



channel mastery

153: Eric Porter

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- Kristin: Welcome back everybody. To another episode of the channel mastery podcast, Eric Porter is here today. We're so happy to have you with us, Eric. We've worked together for so long at Diamondback through the years, and it's just awesome to have you here today on the show as we enter into December of 2020. Welcome.
- Eric: Yeah, thanks for having me. It's good to see you again.
- Kristin: It's great to see you too. And boy, what a year, we're going to talk about all kinds of interesting stuff today, but before we get to that, let's have the audience hear about Eric Porter. Tell us about yourself.
- Eric: So I've been a professional mountain biker for, I guess, 18 years now and that's, I've changed quite a bit through my career. What I do. I tried to make it as a racer, which didn't work out racing downhill. And then did eight years on the world slopestyle tour. After that, I transitioned to all filming trips and that's when I started being able to do things on all of my bikes. So not just on a, you know, doing crazy tricks on a jump bike, but I was able to do stuff on a gravel bike and bike packing and just big adventures and show everybody what I do through. You know, that I'm not just this into one thing. And so that's been the last, I guess, 10 years of my career and it's been awesome. So that's, that's what I do. That's
- Kristin: Awesome. And you have two kids that came along during that last 10 years, and I'm sure that has changed you as well. And I know that you enjoy all kinds of outdoor sports, not just cycling. So your family is pretty outdoorsy, right?
- Eric: Yeah. So yeah, my wife, Megan is here and then we have two kids, Milo and Owen. We have two boys they're 8 and 11 now. And we just, they kind of get into everything. So we're skiing and snowboarding all winter and mountain biking and fly fishing and trail running and stuff all summer and camping. So I'm just making the most of you know, we live in the Park City, Utah area and try to do all the, the best things we can here.
- Kristin: That's awesome. Well, I'm so excited to have you to share with the audience here today, Eric, because you have been, you've lived through a lot as a pro athlete on the cycling side and here we are in December of, you know, the year work, the pandemic hit. Okay.

And I was curious if you could share, we're going to talk about a number of different topics, but let's first start out with kind of at, at this time last year. So December of 2019, tell us where you thought you were going to be right now and then what you had to pivot on. And I know this is a big, big question, so maybe we can take it in kind of bite-sized pieces. We'll talk about kind of your athlete role and then what you had to do to really pivot with the type of content that people were looking for and the channel you were presenting on.

Eric: Yeah. So in December of every year, I'm usually getting all my contracts and everything set up for the next year and planning the whole next year. So this time last year I was pitching trips all around the world. We had a trip to Africa to follow a zebra, a migration on bikes, and that was gonna be a really cool trip and just a bunch of really cool aspirational trips around the world, as well as cool stuff, close to home. And I've been having fun, doing a project or two with the family as well every year. And so all of that basically went out the window as the year developed all the, and I was planning on I'm usually at five or six events through the year to some mountain bike festivals and see outer and crank works and all that stuff went out the door and we're all stuck at home as of March.

Kristin: So basically pivoting into the second part of the question. What I ended up doing was you know, my job as an athlete is to connect with consumers and there's a number of ways to do that. Traditionally, it's been through magazines and then through web videos, as well as, you know, maybe full length DVDs, but that's kind of over now as well. And so I'd been watching the YouTube space for awhile and dabbled with it last year, made a number of videos, but didn't go all in. And this spring, when we were locked down, I basically went in all in on my YouTube channel. And so I started producing videos from the backyard stuff from trips that I had done, you know, earlier in the year or the year prior, as well as, you know, trail building things around here and showing advocacy basically just making YouTube videos about what I cared about. And that's basically ate up the rest of my year because YouTube is the most time consuming and hardest work. I've really done. So it's, that's been the rest of the year up until now.

Kristin: Let's talk about that. And we're going to get into some other aspects of the, you know, what does it look like to be a pro cyclist today? Okay. Because we haven't even gotten to touch the bike. Boom. And your thoughts on that, but let's, since we're on the subject of YouTube and this is channel mastery, I think it's a really good time for us to dive into that because I know firsthand, it is super hard to build a following on YouTube, but it's so important because it's search engine, it's owned by Google and there's so much value there for your brands that sponsor you in terms of like your visibility, their recognition, their, you know, back linking strategy, SEO, et cetera. So let's talk about like how you, how did you tackle that YouTube channel where you're just kind of looking at it like, okay, it's time

Eric: I thought about it way too much for a few years, instead of just diving in, like I probably should have you know, three years ago when, well, so Seth from Seth's bike hacks, which is now called burn peak he's my teammate on Diamondback. And when he was brought onto the team, it really got me thinking because everyone on the team up to that point had ended up on the team through traditional channels of competition and

filming bike, video parts, and kind of being the best in the sport. And so I had to, I started, I just wanted to figure out what was going on in who he is and what value who is bringing. And I realized really quickly that him coming in as kind of like an everyday rider with this audience that he'd built through YouTube and the connection that everybody has with him is that they can relate to him.

Eric: Whereas they can't relate to someone doing a double back flip on a bike, but they can relate to someone who's learning the same stuff. They are learning how to bunny hop, better learning how to corner, better learning, trying to figure out how to work on their bike instead of taking it to the shop. And that's what Seth did a really amazing job with. And now he's, you know, in Diamondback signed him, he had like 30,000 subscribers he's well over 2 million now. And so they made a great call. They're bringing him on board. And so what that got me thinking was how can I connect to my audience and come across in a way that really is me and that isn't trying to jump on a trend and trying to make it on YouTube, but really just putting across my thoughts. And so that was, you know, I had to figure out how I wanted to come in the videos and how I could sound like me and talk to the camera.

And there's a lot of YouTube channels out there that I don't feel like do a good job with that. You know, Seth does a really good job of he's the same person on camera as he is off camera. And that was really important to me because I see a lot of people on YouTube that, you know, they're really hyped up in there, all this stuff. And then off camera, they're a different person. And I dunno, I, I can see that. And I think the consumer can see that too. So I really wanted to come across in a as me. And so I'll send it, I'll make a video and I'll send it to my closest friends and be like, all right, tear this thing apart. Tell me, what is this me? Do you feel like you're hanging out with me and while we're building this jumper or whatever, and yeah, I just want to make sure that it's, that it is me and it's not some character that I'm creating to have people like me on YouTube or whatever, because that's the only way it's actually going to be sustainable and actually grow is if they actually get to know you as the person.

Kristin: And so you should, everybody I'll put the link to it in the show notes to your channel, but it's Porter MTB, congratulations on hitting a hundred thousand subscribers. That is a huge lift.

Eric: Oh, thank you. Yeah, that was you know, that was my goal for the end of this year, which I knew was a really lofty goal. Yeah. I'm really impressed. Yeah. And it's, you know, it's been a lot of sleepless nights staying up editing all night and you know, the stuff I've I've learned from that is put the time in and make a quality video. I didn't, you know, vlogs work great for some people where they're putting it out every day and just talking to the camera, I'm trying to put out high quality videos that stand the test of time too. So when you watch a video from a year ago, it's just as relevant as it is now. And so it's, you know, again, it's been hard, but it's showing in the growth. You know, I think it's exponential too, because the more you get, the more shares you get and it just keeps on kind of growing upwards and outwards.

Kristin: It does. And I mean, that is a phenomenal amount of growth. And congratulations. I know that's been a lot of work, but I love some of the titles. You have kids bikes and chainsaws. I mean, how could you not click on that? And then you have rock jump, but you have a really big piece of heavy machinery in there. Did you rent that? Is that kinda what goes in or did you actually invest in that little guy?

Eric: No. So that was a really cool project. So that was at Woodward at Park City, it's like the global action sports training center. And so I used to, there used to be only one of them in Pennsylvania. Now there's a few of them around the world and yeah, dream coming true with it going into park city. So they were building a new trail and I got to be a part of that project and document a section of that trail getting built with a couple of my heroes to Nate Wessel, who's a legend and Jeremy Jones from snowboarding. You know, so that was just, you know, a dream come true to be able to even make that video. And I got to tell you that was a lot of pressure actually, too, because all of a sudden I'm filming my heroes, that I grew up watching and videos and I'm on the hook to, you know, I don't want to let them down with with the video.

But yeah, so that was a Woodward had all the machines and I mean, we had there's there's one time lapse in there where I think there's three or either three or four machines working at the same time on the stuff. And so that was, you know, a whole new level of stress as well for I'm an app, I'm a writer I'm not a filmmaker per se. I mean, I technically am now, but I really had to learn how to do that. And, you know, so while helping build that and come up with what we were going to do, I was also setting up the cameras in those time lapses and the talking of telling the story on site while we were doing it. So

Kristin: That's awesome. So tell me about the whole you've seen the bike, boom, you went through obviously like launching this channel. You probably got some interesting comments from new fans and followers that are turned on to the Diamondback brand through COVID because as we were talking, as we were rehearsing, like it is such an approachable brand. People love it. And you're actually a huge part of that. Like you really humanize it and you're just so approachable and it feels like you can be, you know, exactly where you are as a cyclist and join up with that brand, which is one of the reasons that I love it, love the brand, but their product is amazing. Right. It's a really special brand that way. So let's talk about number one, like you've been in the bike community forever, right. And now what do you think about this boom that's happening? I mean, I, I'm just flabbergasted by what we're seeing.

Eric: Yeah, it's awesome. We've seen more people on bikes than ever before and all the bike companies are selling out bike shops are selling out. So we're getting a lot of new people in the sport, which is amazing. And, you know, it could be a boom. I'm sure it'll be some sort of up and down there. It can't sustain that much growth for a number of years, you know, but I do feel like a large majority of the people that are getting bikes and getting into mountain biking. Now they're not going to leave. It's one of those things that once you discover it, I think you're in it's really fun. And the more you do it, the more fun it

gets and you, you don't have to have a team. You don't have to have you know, you can just go out and ride and have a good time.

So I'm hoping that you know, a lot of people stick around for longer. And so think part of that with my channel is that I can speak directly to a lot of those new consumers and on some of the ethics of mountain biking and tell them that trail advocacy matters because they're new. So you only know you really only know it's like a kid telling them that they should be thankful for what they have cause, but at the same time that's all they know. So that's their reality. And so these people that are new to mountain biking, it's an awesome time to start mountain biking, there's trails everywhere, pump tracks and bike parks. And there's more trails than there's ever been.

And when I started riding there weren't and so we've grown up to this point. And so it's important to pass that on generationally to the new riders that, Hey, here's how you act on our trail, here's how you treat other trail users. And here's how you can help create more trails and sustain the ones we have. And then I think Diamondback plays into that really well, too, as a sponsor because like you said, they have the full line of bikes, so you can get your, a push bike, your first bike, whatever, like a kid's bike, and you can also get a high end mountain bike. And even the high end mountain bikes, it's not like so a few years ago at Diamondback when we were having product meetings, I, I actually love playing a role on the product side as well. To tell, you know, we have meetings every year about where the brand should go, as far as what bikes are making. And, you know, years ago we started seeing the first \$10,000 or \$12,000 bikes. And you can either play that game and fight the price thing and try and have the most expensive bike out there.

Or you can make a really good bike that's affordable. And that's the route that we went. So, you know, our most expensive bikes, our highest end bikes are in the \$5,000 range. And so that's a lot of money for someone getting into it. But if you're in the bike world, \$5,000 for is pretty, you know, affordable for a top level bike. So, you know that was important too. And I really liked that, you know, there's the top tier bikes that are really fun and then the entry-level bike in the same line. So, or at least one is going to ride really similar. It's the same frame as the five basically. It's got more affordable parts on it, but the product managers go about designing that and specing that bike with the theory that this is all the money you have, how can we put together this bike for this price point? That's not going to need to be updated after you buy it. So basically making it more attainable for, you know, whatever budget you're coming in at.

Kristin: Yeah. And there's a lot of people who might be a little bit older who still remember having a Diamondback when they were little.

Eric: Yeah. And that's, I mean, my first brand new top level mountain bike was a Diamondback team issue in 1997.

Kristin: We do. I mean, I'm, mine was not a team issue of course, but yeah, my first real mountain bike was also a Diamondback when I was living in Newbury park back when the brand was there.

Eric: Oh, that's awesome. Yeah, it was you know, when I was 15, I got my first job at a bike shop and they were a Diamondback dealer, so I was selling Diamondbacks. And then you know, when I was racing cross country, I could L Evans was racing the Olympics and was on that bike. And so that's, that's the bike that I got and that's amazing. Yeah. So it was really cool to reconnect with them. And, you know, in up upon that team, which is still mind blowing to me,

Kristin: It is, and my older brothers and my little brother, I was the only girl. So I, I wasn't able to get a BMX bike for some reason. And of course, that's the first thing I did for my daughter when she got old enough was buy her one. But my brothers all had Diamondback BMX bikes. When we were really really little, they were like, literally that in red line, like the best brand you could get in the Southern California BMX scene. And like, I just always loved the brand. And then as soon as I could buy a bike, I chose a Diamondback bike, cause I never got to have one when I was little.

Eric: Yep. That's awesome. No, I I've found that you know, it's been 10 years that I've been on Diamondback and every trip I go on, almost every time I hear a story from somebody that I meet in a new town or wherever on the trail about their first time and back, everybody's got a story about it. So yeah, a lot of people have a really personal longtime connection to this brand.

Kristin: Yeah. And it makes sense to come back around to that when, you know, we have what happened this year, a pandemic bizarre, but true. So let's talk a little bit about influencer marketing as we're going into 2021. So you're obviously now you're armed with this amazing YouTube channel that has really fast growth. And, you know, I don't, we don't have to get into the details of what you're pitching because we, I know like, just like my business, we don't know what kind of travel we can plan. We don't know the event scene. I mean, we have lots of event companies and we're just sort of like, okay, let's see what happens with this. Right. what's your sense on like the role of you as an influencer for Diamondback in your other brands going into 2021? Because it feels like that humanization and the, the the fact that we've become so accustomed to zoom conference calls and seeing video and seeing like the real deal around people, not scripted, not highly produced, like, what's your sense inside that saying, this is the direction I should go as an athlete in 2021.

Eric: Yeah, I think like I said, we don't, I have no idea where I'll be able to go or what I'll be able to do, but I do know that my job is to connect with consumers that are potentially looking to buy stuff from the brands when you, you know, really brew it down to why I'm being paid you know, marketing to consumers, telling people that are thinking about buying bikes, what Diamondback has and why they should consider that as an option. And so, and I also try with my content on the channel. I try not to I don't know, over commercialize it because I think, I think that pushes people away. And I would rather spend my time creating a connection with the people that are fans of what I'm doing as well as fans of the brand. And then they will see what I'm writing and get a better feel for it that way.

or

So, you know, I might do a bike check video, but I'm also gonna go riding with my kids,

I might do a video about we're going to ride a bike park or go to ride this new trail. But before we do that, let's fix Owen's bike, my eight year old, and I'll teach them how to adjust his derailleur and that sort of thing. So I try to be entertaining and educational with my videos as well as kind of, like I said earlier, lead people in the right direction, as far as telling them, you know, giving them an idea of how you should act on a trail, how you should treat other users and kind of passing down that information. So they're still getting, they're still finding out about the products. I'm still talking about the new bikes when they come out and doing a bike check and what this bikes for, and, you know, what's in, what do you bring on a big ride, stuff like that.

But I try to do it in a really kind of fun entertaining way and not just do it as a, I basically put more into it than just a straight up I'm doing this video because I'm paid to in sponsored, but you've never done anything like that. Yeah. I try. Yeah. It's, I would have a hard time doing something like that. So you know, with and I'm always afraid of even, so with the FCC guidelines, now you have to disclose more blatantly, you know, who you're getting support from and that sort of thing, which I think is really good also. But I also think you know, I just try to make it clear that I only work with brands that I believe in. And here's why, so I'm not saying buy a diamond back because they pay me to tell you that I'm telling you my connection to the brand and why I ride for Diamondback. So I think there's a clear distinction there to where it's not just I'm, you know, selling product because I'm paid to, but it's here's why I pick this bike. Here's why, I mean, I can even say I helped design, not design, but you know what I mean? I helped, I was a part of this product from a drawing on a table to this bike that we're selling now and I helped test it and everything else. And here's why I like it and means more.

Kristin: So Eric, I wanted to ask one thing before we wrap up here today, and that is, you've always had a social impact or a cause component to your brand as a pro athlete and an influencer. How have you seen that positively impact your brands going into COVID and how has it changed through COVID?

Eric: Yeah, so I've always tried to I think the biggest thing I've always tried to do is again pass on the information of how to be a good mountain biker not as a talented rider, but a good steward of the sport, pass that on to consumers, new consumers, riders on the trail, that sort of thing. And the last three, the last two years, I've been president of Wasatch trails foundation, which is my local trail advocacy group. And so that's where I really put a lot of time in the majority of it kind of out of the public spotlight and off camera, but doing trail work for my local community here. So kind of rallying the community around new grants, new trails, things like that. And we've worked really hard this year, since we can't have in-person events and fundraisers like normal we've been working hard towards kind of the future of the group and making it sustainable moving forward.

So working towards hiring an executive director and the fundraising needed for that to really build the foundation for that to be sustainable in the future. So you know, I talk about it a little bit in my videos and kind of try to pass on things that people can do in

their own local communities to help out with their local trails. Cause with, you know, this many new users, we have this many new people that one don't know how to interact with other trail users. And also there's just more pressure on the trails. So the popular trails are more popular. Those of us that, you know, know about the further trails, we're going more remote, but so is everybody else. So we really do need to, as a mountain bike community, continue to build more trails, make more directional trails. So there's not, you know, head-on conflict, things like that. You know, so that's where I've been trying to that's how I've been trying to have an impact.

Kristin: I have a feeling that the world needs more of that message from you next year. I mean, what I've seen this fall, like riding in Fruita and going, I tried to go to Moab, but literally like if I didn't have like a friend's driveway to camp in, I wouldn't have been able to find a place to camp. So I think that that part of your brand, I am imagining will be more and more important, especially knowing that you are serving your local community as a, you know, on a trails advocacy group. That's fantastic.

Eric: Yeah. It's it's one of those things where I definitely don't have time for it. But I make time for it because I know how important it is. And I, I know the skillset that I have that I can share with this and, you know, it's a short amount of time that, you know, over the grand scheme of things when you're actually on the board of something before you pass it on to the next guy. And so yeah, just making that time to have a lasting impact has been pretty awesome. And, you know, again, helping encourage people to say, you know, maybe you don't have time to do that, but you know, donate to your local trails or even stop for five minutes and kick some rocks off the trail. If that makes a difference. You know, everybody, everybody does a little bit, we can do a lot.

Kristin: Yeah, for sure. So the last question I have for you, and you've been so gracious with your time, thanks. Tell me how stoked your kids are that you've been home this year and they've been able to star in the making of this YouTube channel and all these great videos. I mean, you had, they, they must've been so stoked on you being their dad before, but now it must be like over the top with YouTube, right?

Eric: Yeah. They're having a good time for sure. You know, building Milo's jump line. That was something we had talked about for about a year that we should build a line that's his size. And up until this year, I've been on the road you know, 120 days a year. So that's, that's a lot. And so they love having me home every night and you know, a lot of those nights I'm staying up late going into the office and editing or whatever it is to make the video happen. So they've seen how hard I work as well, but yeah, they've been having so much fun and you know, they, everybody that has kids understands that YouTube is where kids go to consume content. So they're, you know, they're not watching kids, aren't watching TV anymore. They're watching what they want to watch on YouTube and yeah.

Kind of getting to drive that and do what they want to do will be a part of what I'm doing. And I actually try to keep them a little bit separated from how big of a deal it is. They're not on Instagram, even. They get asked all the time and I just, I want to make sure that they're able to be kids and this is my job, not their job. So I, you know, cause there's, there's a fine line. There there's some channels with, you know, young kids on

them where they're getting filmed every day. And so I've been really conscious of not overdoing it as well and letting them live their life. And Hey, do you want to be in the video this week? We could do this. And if they say no, then I do something else. But yeah, they're having a good time.

And you know, we actually got, we just got back from the month of October, we did a big road trip all the way out from Utah to North Carolina, we hit Bentonville, we hit Louisville and we hit, we stayed at Seth's house for a week. So they got to ride some of the best spots in the world and hang out with some, some of their heroes and meet some of the other YouTuber guys that they look up to and watch on the trip. So yeah, it's been, it's cool. Long answer, but yeah, they're loving it.

Kristin: That's awesome. Well, I really appreciate all that you do for cycling for diamond back and just, it's been great to watch the trajectory of your career. So I can't wait to see what you pull out of the hat for next year. And thank you so much for joining us here today.

Eric: Thanks for having me on.