that people pay for. Maybe give a subpar product that's in standard definition video for free and then people could pay for the high definition version.

Stephan: Right.

Shawn: It's funny because early on, I remember back when affiliate marketing was starting and Amazon was claiming they were the company that really started the whole thing and while they did popularize it, it really did have its chances as an adult. Even before Amazon, the first mainstream companies, as far as I could ever find, was CDNow. The way they started was one of those great mistakes, I guess, where they just had some different bands come to them and say that they wish they could find a way to promote their own music, put on their own website, and get paid for it on top of whatever they are getting from the record companies and so, they started creating these pages for bands to just point to and have those unique identifiers. Originally, it's just paid clicks on adult sites that even CDNow or anybody else in the early days sort of learned that from.

Stephan: Mm-hmm. Yup. So, what would be some other strategies and tactics that make for an effective affiliate marketing?

Shawn: I guess, one company that's fun to watch is called FMTC. There are formally called For Me To Coupon, and they provide syndicated coupon, data, and information out to affiliates so it enables people to have somewhat of a turn-key site that provide some value to people. They've been around for a few years and I think that's a nice entry to somebody if they if they don't have the chops for really doing the program and creating their own coupon site if they want to do that sort of thing. I guess, that's something that is one of the the biggest areas of sales for affiliate marketing with companies like Retail Me Not that are just mammoth companies with huge revenues. If you're using the FMTC, you're not going to mimic that kind of power and have 100+ person company and be a public company but it's a way to sort of get in the door there without having the ability to innovation yourself. I think that, for the most part, I see people who are creating apps or just doing things on mobile that just make it easy and they're just sort of pushing away from being stuck on the browser.

Stephan: Mm-hmm, right. So, what do you think about these app development tools that allow you the kind of wiziwig development of an app without programming and so forth? I don't know. For me, personally, I'm not really into installing a whole bunch more apps on my phone. I've got an iPhone. I've got certainly like, five, six, or seven screens full of apps-in fact, I recently had to organize them into categories and folders so that I can find stuff because it's just crazy. So, having an app that you use as your affiliate marketing vehicle just seems, I don't know, doesn't make a lot of sense to me as a consumer of apps. I'm very reticent to install more apps on my phone but what are your thoughts about apps for affiliate marketing or for affiliate marketers?

Shawn: I guess the thing there is, it really comes down to any affiliate, whether it's an app or any kind where they're reaching people and they need to be solving some kind of problem or apply some kind of answer so if they can figure out some clever way to do that with an app then I think that totally makes sense. If it's maybe some kind of aggregator for travel or something. Like a service that I love is TripIt. I'm not sure if they use affiliate marketing there in anyway but that said, until I ever used it, I didn't realize it was out there. It sort of made my whole travel life a whole lot easier. I paid for the pro service, the paid service, on it and so, I guess the trick there is that an affiliate has to solve some pain point that gets people to buy through the links that they include on there or pay some premium to use the better version of the service.

> "you can just assemble all of your different elements of whatever trip it is into that site and then you can have it exported to your calendar, which you can share with colleagues. It's a nice, easy way if you want your colleagues, or your spouse, to know where you're going to be any given moment and they would know exactly which hotel and which flight."

Stephan: Mm-hmm. So, what is TripIt for those who are unfamiliar with it? How does it work?

Shawn: So, basically, it pulls all the data for anybody's trip-their hotel reservations, their plane, if they have a car service, and also conference events that they'll pull in like if you get emails from Eventbrite. Basically, you set it up so that any of these event emails, they just automatically push to TripIt and then it creates these trips and you can just assemble all of your different elements of whatever trip it is into a trip on that site or on the app and then you can have it exported to your calendar, which you can share with colleagues. It's a nice, easy way if you want your colleagues, or your spouse, or whoever know where you're going to be any given moment and they would know exactly which hotel and which flight. To me, it is just a nice efficiency because in the past, I would manually send out my flight information or hotel information to colleagues or friends and so, this way, you can include them in your travel plans so that all of you have the same information and you can see who's getting in when. To me, that's something where it was a problem that frustrated me but it was a problem I didn't really realize I had until I found a solution for it so that's really sort of the golden opportunity there that people describe their insurgency or just have their ear to the ground and find out what people were frustrated about that doesn't have a solution and try to provide it to them.

Stephan: Yeah, that's great. I was unfamiliar with that too so I have to check it out. TripIt, very cool. So, we're talking about Retail Me Not and other coupon aggregator sites. In some ways, the merchants don't love that because they're trying to track with particular coupon codes their various marketing initiatives and

then somebody submits that coupon code to Retail Me Not or one of these other coupon sites and then it just gets used to death and they have no idea what percentage of those users came from the coupon aggregators and which came from the actual marketing campaign that they were trying to track in the first place. What are your thoughts on that?

Shawn: I guess, it's a frustration that sort of cuts both ways with the attribution because in most cases, the last click is for who gets the credit for a sale or a lead. In a lot of cases, an affiliate might have gone through a lot of pain to create the introduction for a consumer to a given company and then maybe, that company also doing some paid searches or something else and so they'd fully get zero credit on that even though they really made the big pre-sell and had a lot of a role in that transaction. A lot of affiliates are sort of bothered by the fact that they don't get any kind of recognition when they're in part of that transaction mode. I can totally see from advertisers and there are some that they give a lesser of a lower commission to coupon sites because they feel like they don't bring the same value or in some cases, they might swoop in there at the end. Part of that, I think, is a problem because of the advertisers themselves. Because if I'm going and I'm about to buy some kind of product from a company and it didn't even occur to me to look for a coupon and I see a box there that says to enter your coupon, I'm going to either go out there and try to find a coupon so I don't feel like I'm getting ripped off or I'll feel this sort of element of the fact that I am being overpriced because somebody out there does have a coupon that I don't have.

Stephan: Right.

Shawn: So, they create this behavior that they're sort of angry about.

Stephan: Yeah, that's true. I've got the same behavior. I mean, I can certainly afford to pay full price for the product but a lot of times if I see a coupon box, I spend the two seconds to Google it in a separate tab, looking for a coupon code. A lot of times I'll find one and it will be some newsletter or something that I've never heard of and I'm like, okay, great, I just saved 20%, that's cool!

Shawn: Yeah!

Stephan: Yeah! So, let's circle back to some of these video and image-sharing social sites and tools like instagram, for example. What are some leading affiliate marketers in the instagram world? What are they doing to build big followings and get a lot of revenue coming in through the merchants that they're touting?

Shawn: So far, there a lot of people who are testing it out and just running ads through the Facebook ads interface for instagram but I haven't seen any case studies of people that are really knocking it out of the park there. I run ads that are often times parallel with Facebook campaigns. I've found that since instagram is sort of a limited universe with not really the ability to link people out, it makes it more difficult to make a transaction happen so I don't really crack the code there and I haven't really seen anybody that's doing a fantastic job there so far so, I've been trying to figure out. I'm still searching to see who is doing that well.

Stephan: Yup. Well, I'm going to be interviewing Michael Morelli later today and he's crushing it on instagram. He's got millions of followers. I forget the number but it's pretty staggering what he's doing on instagram. But I don't know that he's doing affiliate marketing, I think he created his own product line. He's big into fitness. This is going to be for my other podcast, The Optimized Geek, and certainly, we'll be talking about ways to kind of do a reboot on your physical body but I should have him on Marketing Speak and talking about instagram and stuff. That's a good point, I'll make a mental note about that.

Shawn: Yeah. I feel like that the stories I've heard are more like endorsement kind of things versus people clicking through to buy directly there so you might get somebody who's wearing a certain shirt or outfit and they get some kind of flat fee. That reminds me more of the model that a lot of the parent bloggers have used in the past where they would just be sponsored versus getting paid on the transaction. Then I say, at least for affiliate marketing, a lot of them and moving over because they get frustrated by the fact that they get one flat fee and this a page that is, hopefully, a good page they put up there, they're getting that $100 or whatever but that page is up there in perpetuity benefiting the advertiser so a lot of them, as they're discovering affiliate marketing, they're saying that they can get that much more of a long term benefit instead of just that one quick shot.

Stephan: Yup. Yeah, it makes sense. So, what would be some tools that you would recommend either as the merchant who has affiliates or as the affiliate who signs up for different affiliate programs?

Shawn: All of my sites these days are in WordPress so a lot of the things I use there are sort of in that whole environment there. They're usually plug-ins or different things that don't work there but one that I like a lot is OptinMonster from a guy named Syed Balkhi.

Stephan: Yup.

Shawn: He has a really good site WPBeginner. I feel like, whenever I get stuck in WordPress and I search for some kind of solution, usually, his sites are the ones that helped me out to find and how to fix

something. He's incredibly helpful there but he has a handful of different products and but his OptinMonster, I think, is a really neat tool. It can sync up with different e-mail service providers like Aweber and the various companies out there so you can just create a process to try to get people to buy from you for your own product, or an affiliate product, or what have you.

Stephan: Yup, I talked to Syed at Affiliate Summit West and he was on one of the panels. He did a great job. I asked him to be on Marketing Speak and he did say yes so, hopefully, I'll get him on a future episode to talk about doing pop-ups and other kinds of innovative ways to drive people to your WordPress blog and for monetizing them.

Shawn: Yeah, that's why my favorite one that I'm using right now that I'd been hanging on for a while that I hadn't touched on. I just got an account there last week and I've been playing with it. I also like stuff from Noah Kagan. He has the SumoMe plugin that's got a whole range of tools in there that you can play with to try to optimize your site, some very basic things just having like sharing buttons that you can get from the lot of other places but also just some different tools to have a good opt-ins, pop-ups, and things to try to build up your list. And I guess that's really just one my biggest goals and, really, I think, it should be for any affiliates to build a bigger list that they can market to.

Stephan: Yup. The money is in the list, as Frank Kern likes to say.

Shawn: Yeah, and that's one the reasons why many years ago, we created our magazine, FeedFront. It's because we are fine that we are buying full-page ads here and there in various publications and they cost a small fortune. I had worked in magazine publishing in pre-internet days and I just knew some of the economics and I figured, well, we just make our own magazine and build our own list instead of paying for other people's list that we have a fleeting exposure to-

Stephan: Yup, and you mentioned earlier WPEngine, is that the tool that you use?

Shawn: Yeah, I used to have a lot of my sites spread across all kinds of different hosts and servers and things and I eventually moved everything, Affiliate Summit and all my personal sites and all of the related Affiliate Summit sites are on the WPEngine now. I just love their support and their service and just the overall company. Some people bristle at the fact that they limit the different plugins you can use but that's just because there are some plugins that are just not very efficient or big resource hogs and they provide alternatives. At first, I was sort of blindly bothered by the fact that I'd be limited in my plugins but it turns out there's no plugins that I use that are prohibited and I like the fact that they load fast and it's an easy-

to-use company and I just like them all around-just the people to support the product.

Stephan: Yup!

Shawn: I definitely recommend them but that does remind me of just a affiliate opportunity, just the chance that you can brand different things. On Social Media Marketing World Conference, I was speaking with a person who has a niche hosting company and specializes in podcast-hosting. When I

was chatting with him, I was realizing that they really didn't have anything unique from any other host, they just sort of branded as podcast-hosting and charged a premium for it that was way more than some of the quality accounts on the WPEngine or some other hosting companies so I guess, if some affiliates, they could private label hosting or different services like that and brand that as the solution for whatever industry and people seem to be lining up to use this service even though it wasn't doing extra except for just saying that it was.

Stephan: Yup.

Shawn: To a degree, it's maybe a little bit disreputable but I guess, marketers sort of selling people stuff that they aren't realizing they need until they get it.

Stephan: Mm-hmm. Yeah, so WPEngine-I actually interviewed David Vogelpohl on a previous episode of Marketing Speak and we talked about a whole bunch of really cool WordPress plugins and ways to optimize your WordPress blog for better server performance, for tracking user-behavior, and ways to drive more revenue. OptinMonster was one of the tools that he recommended as well. Oh, and he also provided a coupon code SS20 to get 20% off your first payment so any listeners who are interested in tuning their WordPress site for better performance or for more monetization, definitely check out that episode with David Vogelpohl. Any other tools that you want to mention for people to check out.

Shawn: I guess some of them are not really that sexy but one that I use a lot is Gravity Forms on WordPress, just to very easily create nice-looking forms. You have some of the themes that are built-in forms there that are sort of not that flexible and not that nice looking so I love Gravity Forms a lot. For any affiliate or even anybody who has long links that they need to shorten, I love Pretty Link. There are two different plugins that are pretty good: Pretty Link and ThirstyAffiliates. Both of them, basically, take your domain and enable you to make a short URL without assuming your domains already somewhat short anyway but so, instead of having say, the long, ugly Amazon link you could make it into AffiliateSite.com/Amazon and just makes it a lot nicer especially if you're putting a URL say, on an instagram picture or something and you want to have a nice short one instead of this big, long one. Also, if you're doing like a text newsletter and you want to put links in there, those long affiliate links are going to probably break and they will be clickable so it makes a lot more workable to have to use one of these shorteners and I just like those better than in some of the free services because in the event that these plugins fade, you can find a different plugin and recreate these links so they're still on your domain instead of being on someone else's domain. One problem I

"those long affiliate links are going to probably break and they will be clickable so it makes a lot more workable to have to use one of these shorteners and I just like those better than in some of the free services"

had with using some of these free services in the past was that, whenever I see these like flashbacks on Facebook dating back to like, 6-8 years, a lot of times, I shared links on various services. One was, I think, called Cli.gs, C-L-I-dot-G-S. I shared so many links on Facebook back then and I see these memories that I want to share them but all those links are dead and that service doesn't exist anymore.

Stephan: Oh no! Yeah, I remember that one.

Shawn: And I guess there are so many fly-by-night ones that seem like everyone is using them so it's a stable company but you never know if it's going to be gone two seconds later so I'd say it's definitely a good move to redirect on your own domain names. One that I like a lot also is Yoast SEO as well as the companion Yoast SEO Video Plugin.

Stephan: Yup!

Shawn: I use those a lot just for the overall ease of optimizing my posts and I love that for the SEO one, you can just put the Amazon link or Vimeo or whatever-just the bare link in there instead of the big, bulky,

embed code and just optimize that to make the video look nice on your blog post.

Stephan: Yup, that was definitely what we covered on the episode with David Vogelpohl. Yoast SEO is a must-have plugin. If somebody is looking to get into affiliate marketing, whether they are potentially going to be the merchant or the affiliate, where would you recommend they start? What sort of resources like training materials would they buy or books they would get should they come to Affiliate Summit? There's an opportunity for you plug your great conference. Where should they start and what sort of resources are they going to need either on the affiliate side or the merchant side?

Shawn: I guess on either side there's a lot of education out there and a lot of it is pretty overpriced and faulty, I think. We've tried to combat that by making all of our sessions from our conferences, after about a year delay, free on YouTube so if anybody was looking and they didn't really have the funds right now to go to some kind of event, they could just go to YouTube.com/AffiliateSummit and they could see all of the sessions up to about a year ago and dating back to 2006. We've had certainly some topics that are related to maybe the latest in Google issues that are going to be dated if they're a year or so old but then there are plenty of stuff that's evergreen like different ways to affiliate programs or are just content creation and different ideas like that. Also, our magazine, FeedFront, is free for people in the US to get it by snail mail at FeedFront.com. On the affiliate management side, there's a guy named Geno Prussakov who has written a number of books on affiliate management and so they can be bought on through Amazon for, I guess, $15-20 each. I would say, those are probably the best for you to get a quick, easy, and cheap training to get to speed as an affiliate manager.

Stephan: Okay, and as a merchant or a potential merchant, let's say you want to sell, I don't know, online training-what sort of process do you need to go through to get set up to take credit cards and all that? Do you have to find a payment processor? Do you need some sort of gateway and all that? Or, do you just sign up with service like Stripe and just really keep it simple like that? What do you recommend?

Shawn: Well, I guess in that case, that's something that positions like a conference really makes sense because they can go there and so many of those vendors, the payment processors, the affiliate networks, and just all the various companies that they have to deal with, they have a chance to get demos in person from all those companies. I guess, depending on the size of the company and the money that they have to spend, maybe a Stripe or something is the best alternative to starting up but there are so many different companies that are represented either as exhibitors or attendees, anything from a company like an AmEx or some of the big credit cards and the various processors down to the some of the high-risk processors for some of the industries maybe like, gaming or adult, they can find any of those kind of companies if they come out to Affiliate Summit, depending what their needs are.

Stephan: Right, and you have an Affiliate Summit coming up here: Affiliate Summit East and I'll be on the keynote panel. That's exciting and I'm looking forward to that! What are the dates and location for that?

Shawn: Yeah, and I can't wait to see that. I'm very excited about the keynote panel there. It's going to be July 31st to August 2nd, which is a Sunday to a Tuesday and that's in New York City at the Marriott Marquis, which is right in Times Square. It's a really fun environment and we're going to have about 5,500 people there and so it's just three days of just networking, learning, and fun.

Stephan: And I'll tell you, that's an impressive conference. That's a really great turnout. I spoke at Affiliate Summit West and that was a great event. Really well done! It's amazing what you've been able to achieve. Some of these conferences are just losing attendees, they're shrinking, going out of business, or having to make some big shifts and you, guys, are still going strong and seem to be growing so it's awesome to see that.

Shawn: Thank you! Yeah, one thing that we have found in the past, some people who come to conferences for the first time can be sort of an intimidating experience so something we instituted years ago is that, we have a what we call, The Newcomer Program, which is like a big brothers, big sisters-type thing where we'll match up people who want to join and participate in this program with a so-called "conference veteran" who can act as their wingman or wingwoman and they'll give them some guidance about the sessions to go to and different events to make it to people to meet so it's a chance to really jump in there and beat the learning curve. So that's something I recommend to people who are coming for the first time.

Stephan: Yup, that's a great tip! So, last question-I want to make it more of a legal question: We've talked before the episode about tax nexus and things like that, then I also started thinking about disclosure guidelines and being compliant with FTC and so forth so what are some important legal things for people to have on their radar as an affiliate or potential affiliates to make sure they're not getting in trouble? And, for the merchant, how do you navigate these legal waters and make sure that you're still able to make money and not lose a lot of your profit margin in certain states because of the tax laws and so forth?

Shawn: Yes, I guess, as a quick primer on the tax laws so starting back and I think it was 2007-2008, the state of New York passed a law wherein, if a company didn't have an actual, permanent base there or any kind of office or anything, if they did have affiliates that would constitute a tax nexus whereas, in the past they didn't have to charge sales tax for people in New York, all of sudden they would have to if they had any affiliates there and so, the result was that a lot of companies, when a state would pass these laws, they would simply kick out all their affiliates in that state so they wouldn't have to charge state tax. It

painted a big problem for people in a lot of states and here was a legislation, probably in at least half the states over the years, and when they brought it up back in 2011 in Texas, I went and I spoke with a lot of other people at the Ways and Means committee for the state here and they, fortunately, didn't pass that here but I was recently up in Utah and a lot of folks, including a guy named Chad Waite who's with AvantLink. He spoke there with the state government and they managed to get them so they didn't pass it in Utah but it's a thing where it's been a threat to a lot of affiliate marketers in a lot of states. Even back then, years ago, a big coupon site, Fat Wallet, they passed in Illinois, and so this company, which, I think, probably had about 50 or so employees at the time-maybe even more, they are now moving across the border to, I think, it was to Wisconsin because they simply couldn't operate if they stayed in Illinois because they were getting kicked out of all the affiliate programs. So, it's not the sexiest subject being tax law but I'm typically Libertarian and I hate to see new taxes but I would almost like to see a national sales tax online just to make this problem go away.

Stephan: Yeah, so definitely you need to think about the tax implications and get some advice from somebody.

Shawn: Yeah, but as far as FTC guidelines, we often have one or more sessions from people who are FTC lawyers or people who are actually from the FTC at Affiliate Summit. I think what really tortures me there is that these sessions are usually in some of the lightest-attended sessions and you have access to these people that are involved in making the laws or have this intimate knowledge of them. It's just an important issue but just not as fun as going to see how to make $10,000 in ten days where people cram into rooms that seem more like a lot of fun like, fast result and these more important things, they sort of blow off. I would love to see that change. I love to see people take that more seriously. One good site if people want to just know how they should be complying as affiliates with the FTC is, there's a woman named Tricia Meyer and her site is trisha.me-T-R-I-C-I-A dot me. She's a former lawyer turned affiliate marketer, which seems like it's packed with a lot of former lawyers, they decide it's a lot more pleasant to be an affiliate marketer but she has the unique insight of being a lawyer and being an affiliate marketer. She has a lot of helpful tips where she sort of distills the government speak of FTC and the laws they pass and she brings it down to a level where affiliate marketers can easily adapt and figure out how to conform to the new laws.

Stephan: Hmm, very cool. I wasn't aware of that side, I have to check that. Awesome! Well, this has been a really information-packed episode. I really, greatly appreciate you sharing your knowledge, experience, and wisdom with all of us. How would our listeners get a hold of you like, on Twitter or whatever if they wanted to continue the conversation? If they wanted to sign up for Affiliate Summit? What if they wanted to pitch a session as a speaker? What would be the ways that they could take the next step with you?

Shawn: I'm @AffiliateTip on Twitter and just my name on Facebook: Shawn Collins as the user name.

S-H-A-W-N Collins. Also, Shawn@AffiliateSummit.com for email. I get back quickly on email, I'm sort of an Inbox Zero maniac so if somebody sends me a message, they can typically expect to hear from me very quickly. As far as Affiliate Summit, it's AffiliateSummit.com. It's a little bit too late at this point to propose a session for our New York conference since it's all set in stone but we will be announcing the call for people to submit ideas for Las Vegas in January pretty soon and anybody who's a writer, I'm always looking for new writers for FeedFront Magazine and the deadline to propose an idea for that is on May 27th. You can just go to FeedFront.com/propose and just submit a one-sentence idea of what you like to write about. All of the content in there it's all one-pagers that are 500 words or less and they're all just focused on having some quick takeaway like "3 ways to do this" or "5 ways to do that" so it's pretty quick and easy stuff that you can write. We're not looking for journalist, we're looking for people who know how to do the stuff and just write it in a sort of first-person, conversational blog kind of feel.

Stephan: Yeah, so practitioners, not journalists who know about it kind of intellectually but but ones who are actually doing the work.

Shawn: Yeah. You know, journalists are actually one of the reasons why we start the magazine. Also, because we are frustrated when we'd see coverage and say Forbes are entrepreneurs and they've got a lot of the small details wrong so we figured that it would be great to just have the people who are actually doing and talking about it even if sometimes, they're not the greatest writers and they present challenges for us to edit sometimes.

Stephan: Yup. Very cool! Well, thank you again, Shawn. This has been another great episode of Marketing Speak. If you listeners want to get the transcript and show notes, go to MarketingSpeak.com. I do highly recommend that. These episodes are fantastic to listen to but then you've got to put them into action and a great way to put that information in action is to go check out the transcript and checklist, which will give you some action items to take and of course, the show notes will have all the links that we talked about. Definitely do something with this information-it's not just entertainment, it's for you to make money. So, this has been Stephan Spencer and thanks for listening. Will catch you on the next episode of Marketing Speak!

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STEPHAN SPENCER BIO:

Stephan Spencer is an internationally recognized SEO expert and bestselling author. He is the co-author of The Art of SEO (3rd edition - August 2015), author of Google Power Search and co-author of Social eCommerce, all published by O'Reilly. Stephan founded Netconcepts, an SEO and interactive agency in the 1990's, and sold it to Covario in 2010. He invented a pay-for-performance SEO technology called GravityStream that was also acquired and is now part of Rio SEO. Stephan's recent SEO clients have included such retail giants as Zappos, Sony Store, Quiksilver, Best Buy Canada, Bed Bath & Beyond, and Chanel. Stephan has spoken at countless hundreds of Internet marketing events, including all the major search & e-commerce conferences (SES, SMX, PubCon, Internet Retailer, Shop.org, eTail, etc.). He's been a contributor to the Huffington Post, Multichannel Merchant, Practical Ecommerce, Search Engine Land, DM News and MarketingProfs, to name a few.

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