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Oct 2020 – Interview with Brad Stewart Au.D.

MAIN EPISODE

I am going to say a word and I want you to say, out loud, the first word that comes to your mind.

Marketing.

Was your first thought SALES?

Mine was.

Marketing is, by definition, any mechanism by which you promote the exchange of your products and/or services for some kind of gain, usually monetary.

Now, for some of you, sales and marketing may bring up all kinds of feelings – probably negative – or perhaps you even tell yourself stories like “I am a trained professional. I do so much more than just push buttons and sell hearing aids; I provide better hearing solutions”. Insert badge of honor, fist on the heart gestures here.

Full disclosure, I have actually used those exact words over the years, thinking I was somehow “above” the whole sales aspect of hearing healthcare.

BUT, as a private practitioner for over 20 years, both as an employee and as a practice owner, I have often been made to feel like a “bottom feeder” in the Audiology food chain, many times by my own colleagues, because sales and marketing have had to be a necessary part of the daily activities associated with my broader mission of wanting to help people hear better.

Now to a certain degree, that limited mindset has evolved and changed as audiologists have come to recognize that, even non-profits like the American Heart Association, “market” as a method of raising awareness sure, but also as a way to raise money – to “sell” and support their broader mission of heart health.

In 2017, The New York Times described marketing as “the art of telling stories so enthralling that people lose track of their wallets.”

That cracked me up because whether it is selling a better cereal or some sort of pill to cure any number of ailments, these highly targeted fantasies have us all parting with millions of dollars every year in search of a better life.

With digital marketing, it has become so personal, so detailed and so automated, that every Google search, every “like” and even the very keystrokes you make on any given day go into a vast ocean of data that is being collected on each and every one of us primarily for the purpose of separating us from our hard-earned dollars.

THAT realization right there may either be...your worst nightmare, or perhaps a dream come true!

On the podcast this month, Dr. Brad Stewart is here to talk all things digital marketing from an insider’s perspective.

Dr. Stewart is a private practice owner in Allen, Texas, and is considered to be an industry expert in digital marketing, especially email marketing. His email program for Audiologists called Email AuDomation (that’s AuD - o - mation – of course) has been promoted by some well-known names in Audiology marketing and he has recently partnered with Counsel Ear, the office management system, to make email marketing an integrated feature of

Hearing^{THE} Journal

THE MOST RESPECTED PUBLICATION IN HEARING HEALTH CARE

their software.

Dr. Stewart, thank you so much for taking the time to come on and talk about global domination by digital manipulation....just kidding...but in all seriousness, it all feels a little daunting.

03:46 Dr. Brad Stewart: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it, it's an honor. It is something I have really grown passionate about, so I am excited to talk about it.

03:57 D' Anne Rudden: Before we jump in too deep, would you mind just running down a list of all the options that exist for digital marketing because I am assuming that with digital marketing you mean a lot more than just sending emails to your patients or trying to make your website show up a little higher on the Google search engine.

04:20 Dr. Brad Stewart: Yes. I think digital marketing can be a daunting concept because of this "umbrella" term. Basically, you are participating in digital marketing anytime you are doing an activity such as educating or persuading people online. It could be posting content on Facebook, it could be making a Youtube video or advertising on Google, Facebook ads, Instagram ads, sending emails. There are a lot of things that fall under digital marketing. People feel like "Oh, I need to do digital marketing", but that's a very vague goal because digital marketing is so many things. It is not the same as they know I need to write a newspaper ad. It's a lot broader.

05:08 D' Anne Rudden: Exactly. For myself, it becomes very overwhelming simply because there are so many pieces of the puzzle, which one should I be in or which one should I worry about or not worry about. It can make a single practice owner like myself feel completely overwhelmed.

05:31 Dr. Brad Stewart: I totally understand I've felt the same way. You have to look at it like anything else that you do in your practice, where if you are setting goals you need to have an understanding of what your goals are, and then you need to evaluate the options and see what the best next steps are to reach your goals. For a lot of us, getting new patients into the clinic or staying connected with our current patients are two of our biggest goals when it comes to digital marketing. There are a lot of ways that you can do that. You could play to your strength. A good example is, Cliff Olson, who is very good at making Youtube videos, and so he makes a lot of them, but I am not. Being in front of the camera is not my strength, and so I would rather write. Writing is more than my strength, and so I focus more on writing because it's where my strengths are, so I play to that. As long as you have a clear idea of what your goals are and you don't get the "squirrel syndrome" where you see something new and interesting and jumped off down in a different path, it's a tangent, then you can leverage digital to be one of the most powerful assets inside of your practice.

06:52 D' Anne Rudden: How did you get interested in digital marketing? What drove you to create a solution that some of us could potentially use to integrate these tools into our practices?

07:08 Dr. Brad Stewart: I started my practice from scratch. I had to be really scrappy when I was starting because I didn't have any money to market - I mean the Dallasmarket. It's a very big competitive market with a lot of big players. You spend a lot of money on traditional marketing such as newspapers, direct mails, on TV, so I had to be scrappy.

I started my practice doing house-calls and ended up serving about a hundred senior living communities doing in-home care which meant that I got to spend a lot of time in my car listening to the podcast and audiobooks and learning a lot. I feel like I've got almost an MBA just in the amount of content I gathered during that time. Over time, I built my first website, I did my own search engine optimization on my first website. Over the years I did pay agencies to do digital stuff for me, but most of the time I get disappointed in the results. Over the past 6 years as I have grown my practice I have personally done every part of my practice, and that includes the digital marketing part.

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But, I spent a lot of time, came with a lot of energy, and a lot of money on learning how to market my practice effectively. I spent a lot of what I call it life-tuition which is like you spend a lot of money but it doesn't work out the way you thought it would, but you learned a lesson - that's life-tuition.

I got to a point where I felt really confident with my digital marketing being effective. We could run digital in a way that was profitable... that created better engagement with our patients and better patient experiences and grew our practice effectively. But, it was still labor-intensive because the tools didn't integrate with the systems that we were using like our EMR, which in my case is counsel ear. When the counsel ear announced that they were automating their email marketing system, I was excited about it. I immediately was the first person that wanted my emails into their system. It was seamless, it works easily and I wish I had it 6 years ago. It seems intuitive to me that I could share a system I knew worked in my practice with other practice owners. Now, we are about 75 practice owners that are using my email system inside of their practices. For all the good things I don't... again, it is something I wished 5 years ago, I could have paid somebody else to do it for me because it's nice to have things work automatically and all you have to do is put your data into the EMR that you already worked.

10:00 D' Anne Rudden: For people who might be unfamiliar with how those works, it's more than just like sending an email to a particular patient which is already integrated into counsel ear. This is a completely different thing, more targeted, more specific, and I am going to use the word funnel because I know it is a term that is used when we are talking about emails and putting people into the funnel and letting it run through. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

10:34 Dr. Brad Stewart: From a high level, a lot of small businesses in general in audiology practices specifically are having what I call a sales culture, which basically means that if somebody comes into your clinic and make a sale that day—great! But if not then you weren't the right person for us or maybe we will follow up with a phone call but, there's no systematize follow-up process in place. The same thing with marketing it lands on your landing page and in your Google pay per click Ad, and if they don't it will convert you to an appointment then they never hear from you again. That is a sales culture.

I believe that in order to be effective with your marketing dollars is to have the most impact in your community. You have to have a follow-up culture, and a follow-up culture is where you have a system in place to make sure that you are following up with everybody even if they don't take action at that time when they are in front of you.

12:29 D' Anne Rudden: What do you see? You talked about wishing you had this six years ago but having an interest in doing it—I would say there are a lot of audiologists that are not at all interested in learning how to do this for themselves. Having a mechanism that is automatic and integrated into something they are already using is definitely brilliant. What do you see as the most difficult hurdle for audiologists to overcome when it comes to the need to promote and I would say sell this bigger idea of hearing health care? Not just one specific product but the whole concept of... It is a life-long journey with them, hopefully, in a best-case scenario.

13:25 Dr. Brad Stewart: It is a really important distinction because one of the biggest hurdles is that many people have a commodity-based mentality. We think about the widget that we sell. We think that what we do is sell hearing aids, and that's a dangerous mindset to have because hearing aids are a technology that is disruptable and that it might be disrupted sooner rather than later.

I recently took a road trip to Colorado where I saw you—which is awesome and got you footage. While I was in Colorado, I was reflecting on my business on what I do, where I want to go, and I found this really cool park where there are these beautiful palms and a stream and a pond at the base of these beautiful mountains. I was sitting next to the stream, hearing the water running over the rocks, and I heard the wind go through the trees. I have this realization that a lot of the people we worked with wouldn't be able to experience that. They wouldn't hear the

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stream, and they wouldn't hear the wind in the trees. It was clear to me that what we do is not sell hearing aids. What do we do? Is to let people hear the stream. We let them hear the wind in the trees.

If we can focus our own minds on that, then that would come through in our messaging, in our marketing, and it will come through in the way we communicate when we're selling or when we are persuading somebody to take action. I'm getting really sick of the phrase now more than ever but now more than ever I, having that mentality is going to be critical for us going forward as an industry.

15:09 D' Anne Rudden: Any final thoughts to share as we close out this first section which by the way just flew by. Anything that you want to leave people with if they are feeling hesitant or feeling like they don't know where to begin—would email be what you would start with? What would be your take-home message for people?

15:38 Dr. Brad Stewart: The message is: I'm an actionable item. I think everyone should do this. I think you should go to one of our online competitors. Go to their website, click through their website, submit a form, and see what happens? Do the same thing on your website, and see what happens. Experience the difference between those two interactions, and what you'll see is the companies that are doing these online, granted they have a lot bigger marketing teams than you do, but you can take the concepts of what they are doing and drop those things into your own practice. If you don't know how to do the technical stuff, there are people out there that know how to do the technical stuff. But, that would be an actionable thing. What I would do is to see what that experience is and then start to brainstorm: How I can do this in my practice? If it feels overwhelming, just realize that the world has been going this way—it has arrived. We are here. Digital marketing is a reality, and you either need to start to learn how to do it or you need how to start working with people who know how to do it because it is an important component over the next five or ten years in your practice.

17:06 D' Anne Rudden: Dr. Brad Stewart, thank you so much. Thank you for bringing your genius and your visionary thinking, and your wisdom to shepherd a whole group of people that have traditionally not been as savvy as we need to be when it comes to marketing especially in digital marketing in general. But, don't go away because we are going to talk a little more, and we are going to dive in just a little bit deeper with Dr. Brad Stewart into digital marketing. Thanks so much for being here.

17:43 Dr. Brad Stewart: My pleasure.

AFTERSHOW

17:48 D' Anne Rudden: It's the hearing Journal Podcast Aftershow with Dr. Brad Stewart talking all things about digital marketing. Full disclosure, Brad and I met on a unique retreat down in Costa Rica a few years ago. There were about ten other audiologists. It was not your typical audiology gathering - that's for sure. It was a kind of audiology that meets meditation and life coaching life skills kind of retreat. What I notice about you in that venue truly was, you are not just interested in being a better audiologist. What drives you is this desire to become a more conscious person, and through that, I feel like I have witnessed even a small amount of your evolution as a business owner and how it has influenced you to see the world. Would you share a little about that journey with everyone?

19:04 Dr. Brad Stewart: Yes. Those trips were really cool. I got to meet some of the highest vibe audiologists that were out there including you D'Anne.

What I bring back with me is this concept of a couple of things. For me, personally and in my business life, this concept of alignment because I am more aware of my own thoughts and I have lessened my ego. I am more in my

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own awareness like who I am as a person, and when I get out of life what's valuable to me in life. I've made changes to my business. I went from at the beginning of this year I had 12 employees and now I have 2.

19:51 D' Anne Rudden: Some might say, "Is that going in the right direction?"

19:55 Dr. Brad Stewart: Yes.

19:56 D' Anne Rudden: But, it's in alignment with your direction.

20:00 Dr. Brad Stewart: That's right. I was really unhappy with the way my business was, but it fulfilled my ego. We were making a lot of money and it was really successful but I didn't enjoy life. It was not in alignment with who I was and it was hard on my marriage. It was the best decision. Believe it or not, my personal income and my lifestyle haven't changed significantly because when you do things that are in alignment, the universe conspires and things work out—which sounds a little bit woe but I 100 percent believe it to be the case.

20:42 D' Anne Rudden: And so, it has driven some of your conscious relationships not only with yourself with how you create or co-create your surroundings in your world. How has it also influenced your messaging and how you communicate with others through your marketing speak and storytelling?

21:09 Dr. Brad Stewart: One thing that's been interesting this year is I focused more on working with tinnitus patients, and I actually have tinnitus. One of the cool things about mindfulness as it relates to tinnitus is those two things are very relevant to each other. Specifically, in working with that subset of people when you start to become aware of your own subconscious thoughts and emotions. With tinnitus, if you are having a negative automatic emotional reaction, you become aware of it because you have a mindfulness practice. You have the ability to rewire your brain and say, "You know what, just because I'm having negative thoughts doesn't mean that they are true and it doesn't mean that's who I am." When I talk to patients about it, it's so cool because I see the light bulb turn on. Most people never think about the fact that they are not their thoughts. Or, if they have thoughts they are not necessarily true. A lot of people aren't even aware that they are having these thoughts. They are just low-level chattered happening in the background automatically. Personal awareness has made it... I have been able to communicate with patients more effectively and help patients get better results in their own lives.

22:29 D' Anne Rudden: And you used that as a vehicle for how you market externally, not just to another person that is sitting right in front of you who's there for particular treatment options?

22:41 Dr. Brad Stewart: Yes. The tricky thing about marketing is that you might feel compelled, especially if you are working with outside companies, to use their messaging because it's what works. A lot of times, the messaging that works isn't or doesn't buy with me as a person. The energy that I want to create in my practice, and I have to be really conscious. Every time you communicate with somebody you are telling them who you are. When I am creating marketing messages I have to be conscious of how I make this persuasive and compelling and written in such a way that creates actions but also genuine, true, and not misleading. It is like building somebody up rather than creating fear or anxiety or stress about their condition.

23:38 D' Anne Rudden: That brings up social media, which blow all things out of proportions and create messaging that may not be in alignment with things. What are your thoughts on using social media as a marketing tool? Do we need to be tweeting with our patients? Is that a thing?

24:03 Dr. Brad Stewart: The thing with social media or any digital communication is we need to be using those tools in the way that they are used naturally. Meaning, if I write an email it shouldn't sound like a newsletter, it should sound like an email. It should sound like I am writing to you D'Anne an email. What you'll find is even if you send

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an automated email to a bunch of people that are written in such a way that feels personal you are getting a better response because people will read it because it feels like an email from you. The same thing is true with social media if you post pictures of yourself, you post pictures of your family, or your team doing stuff together those are always the posts that get the most engagement. It is because that's how that medium works. Whereas if you post an article about outer hair cells or crickets, nobody will respond to that because it is not relevant to that medium. You just have to be conscious of when you are doing marketing, how does it relate to the way people naturally use that type of social media. Whether you do it is a judgment call, but I do think that being present on the big ones like Facebook and Google search is very important.

25:26 D' Anne Rudden: More about being authentic and relationship building has been supposed to in actionable items like, "Call this number today for X numbers of dollars off." It is a completely different way of thinking and marketing yourself.

25:46 Dr. Brad Stewart: Yes. In my case, it's a bit of a bouncing act because you can also go two-part or the other way where you are just running filled with good stuff and people are liking it but it doesn't create any return on your investment. So, you do have to have a call to action. There has to be a way that you can draw a line between I did this thing on social media and created a revenue impact on my practice. You just have to do the messaging in a way; and people still respond to events. We are doing this one-week thing where you can come in and try the technology. People still reply to that stuff but it's good to have a... And the cool thing about Facebook, for example, you can have multiple messages you don't just have one shot. It's not a newspaper ad, you can do a personal story, you can have a patient testimonial then you can have an event invitation and you can sprinkle these things in.

26:43 D' Anne Rudden: Who are your marketing mentors and gurus? Who inspires you?

26:50 Dr. Brad Stewart: I have to shout out to Phil Pales who brought us together.

26:55 D' Anne Rudden: The wizard? We have to call him the wizard.

26:58 Dr. Brad Stewart: Yes. The wizard Phil taught me a lot about what I know about digital. In the big space, I followed Gary Vaynerchuk, for his social media stuff. The way he thinks about social media and the way technology is spot on. Dan Kennedy is a big direct response person that I follow. If you want to learn how to do digital stuff, Russell Brunson, the CEO of ClickFunnels. He has a good podcast called Marketing Secrets Podcast that I would recommend.

27:37 D' Anne Rudden: It is awesome. What do you want to leave people with today? What are your final thoughts, your final words to your brethren on digital marketing? What do you want to drive home that we can leave them with?

27:58 Dr. Brad Stewart: The biggest thing is don't be closed to learning. Be open to learning. Be open to, if you have the mindset that you can do it, you are right. If you have the mindset that you can learn it, you are also right. You just have the mindset that you can learn it and expose yourself to content a little bit at a time. You don't have to go out and learn how to Facebook ads over the weekend but just gradually start to learn the stuff, and you will get to a point sooner than you expected that you would feel comfortable with it. And if you don't want to, there are people in our space that are doing this stuff well. Seek out other people who can give you guidance.

28:44 D' Anne Rudden: I'm going to make you answer one more question because I feel that you are a visionary. Where do you see digital marketing for audiology in the next five, 10—25 might be a little bit of a stretch—but at least the next five years?

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29:02 Dr. Brad Stewart: Our industry has been in an interesting transition since I have been practicing. I graduated in 2012, but since that time I always felt that we are an industry that's right for disruption. With OTC happening - it's going to happen that I am talking on an Airpod right now. This thing will be a hearing aid, and there's going to be a million people who have Airpods with the updates in their software, and now they are going to have hearing aids. We have to be thinking as an industry. Where is our value in the ecosystem? This goes back to not thinking about selling hearing aids as a thing we do, but those quality-of-life goals in helping people reach those quality-of-life goals. Where do we fit into that ecosystem? As I relate to digital, the reality is things are going more digital, and we need to be willing to learn what it means because there will be people who get left behind if they are not willing to learn. I truly believe that's the case.

30:13 D' Anne Rudden: Brad Stewart, you are incredible. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Thank you for sharing some of the things you're still learning and evolving with. For being willing to help take us all down the road a little bit further and gave us some things to think about, and some things to action around. I really appreciate that.

30:39 Dr. Brad Stewart: My pleasure. Thanks, D'Anne.

30:41 END