



# channel mastery

160: Scott Brady, Overland International  
ChannelMastery.com

Kristin: Welcome back everybody to the Channel Mastery Podcast. Here we are in January of 2021, and we are still obviously in the throes of this pandemic, but boy, did we have a lot to learn and a bunch happened in outdoor recreation in 2020. And I'm so excited to have my guest today, Scott Brady, who is an adventure traveler, photographer, and publisher. He is the CEO of Overland International, the parent company of Overland Journal Magazine, one of my favorites and ExpeditionPortal.com, the world's largest and most visited vehicle dependent expedition community. And overlanding editorial resources. Welcome to the show. We have so much to talk through today.

Scott: Thank you so much, Kristin, for having me.

Kristin: Oh, it's absolutely. It's so awesome to have you here. So I would love it. If you could give a bit of your background and how you developed this career path, that you're on that. I mean, what a fantastic trajectory you've had, and I can't wait to see where it's going, but that's a little bit what we're going to get into today, but give us, give us your background here. How did you get into this?

Scott: Oh, well, thank you. I started off in the military and that's what opened my eyes to traveling the world. I remember I was stationed in Italy and I was walking the streets of Rome and I came to this recognition that this has to be my future. This has to be where I end up. I'm not destined for a cubicle, that this is where I want it to be. And it took me a long time to get there, including going through business school and working in manufacturing, and then ultimately working in higher education software development, which is what gave me the network effects understanding and the technical understanding of building my business. But it also gave me through an exit, the opportunity to fund it as well.

Kristin: Awesome. So you and I were talking before we actually hit record that you actually spearheaded this vision in the early 2000's. So we're, you know, coming up on 20 years or a little more, can you talk a little bit about like what it was like for you to maybe hit that first few trade show and with your concept in hand, this is always such a fun story, whether it's, you know, listening to how Jake Burton Carpenter founded Burton by

walking around with his swallowtail, like prototype at SIA or whatever, like tell us about how you sold this idea in first and what it was like for you.

Scott: It was a challenge in the beginning, and there's this idea that if you can develop a thousand true fans that start to believe in what you do, then that can be the foundation of future opportunities. So, because I was a business person, I didn't do it just for the passion, I wanted it to be a business. We had these milestones in mind. So we started off by building a community and that community grew quickly. And then we decided that based upon the size of the community, which is ExpeditionPortal.com, that we had enough people to start a magazine. And I remember when we first went to the outdoor retailer, show me and my chief business development officer, Brian McVickers, and we walked up to, you know, a Patagonia booth or whatever, and you'd show them a vehicle based magazine and they were, they were understandably cautious. They didn't seek help...

Kristin: I think you are saying that way too nicely. I think they probably were shocked or scandalous that you would show up with with this. Anyway, go ahead. I'm sorry to interrupt.

Scott: Well, you're right. And it was, and I think the thing that helped is that we never disagreed because it was unique and it was going to take some time. So, I think that industries that are well-formed, it's very difficult to create change. It takes time and it takes a lot of patience. So we were just very patient and now we can't walk through the aisles of outdoor retailer without somebody pulling us into a booth. So we feel very grateful that that transition has occurred over the last couple of decades. But, you know, for us to now reach millions of people a month, I would've never estimated that this could have happened. So...

Kristin: Okay. We have to talk about that a little bit, because we did touch on this in our rehearsal. So here we are in January 2021, tell us what your traffic was a year ago until it will tell us what it is today.

Scott: Yeah, it was in the high, like 1.8, 1.9, sometimes 2 million readers a month. And now we're consistently hitting 2.3, even 2.5 (million). I think we had a month at 2.6 million readers. And that, that not only feels very reinforcing, but it also shows the trajectory of the industry. So we're now benefiting from being first mover, which was a great advantage, luck in many cases, but we were first mover and then we already had a lot of momentum. So it's been very beneficial.

Kristin: You know, what else I love about this? You were a path burner, right? So you almost didn't know what you couldn't do or what you could do. And aren't you kind of feeling the same way again right now with COVID and this huge influx of new interest from new participants.

Scott: Yeah. Very true. Every day I wake up and I don't know how I deserved to be in this position and to have the, the team that I have in the organization that we have now. I feel very grateful but it was certainly a long road to get to this point, you know?

Kristin: Absolutely. And that's what we're here to talk about today because on the podcast here, Channel Mastery, we're turning four or five or whatever in 2021, I think it's four, four years in. And I think, if you count Frank Hugo Meyer, when he was directing RVIA, we've had six or seven episodes on, you know, Overland per se, vehicle supported adventure.

And just for anybody who might be joining us for the first time, first of all, welcome, we love that you're here, but we had a completely different container for outdoor recreation than we did for vehicle supported recreation up until the outdoor rec round table happened. And all of these industries came together to become larger as States were standing up these outdoor recreation offices. And as we have started to be counted as a segment of the economy. Now, if you put all of us together; Marine RV, outdoor bike, all of them equestrian, right? Everything together is nearly a trillion dollar industry. That's our you know, some say bigger than pharmaceuticals, et cetera. So here we are, right. And vehicle supported adventure. Your vision in the early two thousands has always been the great equalizer, right? Everybody may not be a mountain biker or a climber or a car camper or a backpacker, but we all use our vehicles to access our adventure. And ultimately I think that COVID has just like ushered in these - things went really slowly, they were starting to uptake for sure, but now the clutch has dropped.

Scott: It feels that way. And if you think about it, the number of families who would have maybe planned a Disneyland vacation, or they would have planned a trip to Paris, none of those things are happening. So they're buying a roof tent and they're putting it on their SUV and they're going into the backcountry.

Kristin: Exactly. And there isn't a limit necessarily unless you're looking for a campground. Right? And so let's, let's maybe start with that because overlanding, to me, has always represented not going to the campground.

Scott: I would agree. Traditionally we define overlanding as vehicle based adventure travel. If it's vehicle based travel alone, then it really includes the road trip. Right? Which could be staying in hotels or, and it doesn't mean that we don't stay in hotels. I would prefer to stay in a hotel somewhere in Guatemala. If I'm in North America, I would rather camp out because that's one of the great strengths of our nation is a lot of public land that gives you the ability to get remote and to have those experiences. So traditionally it would not be an established campground. It would be let's get remote, let's get to the trailhead of the 14er and camp out there.

Kristin: Right. And the other thing I was hoping that we could get into, which I think is a very, very important thing for my audience is, you know, through the course of talking with some of the like main over Overland and a couple of other, like very core Overland, like builder dealers, if you will and the way that they have tapped into community through the vehicle. So like to Toyota Tacoma or whatever, is that still how people are discovering their communities around travel and adventure with Overland?

Scott: That has shifted in the last few years where, and I think it's because of the expansion into the outdoor recreation space I think a mountain climber less identifies with a brand and more with being able to access that location, which I think is actually very positive. The less siloed we are and the more inclusive our communities are and the more we openly share information the better. And I would actually say that one of my greatest hopes with all of this was to have much broader inclusion of outdoor recreation is because they also take much better care of the planet. That was always one of our greatest concerns with overlanding was to make sure that it didn't go down the road of four wheel driving, which is nothing wrong with that. But I wanted it to be about travel and the outdoors. So this broad adoption of overlanding by the outdoor community means we have better stewardship. We have better care for the environment. We have people who better understand that and are more quickly to adopt it with their vehicle as well. So I see that as a big positive.

Kristin: I do too. Can we switch gears and talk a little bit about the Overland Expo? The reason I would like to go there is, you know, we started to go there as an agency, I believe three or four years ago now. I mean, 20, 21. So it'll be four years. If we're able to go back to it this year, we missed a year, but that to me was an incredibly interesting gathering and it really exemplifies everything that you're speaking about right now. So for those of you who don't know, basically, maybe Scott, you can give an overview, but it's a consumer-based show that just grew exponentially every year. So can you give a little bit of an overview on that and then talk about it maybe as a mirror for what you're talking about in terms of this network effect?

Scott: Yeah, absolutely. The event was actually started by my, at the time editor in chief, Jonathan Hanson and his wife who was my marketing director at the time, Roseanne Hanson. And they just did an amazing job of curating this event and because we had the audience, we provided the, kind of the, the incubation for their attendance. But as the event grew, we always knew we weren't an event company. So Jonathan and Roseanne moved off on their own with that, and they were very successful with it. And a few years ago they sold the event to Lodestone which is I would say one of the most professional organizations we've ever dealt with in the event space. Very, open-minded, extremely enthusiastic, very honorable to deal with which I believe just gives an event like that a lot of future, because now you're doing projects with people, you know, you'll be doing projects with in 10 years.

Kristin: Absolutely that is super gracious of you to say around the founders and the whole thing. So thank you so much for that. I have a feeling as it comes back, hopefully this year hope, hope, hope that happens. The format was completely based on the north star of the end consumer. It was genius in that way. And, and the outdoor industries had so much to learn from that. We started to see a big uptick of outdoor brands after specialty brands wanting to exhibit there. And it was so cool to see that they were like relegated to like a small area that they had to kind of earn their way to the main floor, same way we saw at the trade show that would happen to brands that were new, you know, it was just neat for them and humbling for them to like get there and be a student and not be like the big prom queen, if you will. So what's your, I'm sorry. Say that again.

Scott: Yeah. So true.

Kristin: Yeah. So as I realized, like, this is not your property anymore, but you are so tied to the pulse of this community. Can you give us any kind of like quantification on where you think this show is going to come back? We had this huge uptick, right? And now it's an established, trusted property. Hopefully we're able to have these shows again, but where do you think we're going to come back on that?

Scott: Well, I think that they will do well for two reasons. And it's the same reason that those that are, focused on authenticity will always do well. If you have specific knowledge and you engage with a consumer or reader or a business partner in an authentic way, then shows like this will always be successful. I think that shows will always be different from now on. I think that it will take a while for attendance to come back. Maybe not so much in the Overland space because of the rate of growth. I think that those shows will be fine, but I think consumer shows in general industry shows in general are going to take some time to come back. But if they focus on building specific knowledge, supporting specific knowledge in an authentic way, then they will have value in the long term. Otherwise some other medium will take that role. And that's the thing that I believe events have a moment in time to recognize and to engage with my opinion.

Kristin: I totally agree with you. You are a multi-channel content creator and publisher. So I'm curious if we would do our audience a disservice, if I didn't ask you about kind of where you see the state of podcasts print online, YouTube, can you give us a little bit of a glimpse into your ecosystem and kind of how you see that developing right now as we're coming through COVID?

Scott: Well, what's been interesting for us is we always wanted to at least primarily own the channel or the outlet. I think that like an influencer position or social media has a lot of strength and it's super important, but it's also fickle and it can evaporate in a night. If you think about someone who spent a great deal of energy, building a Tik Tok audience, and then that evaporated nearly overnight. So I believe that like what you've done with this podcast, which is again, specific knowledge presented in an authentic way, it has a

lot of value to people and you own the channel, you own the outlet. So that is very powerful. So for me, I always focus on that first, which is why we have a print magazine that we send to our own subscribers that we deliver to the newsstand. It's the reason why we have our own, that we actively develop both the community on that website and the content that brings in new readers, a podcast is the same. And that's why we started a podcast just over a year ago. We're at a couple of hundred thousand downloads, which I feel grateful for and it's done well. So it's just continuing to build those network effects that we have more control over. Social media still has a place, but we use it as a marketing tool, not as an audience development tool.

Kristin: And then what about email marketing?

Scott: Yeah, yeah. That we don't talk about that a lot, but that is one of our greatest efforts going forward because once we got over 200,000 emails, we realized that it had a lot of strength and momentum. So for us we're actively developing that as quickly as possible. We see that as being, again, one of those supporting elements of a very strong network

Kristin: You own that as well. And it's still a top converting platform. And so that's so awesome and interesting to me that it's almost like your audience just went ahead and signed up because they wanted to enroll with your brand. And it's almost like they were trained to do that, maybe through the brands they follow, who knows. And now you have the opportunity to, I mean, nobody gets this opportunity, Scott, like you have this huge opportunity where these people have all been, like, I wanna, you know, belong to this experience that is your newsletter list. And you're actually going to be able to give them a 2021 experience of that instead of like, I have to, like, we have to kind of take what we are doing and up-level it and give it to them now. Like you're starting there with a built-in audience. Like that's really cool. Nobody gets that.

Scott: Yeah. We feel very grateful. And one of the reasons why we have a larger number is because we do have a forum community that started in 2005. So that generates a lot of emails in and of itself.

Kristin: That's something else I'm so glad you brought that up. So the forum approach, when I first started to kind of study the, you know, vehicle supported adventure space, as I mentioned early in the show, like the forms were tied to vehicles, literally. And you said that you've seen some changes there and I would love for you to talk about that, about busting those silos and kind of how that's really helped the vehicle supported adventure community go forward. I think that

Scott: When you look at overlanding, the primary goal is adventure travel. So if you, if you kind of remove the fact that, you know, I ride a Salsa and you ride some other mountain bikes, so you're not as cool as me or whatever. I think if you start to remove that, then it gets people talking and it gets people talking about how the border crossing into

Nicaragua because they don't actually care if they're on a motorcycle or in an RV or driving a Land Cruiser. So we have always made it very travel forward, which I believe also reinforces authenticity. If you're out there doing it, then people have greater trust in your brand. So that was really the, I think the pivotal thing. But again, coming back to the outdoor industry, the outdoor industry in that regard has been extremely beneficial because someone who's a mountain climber really doesn't care if they have a Tacoma or a Nissan or what they just want to get to the trailer, to the mountain.

Kristin: Right. And that is true. That's again, the great equalizer I think, is what we have here. And I guess I'm also curious to know as we're looking to wrap up here you've seen a lot of competition come in on the publishing side. I mean, our big publications in core outdoors are now assigning people stories on this specific segment. What do you think that that's doing in terms of like the overall bump in participation and, and like as the founding voice, you know, like what does that look like to you?

Scott: Well, there's two things that we look at. Anytime we start to drop below a 10 X audience advantage, we get a little concerned. We haven't done that yet, but we keep very close eye on those vertical categories that exist within other publications. And we monitor their traffic, quarterly. We don't do it very often because otherwise it's distracting. But as long as we maintain that 10 X advantage as a first mover, I think we're in a healthy space. But other than that, I see it as nothing but positive. I mean, if you look at someone like West Seiler from Outside Magazines, a very intelligent individual that speaks intelligently about the subject and has a lot of experience. If you look at Steve Casimiro with Adventure Journal, a publisher that I have enormous respect for the more that he talks about overlanding with his audience, the better, and the more that we talk about outdoor activities with our audience the better for Steve. So fortunately it seems like most of the publications that are left are really good Outside Magazine, Adventure Journal. We have a few publications in our space, but they represent such a small audience that we don't really pay much attention to it.

Kristin: Right. And then you also are global. I mean, that's sort of the beauty of what you created was that you were international first. It is not that you started in North America and then invited other countries in, like, I felt like that was one of the most beautiful parts of your print publication from day one is that I was on this international Safari, if you will, with all of your other readers. And I felt like the Overland Expo had that same thing. Like there literally were manufacturers there from Australia, New Zealand, and they would like go where I live in Southwest Colorado and go shoot their marketing materials out after they finished the show. Like it was just a little bit of a star struck feeling, you know, talk with me a little bit about how these channels have really made everything global. It must just accentuate what you started in terms of that global purview and approach.

Scott: I believe so. And we did it intentionally from the perspective of we wanted it to be as authentic as possible, but we found that international readers also liked the technical nature of our content as well. So we started an office in Cologne, Germany a few years ago where we translate the magazine into German and we service European readers out of that office which allows us to maintain a lot of that across the pond relationships. So

Kristin: That's awesome. And that again, like really speaks to authenticity. Let me know when you want to open one in New Zealand and maybe I'll go down and help you out.

Scott: Let's do it!

Kristin: The last thing I wanted to ask you about, unless you had more to add of course, some of the brands that we've had that just honored to work with over the years, one of them is Four Wheel Campers. And a great team over there. And we learned so much about their owner group, right. They had just a stalwart owner group membership and it directly mirrored their target avatar. Like it was amazing. Everybody kind of looked the same and they wanted to like go younger and expand here and whatever like that was. But it was so fascinating to me to see this Petri dish of like owners truly were like, okay, that's exactly who you said it was. And look at all of them. And they would drive from all over God's green earth to come to these like expos and drive ins that, that the brand would host. How do you see that changing or evolving? Like, is that still gonna be like a big part of this community?

Scott: I believe so. The thing that is most important for any industry is that you see young families with children involved. If you don't see that, it's time to worry. So as we have seen our demographic at younger, and maybe the trips are less ambitious, but when you see their children there and you see multicultural communities developing and you see other people coming into the organization and into the industry, it's extremely exciting. It's super important that it continues to diversify in every way possible.

Kristin: I totally agree. Was there anything that I did not touch on because I just feel like I have such an incredible opportunity to have somebody who literally like spearheaded a movement, became a publisher, had a hand in a consumer show and now you've, you know, literally you told me before we hit record, you've made just a substantial number of hires, you're growing like crazy. Like, is there anything I forgot to bring out while I have you here?

Scott: No, I'm grateful to be on the show. I think the only thing that I would add is, is my sincere gratitude to my team. We have an amazing group of people here that helped me produce a podcast and help us produce a beautiful magazine. And you know, like my life would not be anywhere near what it is without people like my editor that does such a

great job every single day. So it's surrounding yourself with a great team, obviously. And then when it comes to overlanding when an industry like the outdoor space wants to start to communicate with those consumers, talk to the consumers first, find out where their needs are, what isn't working learn from those consumers as you begin to develop products. And those are the companies that do the best.

Kristin: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much. This has been absolutely so much fun and such an honor to have you on I've I've admired your career for years and years and have had you on the show. It really is an honor. And I cannot wait to see what happens as we kind of continue our way through this global pandemic and see exactly how we're all going to come together. And I think a lot of healing is going to happen outdoors. And ideally right from that, as you said earlier, a conservation mindset, the more people will fall in love with these natural places. The more they'll work to protect them, which is just going to be exactly what we need. So I'm right there with you and let me know how I can help. And it was fantastic to have you on the show.

Scott: It was a sincere pleasure. Thank you so much, Kristin.