



# channel mastery

Channel Mastery Podcast, #122: Tyler: , Bike Rumor

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Kristin: Okay. Welcome back to another episode of the Channel Mastery Podcast. I am absolutely stoked to bring Tyler Benedict to you. Tyler is with Bikerumor, and he is here to talk about a myriad of things that range from the evolution of cycling media to a conference he has coming up, to basically getting his take on exactly who this consumer is today and how to reach them through different channels. Welcome. We have been trying to put this show together for some time, so I'm so glad that you're here.

Tyler: Yeah, thanks for having me. Yeah, it has been a little while back and forth and scheduling mishaps, but glad to be on.

Kristin: Tyler, give us a little bit of your background and your founder story with Bikerumor.

Tyler: Yeah, sure. Bikerumor came about because I didn't want to go get a real job when the thing I was doing before this started going down. We had some friends and I had launched a sports drink beverage, powdered drink mix company for endurance athletes, way back in the day for a few reasons. We just didn't really like anything that was out there and saw a hole in the market. And as the energy drink craze swept over America, we jumped into that and sort of more from a powder sports ring mix into an energy drink.

And about six and a half years of that and losing money doing that, we decided that it probably didn't make sense to keep doing it and the options were for me basically, find something else to do on my own because I make a terrible employee and I wouldn't want to subject myself to a 9-5 job, but I really wouldn't want to subject any employer to me being at 9-5 job. So I just looked around and saw this blog called Engadget that I really, really liked from the tech side and then-

Kristin: Oh, I love that blog.

Tyler: Yeah. And there was at the time, nothing like that in the cycling space. You had things like MTBR, which was largely a forum. You had Peds Cycling Race news which was just like this mishmash of race news, and not a lot else. Not very many, if any of the magazines had like a real true functional website other than just a portal to subscribe. So I thought it would be interesting to just to try it and see and just start posting. And when I launched that, I had this whole like storyboarded layout of what I wanted the site to look like, what I wanted it to do and I turned it to a developer and they're like, "Oh

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yeah, that's WordPress." "Great. What's WordPress?" So here we are, 11 ½ years later and yeah, Bikerumor is kicking butt.

Kristin: Well, good for you. I love... You've spoken like a true entrepreneur, "I knew I'd make a terrible employee." I definitely had the same experience myself. 11 and a half years, congratulations. You have seen a lot of change in that time in the media landscape for sure, and I really just applaud you for sticking with it because I will say to everybody listening, consistency truly is king. This is my third podcast, I think I'm on episode 120 with you here today. And one of my just absolute revered rockstar employees at Verde, Chris Dickerson, and he leads our integrated services, basically told me like, "Will you please quit re-branding yourself?"

Kristin: And so I'm making myself stay, even though the show's evolving, I'm keeping the actual same approach, but I have to say, that's fantastic. I bet it probably was pretty lonely at the beginning and you probably had a lot of arrows in your back looking at the more traditional stage, established cycling media at that time, it was a bit of an institution, wasn't it?

Tyler: There was, and there was a lot of hard lessons we learned by doing a lot of really stupid things as we figured it out. The first I say a year and a half was really just me, and then slowly but surely people were interested in writing and we fortunately we've had a couple that had been with us forever now, a lot more that have cycled in and out as they've done different things, which is fine. It's always nice to have fresh voices in it, but yeah, I'm definitely seeing a lot of changes, and definitely we've evolved.

The rumor name, we took it to heart and just twisted a little bit of everything, definitely some stuff we shouldn't have and some of the bits in the ass, some of it didn't and it got us to where we are today. But I think part of that evolution is, the brands don't always want everything leaked out ahead of time, and so for better or worse, you have to respect that and evolved the way you covered it and try and find stories at a time, but also really respect embargoes. Now, I think of anything, we have a reputation of absolutely adhering to embargoes and honoring what the brands want to accomplish, but they also know what our goals are and we work really, really well together.

Kristin: Tell us what those goals are because I feel like this is a big point of differentiation for you.

Tyler: Sure. I actually, before I forget, I wanted to mention one funny thing on consistency. So its not funny for Dirt Rag now because as we all know, Dirt Rag just folded. But we launched a podcast probably like eight or nine years ago. I started a Bikerumor Podcast, so I thought, "Hey, there might be something to this." And this was when you had to like host the audio files on your own server, and there was no proper podcast hosting platform. And one of the interviews was Maurice Tierney about how he started Dirt Rag, and all that.

And then I'd interviewed Kay fish, and I think we have like four episodes. And now I'm like, I just thought it was Saturday. I was like, "Man, if I had stuck with that, we would

own the cycling podcast base, but whatever."

Kristin: You definitely would have. If you still have that Maurice interview, it might be interesting to actually re-post that.

Tyler: Yeah, that would. I'm sure I've got that file right here somewhere.

Kristin: I just loved Dirt Rag. I'm glad you brought that up because we should acknowledge that they definitely did bring a lot to the media community. Let's evolve our conversation, because I think it would be super interesting for my audience at Channel Mastery to get your take on ultimately as a media provider and now learning that you evolved from loving Engadget and almost more of a tech approach. How do you think that consumers are evolving today in terms of the types of content that you're putting out? And the reason I ask is, here we are in February of 2020, we have a lot of great clients at Verde, and so, so many of them are asking how they can use their, for example, one example, corporate social responsibility, give backs, things that they are ethically tied to as brands because they're seeing more and more consumers are gathering around brands for community.

And I think that you are a conduit for that with Bikerumor as a media outlet. So are you seeing that, like maybe you're evolving more into storytelling or behind the scenes or what are some of the most popular stories that you're running right now in terms of how they're resonating with your audience?

Tyler: Well, the funny thing is the anytime we do actual weights and especially anything for some of the major brands, those are always the most popular, which are basically just because people like geeking out and seeing what stuff actually weighs. But beyond that, we have our core bread and butter, which is the tech, and that really is what people come to Bikerumor for, is they want to see everything that's new. And what's really set us apart from the beginning was that we just publish more of that than anyone else. And we still do that because we pay attention to all the little brands and basically any little brand knows that they can send us some images that are a little blurb or emails that say, "Hey, I'm coming out with this thing, what do I do?" And it's pretty simple, "Just send us the info and your pictures and if it's cool, we'll post about it."

So people know they can come to Bikerumor and see all of the little stuff that's from every brand that's cool and new, not just the big 10 or 20. So that is our bread and butter. What we have done is evolved into, like you said, more storytelling options and that's adds to what we do at the base. And some of the more popular ones are like the Where to Ride series. And so it's a really long tail thing because, like we did a story on gravel, biking in Slovenia, well, it might be 10 years before you plan your gravel biking trip in Slovenia, but the information is there and had a lot of value to those brands that helps support that trip just year after year after year.

Tyler: And so we've done more of those with some really cool destinations. Some of the fun stuff we've been doing lately that is getting traction is how long can we keep up with whatever pro name? Like I've done a few with recently, Rebecca Rusch and Gordon

Wadsworth. It's just super fun because it's an opportunity for the athlete to showcase their personality in a way that they don't usually get to, and we just have fun with her because there's no way I'm going to keep up with any of those people, but for me to even try and just like get them to give me advice and everything, it does a lot. They get to show off their sponsors and their personality, I get to learn something and therefore our readers learn, "Okay, how do you do this? How do you train? How do you handle? Why do you pick this part versus like this tire versus that tire?"

And it's just you get all the elements of a good story in there and it's interesting for the reader, and the viewer, but it's also a great opportunity for the brands to showcase something. And that's what it comes down to for us is like, "Look, if we're going to invest the time and energy in creating these stories, it's great if they're fun, but ultimately, we're in business and so we need to bring our brand partners, so the brand needs to get something out of it and the readers need to get something out of it in order for us to get what we want out of it."

Kristin: Well, that's and you really hit on an, especially talking about the influencers, the work that our agency, I think has been enjoying the most, is creating, I think, creating different ways of integrating audience growth drivers around product launches or event launches and things like that. So where I'm going with this is plugging in a Rebecca Rusch or somebody like that in a way that is very additive to the people who follow and revere her. She has her own community and it overlays with your community and people within both those communities have a goal that she's able to inform.

And one of my absolute favorite examples of this is the Leadville Podcast with Hottie and Fatty, I don't know if you listen to that because usually it's reserved for those of us who are really obsessed with Leadville, and I'll be doing it for the third time this year doing Lead Boat, which is terrifying, but we can talk about that later. But anyways, point being is, I didn't even know that show existed the first year. I didn't know what the hell I was doing in that event, even though I live in Durango and lived here 25 years and I moved here for mountain biking.

So the second I found that podcast and realized that, and Rebecca was actually on that season, they would break out, every episode had a part of the episode where they would talk about how to hack a certain part of the course, which was like incredibly valuable for somebody like me who is super intimidated, and I trusted the podcast host and of course, the athlete. And that's exactly what I think that you bring a proof of concept and you bring an awesome resource with this, kind of charge of like a Rebecca Rusch, and I think it's actually a perfect way to bring resource-based content to your audience, and I don't really think it looks like a branded play the way that you do it.

Tyler: All right. No, it's got to be fun first and foremost, nobody wants to watch a commercial if they know they're being sold something. And so for us, there's no hard sell, it's like the travel stuff. It's like, "Look, this is the trip we did, this is how you can recreate this trip. Here's all the hotels we had, the restaurants. This is all the information you need to plan your trip. Oh, and by the way, if you're wondering what gear to you use, this is what we wear out along, this is what worked for us, why we chose these things." And so I guess

it's presented as, "Look, Hey man," like your riding buddies asks you, "Hey, what did you use for that race? What work?" And we're like, "Oh, we use this."

That's the way it should be, and I think that's the way the whole content marketing thing needs to work is, how are you going to provide value? Why is somebody going to consume that piece of content? It's not because they want to hear your sales pitch.

Kristin: Yeah, no kidding. I think the second that you turn to that, you lose trust immediately. That brings me to my next question for you is, so you've been doing this 11 and a half years, and in my opinion that's like a PhD in journalism, but do you have a journalism background?

Tyler: I actually have a journalism degree from University of Florida, yes.

Kristin: Oh, awesome.

Tyler: And then I thought I would never use it and yeah, sure enough like whatever, eight years after I graduated, I actually started using it.

Kristin: That's awesome. And you've evolved Bikerumor in terms of channels, you have your site and you have obviously the social media. This can all be found in the show notes at [channelmastery.com](http://channelmastery.com), as well as [bikerumor.com](http://bikerumor.com), obviously. But you now have a podcast and a newsletter. What are some of the other channels that you're using to partition out key content for a part of your audiences here?

Tyler: YouTube for sure. We write about Sea Otter time last year, we've always had a YouTube channel, just not a ton posted to it. And I started making a concerted effort to produce more videos. And so you can see we went from like maybe one video at Sea Otter in 2018 or something, I don't know. It's basically nothing, I think I got 12 or 15 videos done at Sea Otter tails in '19, and this year try will and do it even more. And for us, it's where are the eyeballs and so much of the public these days, especially the younger half of it are just watching video, they just want these little bite size content pieces. And so it's definitely, YouTube is where we're putting a lot of effort.

And then of course that video you can use elsewhere, we'd put it on our site, we always embed it on our site and try and bring people back onto the main site to see photos and more tech details, because there's things you can do with video and there's things you can't, nobody wants to read like a bullet point list of features, but they probably want that information. And so you put the information that belongs at one platform there and the other there and hopefully people will look at all of that at some point.

Kristin: Do you spend a lot of time with search engine optimization on YouTube? Because this is an area that I've gotten a lot of requests from our audience, believe it or not, even though it's very nerdy and in the weeds, everybody's wondering, their partitioning spend to video, they realize they need to do a channel, but it's a little like SeaOtter, and you know what I mean? It's like way too much noise and traffic and so much going on, how do you rise above the noise? So how do you find that you're successfully

connecting your YouTube content with your audience?

Tyler: Well, there's a lot of black magic to that, I'm going down that rabbit hole. If somebody really wants to just spend a couple of days trying to figure it all out, check out Tim Schmoyer site, he goes super deep into that stuff. He's like one of those pro YouTube guides and stuff that charges a whole lot of money to evaluate your site. But he gives a lot of free information out there. And so a lot of it boils down to, and there's some other people which if I could plug my conference for a second, like we have a couple of people that are just experts on video coming to Peak Content Summit in March in Asheville.

And I brought those people in specifically because they will cover the gamut of how to create a good video because you mentioned SEO, that's to me like only a fraction to the battle. It's an important part, but there's so much more. It's you have to have the right story arc to your video, you have to have that hook in the beginning. Literally, you have probably two seconds to catch them on before they flip away to something else. And if you don't capture their attention and then immediately capture their interest, then you're done. Like if you can capture their attention and if they watch the next five seconds and they're bored or they don't understand why I should keep watching, you lost them. So there's a lot of opportunities to lose people and only a few to really keep them.

So that's a big part of it, maintaining momentum is a big part of it. From the tech geeky stuff, just captioning is hugely important because there's no texts in the video unless you add those captions in, and that's the text that YouTube, which is essentially Google for a video, because obviously Google owns it, everybody knows, that's what they're using to inform search results until they figure out on a transcribing that's 100% accurate. So if you take the time to make sure that your subtitles and everything or your close captioning is accurate, that's an easy way. It's actually easier than you think, I used to dread that and now I'm like, "Ah, Okay. It only takes a few minutes."

Kristin: It is a little daunting, so it's good to know that you are able to find, just like anything, you start training and you're going to overcome it and be able to like learn more and take on more. But tell us, so you said that you did one video Sea Otter 2018, 12 to 15, 2019, how consistent are you? How quickly did you see the hockey stick growth?

Tyler: Before I went to Sea Otter in 2019, I'll look to see what our subscriber base was, and it was like embarrassingly low, but it showed you what happens when you don't put any effort into your YouTube channel.

Kristin: No judgment.

Tyler: All right. So we had about 6,000 subscribers to our channel. Now, well, as I say, I checked a couple of weeks ago and we were at, going from memory, maybe close to 8,500. So while those numbers are still low, if you look at the growth as a percentage, we grew over 20% over, well geez, like over 25%, almost 30% in like eight months. So from a percentage growth, I think that's pretty good. And what it really came down to is just

producing board videos consistently, but then also learning how to structure those videos and the descriptions of the titles and everything else to make sure that they're easily found. And now, I get a tremendous kick out of this.

Some of our highest referral traffic, two of our videos on YouTube, comes from similar videos from our competitors because we just show up like, as the recommended, "Also watch this," next to their stuff too.

Kristin: I have to tell you as somebody who is like a massive YouTube content consumer, and that partially stems from me finding out that I'm doing DK now that we're working with Lifetime Media and events, I watch everything possible to get better at that and smarter at that. And I actually am the one who will click on all the recommended videos next to the one I'm watching because literally, if something is over, I think GCN does a nice job of saying, "Click on this video, blah, blah blah." And then YouTube does it for us too, just having that margin. So please, there's no shame in it. And also 8,500, I'm assuming that's organic growth, right?

Tyler: Oh, I'm not paying to promote any of that stuff.

Kristin: That's pretty proud in my opinion.

Tyler: Thank you.

Kristin: That's pretty proud. Cool. I'm really, really happy that you brought up YouTube. How about your newsletter these days? Because that's something that my clients, and I know a lot of people in the audience, they know email's not dead and they know it's a fantastic way to nurture people, and it's obviously like you're earning the right to keep them, opening your emails every week, so it has to be your best content or every other week, whatever. How can you talk about in terms of like you as a media outlet and how you're utilizing the newsletter channel today?

Tyler: Yeah, it's pretty simple. It's funny, you'll find that a lot of what we do is very simple. It's like what's the... At the risk of sounding lazy, it's like, "What's the easiest way to use the tool, and let's just do that." Because like most media outlets these days, especially digital media that don't have the legacy of print, ad revenue to support them, we're running super bare bones and it's still be on the belief with the team that we have because they work their asses off to keep us going, I think we just found the right people that are super passionate about it. And so the point of all that is, we don't spend money to promote stuff, we're not boosting anything unless the brand wants us to do something for them.

So all of our growth is 100% organic, and same with our newsletter, we're up around 17,000 subscribers, which again, to me, I feel like we could be bigger. We probably could if we used every little gaming tactic there is and funnels and re-clicks out of retargeting, stuff like that. But the simple fact that is, look, we produce really good content, and so the way we use our newsletter is we recap the best or most highly clicked on stories

each week and put maybe 10 to 12 of those in the newsletter. We have two ad placements which are sold at the same person.

So let's say brand X wants to sponsor that week's newsletter, they get a middle of the email placement or a bottom placement, and then we just send it out to our list and like it just, the list just grows every week. We get a few more subscribers, few more subscribers, and so we can just watch it grow. And again, like we don't use the little popups like, "Hey, before you leave..." Like, "Hey, you just got here two seconds ago, sign up for our email list, something." Because it drives me crazy. And that's the other thing we do is like if something bothers me, then I know it bothers a lot of other people too, and we're not going to do that to our readers because the last thing we ever want to do is piss off our readers and have them go somewhere else.

Kristin: No, you want it to be like a trusted friend who shows up with new content, like magazines used to be.

Tyler: Yeah. Well, and the thing is too, I don't read every newsletter I get, but I do usually skim, I'd say, most of them. And that's what our newsletter is for, it's for the people who can't get to the site every single day, but maybe something catches their eye or they can at least get a top level, "Okay, here's the really important and cool things that are new." Even if they don't click through, obviously, we want them to click through, but not everybody does, but it's just a nice way for somebody to get a once a week recap. And then the other thing we do occasionally, we don't do a lot of these because we don't want to flood people, so we intentionally limit how many promotional emails we send, but you can do a sponsored email promotion to our list that we send out. We don't sell our list to anyone.

Tyler: And we just did one last week for Gravel Epic, which is a series of European gravel races. And they said the second it went one out, like within minutes, they just got a huge spike in traffic to their website. So yeah, email does still work.

Kristin: It absolutely does. It won't die, it's pretty interesting. As much as people love to like put that in the headlines and make the clickbait, it definitely is still there. Let's talk a little bit about international. What portion of your audience is international?

Tyler: Roughly 45%, give or take.

Kristin: And has that been growing like more so in the last couple of years or is it steady growth?

Tyler: Last couple of years it's been pretty steady. When we started it was primarily US, and then it would just creep up and creep up, but I think it feels like it's hit that spaces point, where for the past few years, it fluctuates in those mid-50s, mid 50% is North American, so that does include Canada.

Kristin: Okay, cool. And then the other thing I was going to ask you about and I brought it up a little earlier, is Sea Otter. It sounds like you have a lot of experience at that event. And again, because this is a more of a business to business, we definitely count some consumers, but they're usually interested in the business of the outdoor active lifestyle

markets, including cycling obviously, but Sea Otter to me, I've just been really interested in Sea Otter lately because Interbike has not come back as much as they like put out that announcement, like it's taking a furlough. It's actually not coming back from what we can see, and I feel like a large part of that community within the cycling world, so I feel like there's a cycling community that's much larger than the industry, but let's talk about the industry for right now.

The businesses are looking to Sea Otter obviously as their seasoned kickoff and it truly is, the biggest global cycling event out there, that's a consumer event, product launches are happening there, it's a big moment in the calendar, but it's become incredibly noisy. I'd love to just have you give a little bit of insight for the benefit of the listeners who are trying to weigh like, "Well, where do I insert my brand or create these brand experiences with consumers?" When Interbike was the conduit for enabling your wholesale partners, your IBDs to like showcase your brand, Sea Otter is more a direct to consumer launch platform it seems, but it's so noisy. So I just thought I'd get your take on the evolution of Sea Otter because it's an interesting one. It's enormous, it's trade and it has a bunch of races, it sort of has everything there.

Tyler: Yeah. You're right, it's all encompassing. For me personally, I don't pay any attention to the racing because I don't have time when we're there. We're just literally scrambling and running until the last possible second, when people are boxing things up and leaving, we're still, "Hey, well, I miss that. Can you pull that out? Let me get a picture real quick." But also we don't cover racing and athlete profiles really on the site. So our focus is 100% tech, which is a big differentiator for us in that if you just really want to focus on the bike tech, that's Bikerumor.

I can't really speak to the consumer experience at Sea Otter, but from a brand standpoint and a media standpoint, it's everybody knows it's very much a product launch platform to be there. If you've got anything come up that you're probably going to try and show it off because you know all of the cycling media is going to be there. That event draws foreign media over for it, and more and more as it's grown. Last year was just insane how they had to expand the footprint of it to accommodate all of the booths that they had sold. And I'm sure this issue is was going to be even bigger because now like you said, everybody knows Interbike not coming back. It's funny, not like, ha, ha funny, just like funny to us in the weeks, especially the week before and even the Monday and Tuesday before, we get literally 50, it seems like, "Hey, our stuff is embargoed until the start of being Sea Otter."

And like, you would think the brands by now would realize that, "Okay, I'm going to be competing for that 9:00 AM Wednesday slot on every single news site for attention," when there's 50 other things launching on the same day. Spread it out or send it out a little bit earlier and get some pre-show hype so people come and see you. Because I think for the people actually coming to Sea Otter, they're not looking at the web anymore by the time the show starts. They're getting in their car, they're there, they're walking around so they're not going to see that announcement and get interested in coming to see your products.

So send it out in advance or wait for like a week after when all that huge spike in traffic has started to settle down, post it then because you'll probably get more exposure because we tell people that are trying to plan out some promotion with us, there's certain things that will work well on our site from a layout and graphical standpoint that will actually stay visible as we cycle through the news, but if you just send us some press release or you just want us to post a story at a certain time, it's going to get buried and moved off the front page so fast because we're posting so much from that show.

Tyler: So yeah, from a branding standpoint, from a dealing with the media standpoint, if you're going to send something out ahead of time, send it out maybe a little earlier than you think without a start of show in embargo day or if you're going to show us something at the show, just make sure that you have all of the information, easy to digest, readily available, like USB sticks or honestly like okay, they're kind of a pain in the butt, but we also don't want a big catalog. Like if you hand me a one sheet of paper with the information I need to know, great. That's perfect. I can talk to you a little bit about it and make sure I understand everything, take the pictures I need to take and move on because we have, what do they have, 800 booths? And usually there's two or three people.

We're slammed and we're going to hang out, we're going to come back at five and drink beers with you and hang out, but when the show hours are cranking and we've got to cover everything, we need to stay focused and stuff. And so the other thing is too, there's some brands that have presentations which are great. If you've got a lot to talk about and you want to run through it all in a quick presentation, like quick, great. But if you're going to try and hold like an hour long press conference, come and meet the athletes, hang out, we're going to have some maybe some snacks and stuff for like one little new component, we love you, but I can't, none of us can take an hour to come learn and what I could literally get in and out in like three minutes and get everything I need to go tell the story.

Kristin: These are great tips.

Tyler: Yeah, respect our time and just understand that we're absolutely pinned, trying to see everyone because we're not just there to see you, we're trying to literally see everyone. And that's not true of every media outlet, some are focused on say, just road or just like gravity starts. So we're not 100% unique, but we're a little more unique in that we really and truly are trying to see every single booth there to see if there's something new and interesting.

Kristin: Right. And tell me this, and I'm not sure even how it factors into your editorial approach with the site, not so much with the podcast, but have you seen the role of like affiliate links play in your content at all? Because as the owner of an agency, I can tell you that's definitely something that is affecting editorial quality in terms of click-throughs and affiliate and all that kind of stuff. And it's okay, I actually don't have judgment around it, it just is part of the evolution. And I was curious to know, if you're cycling through 800 different booths looking for everything that's new and everybody feels like they have to have something new, some of it may not be available, I get that, but is that part of your

strategy in terms of monetization, is it affiliate?

Tyler: It should be if we had the time to do it. We have actually a shared Google spreadsheet where we have the affiliate deals that we work with, which if somebody think about setting one up, I highly recommend a Botlink and then second to that, Commission Junction. Those are really the only two we ever look at. And we just keep a spreadsheet like, "Okay, brand A, here's the shortened link for their stuff. So if you're going to post something about them and you think about it, add this to the bottom." but we don't go out of our way to, if we're talking about every product, try and go find that product on say, Jenson USA, which we have a pretty good relationship with them, but it just adds time and we're usually so slammed trying to do it, especially not at the trade shows, but if we were back at the office and it's a slow time of year, we have the time to go add that.

or Yeah, occasionally we will. We'll do that some for like our end of year editor roundups when we used to do gift guides we would. I've found that there is incremental revenue to be made, but you have to work really hard at it. It's going to be a concerted effort to be a real revenue driver, but if you're not going to go full on with it, there's other things that we could spend our time on that produce far better results.

Kristin: Right. And I also feel like the last question I have on Outerbike is, it's trained us all to expect expo launches, and there's so many events out there and festivals and demos. Are you guys looking at other event properties or festivals and demos as places to report from now when they're in conjunction with a race or a festival?

Tyler: Well, you said that Outerbike, I think you meant Sea Otter, but it's funny, I know you guys are working with Outerbike now. Actually yeah, Outerbike is on our list of events to start. I just talked to Zach this morning and said, "Hey, just add those events to our shared calendar just so that we're aware of them and probably start to look at it." Because you had sent me a little bit information on it ahead of time and I believe you're right in that a lot of brands are going to start looking to those events to launch products. For us, it's also an important opportunity to, or an easy opportunity to go and test drive a lot of bikes. We can only get so much in here at our individual offices. Like we're all remote workforce at Bikerumor.

Everybody's basically operating out of their home or a very small office, like what I have here. And so I can't have 30 different bikes in here at a time, but I could go to Outerbike and ride basically until my legs can't take it anymore, and probably get realistically maybe 10 to 15 like one solid ride in on thing, just enough to get a first impression and do like a simple review on. So those events will definitely take a point of see because some people will probably realize that like, "Yeah, I'm going to get lost in the noise at Sea Otter, but hey, this thing two months later, maybe it'll work better into my product launch cycle. Maybe if I had shown this at Sea Otter, people would forget about it by the time it comes out. Oh, but Outerbike's only like a few weeks from it." And that is probably going to start to make more sense.

Kristin: It's been really fun to test where the market is on that. So we have yet to see how it's

going to fold into in real life, but I will also tell you, working with SBT GRVL and now all the lifetime events, that expo area is a really interesting place to look as is the demo fleet line item within the bike brands and how those expo and demo fleet mindsets haven't changed in a long time yet, we have the consumer, I think is using them differently. So it's just going to be interesting to see how that all evolves and you will probably be the front lines on that as somebody who embeds at multiple locations and talks to all these brands. So I'm super excited to hear what your take is going to be.

And I wanted to just ask quickly before we wrap up, tell us about this conference. Is that the first conference that you've ever put on? Where did this come from? It sounds super cool.

Tyler: Yeah. Well, I've put on other events. I used to put on a 24 Hour Mountain Bike Race, so I'm not new to hosting an event and hosting people. This is the first like conference-conferencel've done. So it's called Peak Content Summit, it's an Asheville on March 12th and 13th, 2020, and more information if you want to add to your show notes is [peakcontentsummit.com](http://peakcontentsummit.com), pretty simple.

And basically what it is, it was this obvious need in the industry. And I say this because like over the past couple of years with Bikerumor, what we've done is really started offering more content-based packages, and we were really late to the game and doing any like paid opportunity for our brands to pay us to produce a piece of content because we saw so many bad examples of it out there, a lot of advertorials, a lot of just very clear pay to play.

And I just drew a line in the sand, I said, "We're not going to do that." But a lot of people also don't want banner ads anymore and stuff. So we had to figure out some revenue model, and that's the kind of challenge I like. Like, "Okay, if you had to do this, how would you do it? How can you do it right? And so we found some ways and I'd love to talk to any brand that's interested in what the opportunities are because there's a lot of brands that have been really, really happy with the results. But I won't sell, I won't give you the sales pitch here, but the point of the conference was that the more we started selling these packages to brands and the more we tried to explain them, we found out that everybody's super interested in content, "Oh yeah, we want to do some content stuff. We want to content marketing. This sounds great."

"What is it? How do I use it? Or, "Explain that to me." And so we would show, "Here's this package we have." And then we'd have to explain it, and explain not just like what they need to do to make it work, but like, "Okay, here's what you can expect, here's the benefits of it. Here's why you should do it, here's why this is better than this. And I finally realized we're teaching a lot of people about this. I think there's an obvious need for an education on what content marketing is and all the different permutations of it. And so I figured, "Well, if somebody is going to teach them, it might as well be me." So I launched the conference and we've got some really, really smart people coming to talk on everything.

Like Stephen from Gear Junkie's, is going to do a session on how they create entire

branded content campaigns, and they've won awards like national awards for some of their stuff that they've done with REI, which is crazy. Who would've thought paid advertorial stuff could ever win an actual film award? But the thing is, it's all in how it's executed. So if you do it right, and going back to what I said earlier, if the reader finds value in it, the brand finds value in it and the media outlet can charge for it, then everybody wins. And that's the important thing. If any one of those parties doesn't get anything out of, it's going to fall apart. And so, yeah.

Tyler: So that's the conference, come and learn everything you need to know about content marketing from video strategy to how to read analytics using user generated content, how to create a story, how to work with a media, that's going to be an important line for the brands is, between Stephen and I and a few other little sessions we're doing like panels and stuff, the brands that are trying to figure out why they're having a tough time, maybe getting the media to share the stories that they produce, and there's a lot of brands out there that have way bigger budgets than we ever will that produce amazing videos and amazing stories with their athletes, they're paying an insane amount of money for.

And we get a link to the video and we're like, "Well, great, but that's, we're not going to share that. It's a beautiful video, well, done, but that's not what we're going to put on our site for our audience because that's not the kind of story we tell. But hey, we can work together and we can tell some stories that do speak to our audience because we know our audience, you know your product." Like, "Hey, let's work together on this." And I think that's, that seems to be this disconnect right now between some media trying to sell, "This is what we have. It's black and white," and the brand saying, "But this is what we produce." "Well, great. Okay, let's just stay over there then."

Kristin: That's super interesting, and I'm hoping I can actually make that work. So it's [www.peakcontentsummit.com](http://www.peakcontentsummit.com) and it's definitely focused on cycling specifically or outdoor active lifestyle, or is it just any specialty brand?

Tyler: I mean, honestly, any brand, any agency, anybody could benefit from this. The original focus was going to be just cycling because that's who I know, but the more I started adding speakers and stuff and rounding out the curriculum, yeah, totally anybody. But there is definitely leaning in the curriculum and the types of presentations and the people that are going to be there on a whole outdoor active lifestyle and cycling. So it's cool because the people that we all hang out with will come and they're going to get it right. Like the stories and examples being used, they're going to be like, "I can see myself doing that."

Kristin: That's good. And they do need, I don't know that it's permission, but I think they need a little bit of inspiration, almost like if they can see it, they can be it, right?

Tyler: Yeah. And I'd say, that's half of it because sorry, not to drag on, but for me, when I go to learn something, when I go to conferences or whatever, I want to be inspired for sure, everybody does, but the other side of it is, I want to walk away with information I can

use. So I call it half inspirational and half tactical. Like you're going to get there, you're going to have a lot of great ideas, but then you're going to go home and you're going to know what to do with those ideas. And I think that's going to be what really separates this conference from some others is that, you're going to walk away with the game plan.

Kristin: Right. Well, cool. Is there anything I neglected to ask that my awesome audience might need to know from you, Tyler?

Tyler: Well, it's up to you if you want to answer. I was actually curious, you mentioned something about like how consumers are coming into these shows like Outerbike and Sea Otter with maybe a different goal or a different perspective. And I'm curious what you meant from that, how do you see the consumers viewpoints changing when they come to, let's say, Outerbike?

Kristin: Well, I'm so glad you asked because I nerd out on this and researched so much and it's one of the reasons I was so excited that Verde won the trust of Outerbike and LifeTime to work on their events. And obviously SBT GRVL gave us our start, so Mark Sakowitz and the gang. I definitely feel like the brands that are going to be most successful, first of all, today brands are the community, as I said, for so many consumers out there in the passion markets or the specialty markets. The way that they spend their favorite hours is on our product doing the things that we all love to do. That's why instead of going to find another J-O-B, you decided to start something you love so you can stay really close to your passion and connect to everybody in your community around that and serve them.

Well, the consumer wants to be part of that community, they're online-experiencing it, they probably very much still have a relationship with their shop, whether it's an outdoor store or whatever it is, they have a place they can go in-person to look at product and talk to people. But those places are not offering what they're trained to look for anymore in one way and that is selection. They're online looking at everything, they're reading reviews, and the most successful brand communities and brand experiences out there for a consumer will be melding the online and the offline.

They actually have no interest in channels whatsoever, the consumer or shopper is the channel. So if they're researching something online and they want to get a group of friends together to go ride bikes at an Outerbike event or maybe they're all trying to figure out how to get into Leadville together, or whatever it is, and they find product there or they're researching what they're going to use while they're there. This is all part of the experiments that is something in their mind that participating in these events, being in-person with the community and actually purchasing the product makes them believe something in their head about their identity, it's really powerful.

And that's I think where we're getting today because consumers don't believe in institutions like government or maybe organized religion or the places that our parents and grandparents self-identified and joined communities. Today it's about consumption and brands and shopping and community with our passion areas. So I feel like it's a natural next step. And I've even seen a few, I hate to get super nerdy here, but I've even seen a couple articles that I've been researching just in 2020 about embedded retail,

which is nothing new at all because if you look at a climbing gym or a gym for that matter, there's always a little retail area, but we're going to see a lot more of that from Amazon, from Target. Starbucks just opened one right next to Penn station in New York that basically is a pickup Starbucks. So you order it on your phone, you go in and pick it up, you have the barista like human experience, but you're in and out of there like that and you have a cool friction free experience like the way that you're used to shopping and using your phone to get your coffee. So I feel like our consumer, whether they're running our speed when they're in our zone in cycling or outdoor, etc, or any specialty market, but they're getting trained on the broader macro level with Amazon and different things that they're seeing out in the field in their day to day lives.

Kristin: Buy Online Pick Up In Store is a great example of that. If I'm going to be out, I'd rather go pick up something and get the hell out of there not have to deal with parking or whatever it is. Anything we could do to save them time is part of the experience today. So that's why I feel like joining that community and actually getting to interface with people at Outerbike specifically right now, you get to be treated like a VIP and an insider in the industry. So you pay to be there, it's a highly qualified person being there, and they've researched a ton of stuff online and now they're there to try it with the incredible authentic backdrop, best trail riding in that region, whatever.

So it just seems to make total sense to me. And plus, as I said, the industry is being trained every year with Sea Otter more and more to launch at consumer events. So it really just seems like it's a matter of time to me because consumers and the industry are going to come together.

Tyler: You said the word experience a couple of times. I think the experience is the next evolution of that. People have identified with the brands for sure, but it's the brands that speak to them and give them the experience they want because ultimately, that's what we remember, right? I could tell you every bike I've owned, but it was the feeling I had on those bikes that made them special and stuff. And so for the brands that are trying to, if they just show up and it's some dude's like, "Okay, what's your seat height" and they come back and ask much questions and a person doesn't know, you need to have that full experience at those demo things to be able to really create the experience, right?

Because that's what they're going to remember. If they meet them at the bike and have a great time, but if the interaction with the person at the booth sucks, they're not going to probably go with that brand.

Kristin: Oh, you're so right. And I really hope that there are many brands taking notes across. It doesn't matter what market you're in, but that touch point with the brand, you never have a second chance to make that first impression.

Tyler: Yup. Awesome.

Kristin: Yeah. Well, we'll see how all of this unfolds for sure. But it's good to know you'll be reporting from the field here in a couple of weeks at Sea Otter.

Tyler: Yeah, I will be there.

Kristin: Will you be at the bicycle leadership conference too or just Sea Otter?

Tyler: No, just Sea Otter.

Kristin: Okay. Well, I'll be reporting from the BLC as well. I have to give a panel there and I'm working with people for bikes on that, so I'll add that and then we'll watch your coverage for the on-the-ground at Sea Otter, and I'll see you there as well.

Tyler: See you there. Thanks.

Kristin: All right. Thanks so much.