

Andy: Welcome everyone to another episode of Starting from Nothing – the Foundation podcast. Andy here. Today we have Ben Krueger on the show with us.

Ben is the founder of Authority Engine, a company that helps small business owners conceptualize, create and manage your podcast that will help grow their business. Authority Engine is only a year old and before launching his business Ben was working a job he hated and was looking for a way out. I think a lot of us can relate to that. Today Ben runs the company full time and in this interview we're going to talk about the steps he took to launch and build his business over the past 12 months. Ben, welcome to the show man.

Ben: Thanks, Andy. Excited to be here, share some stories and ... yeah, just have a little fun.

Andy: Yeah, dude. Tell me what kind of job were you working in?

Ben: I was working as a SEO project manager for a small web design company and it was one of those type of deals to where you come in and they said, okay, well, here's how we do it and essentially they did it by writing a bunch of blog posts and a very, very old school methodology. I was trying to upgrade their systems and upgrade how they went about SEO. They weren't keen to upgrade even though SEO is a constantly evolving beast.

Andy: What was the experience working for them like?

Ben: To put it in words I worked in an office with three white walls. The fourth wall had a window to the white wall on the hallway. It was a cubicle with a lid on it. It was very ... the guys I work with were fantastic, they weren't degrading or trying to keep me in but it was just one of those type positions to where ... you feel just trapped. You can't go very far or forward, you can't go up anywhere. It's a small company and so I was just looking to learn as much as I could, as quickly as I could and then kind of find the next thing that was going to be my next ... I don't know, my next stepping stone if you will.

Andy: What kind of things were you trying?

Ben: At that time I was doing a lot of self-education on online marketing so I was dabbling in affiliate marketing, I was dabbling in ... there was a lot of dabbling is what it was. I was trying to build some websites and do some SEO on them and do some different things because I really didn't have a grasp of how the whole online marketing thing worked. So I was doing SEO for these guys and working on growing my knowledge independently of that and that's when I kind of stumbled into my next opportunity.

Andy: Was that the podcasting thing? Or what was that?

Ben: That was ... So I got an opportunity to ... or I stumbled upon an opportunity to go to the Philippines for six months and do online marketing for a resort in exchange for free room and board and food. So I was like, yup, dibs. I'll do that. That's through the Dynamite Circle guys, Dan Andrews. I'm sure you're well aware of those guys.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: Yeah. That was like the perfect, perfect thing I was looking for. No living expenses and got me out on my own and got me into a new network of people. I applied for it, got an email with the header that said "Pack your shit."

Andy: That's so awesome.

Ben: Yup. Later I was on my way to the Philippines. It was a pretty quick turnaround.

Andy: How long later?

Ben: Two weeks.

Andy: Two weeks later.

Ben: Yeah.

Andy: A lot of people try for the tropical MBA stuff.

[Inaudible 00:04:19] who's like one of my first online friends if you will.

Ben: Oh yeah.

Andy: [inaudible 00:04:22] one of the first ones there. And

they get a ton of application and stuff, why do you think they picked you?

Ben: I could tell you exactly why they pick me is because I emailed the previous two guys that had had the position. One who's John McIntyre, the other one ... Asked them this position is exactly for me. This is what I want and I know I can kill it for you guys. What do you suggest I do to stand out from the crowd because I know that you guys must get the same applications over and over and over again. It was one of those shoot a quick one-minute video of yourself saying why you deserve the position.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: And I'm sure they get stuff over and over. I shot them a message saying what exactly are you looking for so that I can be that guy.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: I took what they were talking about, what they were looking for and made sure I highlighted the crap out of that in my application.

Andy: What did they say?

Ben: They had said they want somebody who's a fast learner and can grow into the position and not need baby sat. They wanted somebody who can ... essentially a mover and a shaker. Somebody that can make stuff happen and has a track record of making stuff happen without much direction. So you kind of give him a task and let him fly. For my one minute ... Yeah, you got one minute to get it all out. I kind of laid it all out really strategically before I ever even shot the video.

Andy: Beautiful. Beautiful. I love that they're doing that. It's such a great opportunity. So many cool people have come out of that internship.

Ben: It's incredible. It's incredible. Some of my best friends have come out of that internship, previous applicants and post applicants of me.

Andy: What did you for them while you were there?

Ben: Essentially the resort is run by one of their friends. It's not their resort, they're not really affiliated with it; it's just one of their friends. While I was there about one to two days a week I would do their online marketing for that small resort. So I would update their go-to listings, I would work on their SEO, I would help them publish videos and get them out to as many places as possible, put together some specials, that kind of stuff.

Andy: Cool. How long was that for?

Ben: That was for six months. It was a minimum of four months; it could go as long as you wanted. While I was there I got started into the podcasting stuff and I was starting to really get some momentum with that which is why I cut it a little bit short at six months wherein some of the previous applicants had done it for like a year or eight months or so.

Andy: How do you come across the podcasting stuff?

Ben: Yeah. I was actually talking with Dan Andrews. He runs the Tropical MBA podcast and at that time he also ran the Lifestyle Business podcast which has since been merged. He was talking about how a big of a pain doing podcast post-production was. I had done video production, video post-production in high school and so I understood kind of how it worked. I was curious so I was asking them a bunch of questions about it and what was painful about it, why it was such a pain in the ... expletive. He was just kind of telling me how much time it took and that it took. It wasn't particularly a high-skilled job, it was just one of those, you know, somebody who's got attention to detail and all that stuff.

I started mulling it over and I was [inaudible 00:08:09]. Well, number one I want to meet some industry leaders, I want to meet some movers and shakers. Those are the people that have podcasts. That's a great way to network with movers and shakers. And number two I had been looking for a marketable opportunity whether it'd be a service, whether it'd be starting an e-commerce

store. I was kind of bouncing around between a couple of ideas. After talking to him and doing a little bit more research into podcasting, I really loved the power, the marketing power behind the podcasting currently and just how much of an impact it can have for a brand. I offered to Dan to do his podcast for him for six months for free to do the production, the backend production and he said no. So I couldn't give my service [inaudible 00:09:00] at the beginning.

Andy: He said no.

Ben: Yeah, he said no.

Andy: Why he say no?

Ben: Because ... for two reasons. One, he figured if I was doing it for free I wasn't serious. Two because we hadn't really nailed down what the deliverables were. I sat down with him and I said, okay, if you could have the perfect solution for you as a podcaster with the post-production stuff, what would it look like? As he talked I scribbled [furious 00:09:29] bullet point notes and when he was done I kind of picked out all the things that he had said and I put a price tag on it and I made him an offer right then and there and he shook my hand and we had a deal.

Don't try to give it away for free. Apparently put a price tag on it and make sure that it's actually what they want and what they need.

Andy: What was the deal? How much did he pay you [inaudible 00:09:54] your first customer?

Ben: The deal was ... it was 497 a month for four episodes or a weekly podcast episode and it was from ... The principle or the idea of the service is ... as a podcaster you do your recordings, you upload your raw files to a shared system like Dropbox is what we use now. Everything else is taken care of for you. So the episode is edited and worked up. All the mistakes, ums, ahs and that kind of stuff were removed. The audio brandings put in there. Then it's loaded up to your host. We write up show notes that are compelling and engaging based off of that episode. We also link out to all the

tools, people resources in the episode. So it's kind of like a full package. Once you upload it it's ... consider it published. As a podcaster then he can focus on creating content or running his business or sitting by the pool.

Andy: Beautiful. He loves that too.

Ben: Yeah.

Andy: That's perfect.

Ben: Yeah. He's a fan.

Andy: So he was your first customer.

Ben: Yeah. Dan was my first customer and then him being the head [cheese 00:11:05] or whatever of the Dynamite Circle, he's got quite a bit of influence in that space and there's quite a few podcasters in there. My original service group almost 100% off of referrals from him. Once I got a couple of clients under my belt and I was kind of starting to get referrals from a bunch of different angles because I saved him a bunch of time, I made it very easy for him. It was one of those things to where ... At that time nobody was doing podcast services, that wasn't a thing. If you had a podcast you did the post-production, that was just how it worked. It was kind of a new space at the time. Now people are starting to get into it a little bit more but it's still very new.

Andy: Yeah. It's growing really quickly too.

Ben: Very quickly. Very quickly.

Being a service business that's one of the challenges is trying to grow without growing too quickly and losing the quality and kind of imploding on ourselves. It's a really good problem to have and I'll take that problem over any other any day.

Andy: How many people are you at right now? That [inaudible 00:12:18].

Ben: We actually offer launch services as well so it's ... we'll do ... beginning to end we'll help you conceptualize a podcast for your brand and then launch it and rebuild all the components for you, everything like that. So we've got ... right now we've got six

launch clients and we've got I think 16 ongoing editing clients.

Andy: Nice. How do you charge ... is editing still 500 bucks for four episodes or do you have [inaudible 00:12:47]?

Ben: As of this recording the price has recently increased. Simply because of demand and because of just the value that we've discovered the service is. Our launch services we started out with really low price point, we started out at 600 bucks for our very first launch package. Before I really knew I had launched a podcast or a couple of before but I didn't really know what all I had intended to pour into it. Now that it's a brand new package, it's a very systemize and we know how it works. We've got to experience launching like 20 podcasts. Now it's a onetime 19.97 fee and I think that will stay there for a little while.

Andy: Cool. Cool, cool. How did you get ... So you work mostly through referrals and stuff, are you still mostly working off of referrals or where customers come in from now.

Ben: It's still mostly referrals, however, people are starting to find me through my own podcast as well now. Through the podcast, through ... I've started Authority Engine TV which is short YouTube videos where, you know, I'll just talk about podcasting concepts and how to grow your business with a podcast. The other one is going out to conferences and networking and just getting referrals from other podcast experts in the space that don't do services. So it's all referrals of some sort or another but whether they are client or whether they're an industry leader that's been ... that's been my real bread and butter so I'm really doubling down on that.

Andy: What's the biggest challenge that you're struggling with right now? As your business grows.

Ben: As the business grows the biggest challenge is bringing on the right people so that I can build a company culture and not a ... I don't want to build something that burns or fizzles out because our mission ... and this is something that I developed about

six months ago, after I really saw the power of what we were doing and where I could take this thing. But my mission now is to ... I really like what you guys were doing with the Foundation and so if it ain't broke don't fix it. My mission now is to help one million small business owners grow their businesses with podcasting so whether that's with the service, whether that's with some of the other things that were going to be coming out here with in the future. The planning for the long term and still handling the amount of ... the influx of business that we're getting now is really the challenge. Like I said it's not ... I'll take that challenge any day, it's the best challenge to have. It's definitely trying.

Andy: How many people are you at now?

Ben: So right now there's myself and three others and I'm really working on getting our system solid so that when we do bring on more editors and more in the team then it's a pretty seamless process as well as when we bring on new clients it's a seamless process because right now it's very email intensive which just is not scalable whatsoever. It's a little bit of one of those, you know, we grew beyond our systems at this point so need to take a quick step back, get everything set up again and then continue.

Andy: Dude, we do that too. We're in the midst of all systems and structure building right now. It's kind of ... it's a different stage, you know? Totally different than the marketing phase.

Ben: Yeah. I like it. I like. It is totally different but it's one of those ... instead of thinking, okay, well, this is how we can position in package and whatnot, it's more ... here's where I want my business to be in two to three years so here's what I need to put in to place now for that to happen which before was not my mindset.

Andy: Did you watch ... Have you had Rockefeller Habits?

Ben: I have but it's been long enough that I should probably give it another look.

Andy: It's probably a good timing wise for you to check it

out.

Ben: Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Andy: We had a consultant this year who's teaching us the Rockefeller Habits inside the company. It's completely transforming everything. Like how we operate, our culture. It's really, really good stuff and it's simple too. Like nothing that you read is going to be mind blowing it's just ... oh yeah. Set goals and measure them and ... the basic stuff.

Ben: Standard operating procedures and stuff.

Andy: Totally. Totally, totally.

So you're in Costa Rica now.

Ben: Yeah.

Andy: Why Costa Rica?

Ben: I want to learn how to surf.

Andy: Good.

Ben: It's good reason as any. Yeah. One of the major reasons why I started Authority Engine is because I wanted to kind of do the whole live any, where work anywhere type of thing.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: I hired a business coach as well here about two months ago and in our initial interview I said here's my thing. I'm going to work like crazy to grow this thing and I'm going to work like crazy to make that happen but I value my lifestyle over putting in 16-hour a day and having a physical location, an office with a whole bunch of workers. That's not going to happen.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: So if you try to push me in that direction I'm going to tell you right now it's not happening.

So, yeah. I came down to Costa Rica because I wanted to learn how to surf and I wanted to work on my Spanish and so both of those are going. [Inaudible 00:18:36].

Andy: How did you choose your business coach?

Ben: When I was at New Media Expo, this was about three

months ... two and a half months, three months ago now, I met a lady that I was talking to. She's kind of in the podcasting space as well and I was just chatting with her and she had mentioned how her dad was a business coach and I was saying how the business coach I had at the time wasn't really pushing me to grow, wasn't really pushing me in the direction that I wanted to go and so she encourage me to check out her [inaudible 00:19:10] stuff which, you know, naturally anybody saying, "Hey, you should check out my [inaudible 00:19:14]."

Andy: Totally.

Ben: You're naturally leery. But I checked them out and I checked out the mastermind because it's a ... partially like one-on-one calls, partially mastermind. And so I checked out the whole thing.

I was really impressed when I got on the phone with him to do the initial interview because we had about a 20-minute conversation and at the end of it he's like, "Alright. So, off the top of my head here's a couple of things we can start doing." So I'm scribbling notes as quick as I can and so I'm like, alright, yup, this is exactly where I want to go. I hung up, paid for his coaching services right then, fired my previous coach and made the transition real quick.

Andy: Beautiful, dude. Beautiful. It's fun how that works. I'm always interested about people make a decision on hiring a coach. It's such a big decision to make.

Ben: It is. It is. And it was one of those, you know, the suggestions that he made were just so spot on for where ... like where my vision was and where I wanted to go with it.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: I was just like, okay, yup, this is exactly the type of dude that I need right now, you know? If that outgrows at some point I'll revisit it then.

Andy: Yup. But right now this is what's perfect. That's awesome.

Ben: Exactly. Exactly.

Andy: You mentioned in the pre-interview that ... you said you try not to chase shiny objects and I think all of ... I suffer from that a lot and I think in the starting phase it's really hard not to because there's so many directions that you can go in and so many different options and opportunities. So how do you ... how do you manage to stay focused?

Ben: That's an awesome question and that is a challenge ... it's a constant challenge.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: The biggest thing that I found for me is because the two main services that we're doing right now, the launch and then the ongoing editing stuff are going really well. I have decided to kind of block out some of the other add-on services or add-on things that I could be doing and really double down on those for now. Because they are working really well, they're super easy to sell when I get somebody on the phone, it's not a very difficult sales call by any means. The value proposition is very clear. What I discovered was when I started taking on clients that had not ... I never really done custom work.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: But I would do some clients where I adjusted this portion of a package and some clients [inaudible 00:21:50] adjusted this portion of a package. I felt like maybe I could roll those into their own services but the more I got in to that the more milky stuff got and the more kind of ... it just really didn't ... really didn't pay out and it wasn't going to pay out in the long term. So I've kind of chopped ... put the chopping block on those and really went back to focusing on my core two for a while. And so I'm really going to double down on those. The other shiny object was I wanted to go into like the info product space really quickly.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: But as well, that's still on the horizon but I need to

really focus on what I'm doing now because it's just going gangbusters and so ...

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: I need to really make sure that this is setup for long term success before I start chasing my tail around another places.

Andy: It sounds like you're really strategic when you think about things.

Ben: Yeah.

Andy: And you think through them really well before moving on things. Why do you think ... you went pretty quickly from having a job to having a full time business, it's growing really rapidly. What do you think attribute to that? Why do you think that you grew so fast when so many people ... they might struggle for years, you know, in Corporate America in a job that they hate, trying to figure out that thing.

Ben: I think it's clarity of what you want. Because for me ... so in college I went to Ohio State as the marketing undergrad. Supposedly it's one of the top six marketing businesses or business schools in the country. As I was going through it I kept thinking, "This is really it." I did not want to do any of this. As I realize that they were just grooming me to become a cog in a big machine I started doing my own online marketing research because I figured, okay, well, I want to do it from wherever the heck I want it from. If I can learn online marketing that's the best of all worlds because I can do it from wherever.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: That's when I started pouring my heart and soul into and it was ... it really came down to that's what I wanted to do. I decided that that's it. I was willing to put a couple of things on the line and fail a couple of times before I had any successes doing it.

Andy: I'm checking your website [inaudible 00:24:18].

Ben: Yeah. I recognize that video. I've only heard it a couple hundred times.

Andy: Awesome stuff man.

Ben: Yeah. I was just going to say with ... with kind of the direction and that kind of stuff, to me it's far more introspection. It's knowing yourself and knowing who you are and what you want to do and not letting anybody else's opinion of what you should do, steer you too much unless they've already been really successful doing what you're trying to do then you better listen.

Andy: What advice would you have for somebody who is still stuck with getting started? Yeah.

Ben: Yeah. That's a really good one. I'll often say this or different variations of the same thing but what ... what I found really helpful was to sit down with a piece of paper, and I actually put in like some meditating music. [Inaudible 00:25:18] and kind of getting the zone. I think about anywhere from two to five years out, how do I want to be spending my time during the day. Not on a weekend, not on a vacation, not on ... whatever but on a typical day. What do I want to spend my time and effort doing.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: Because I wanted to ... when I thought about that I wanted to be living kind of wherever I wanted. I wanted to have some form of income that was generated by myself whether it was passive or active. I wasn't particularly concerned at that point but I also wanted doing a lot of outdoor stuff. I'm an outdoors guy. So, I'm here to surf. I like rock climbing, I like all that stuff and so I wanted to have a lot of time to do that kind of stuff as well. And so when you start thinking how do I want to spend my days then you can backtrack and figure out the income streams or the possible income streams that will fit in to that lifestyle versus thinking, "Alright. Well, I'm going to make 300 grand and then I'm going to take two years off and I'm going to do whatever."

Andy: Yup.

Ben: That just is not the way to go.

The other thing that I thought for myself is I want to ... I'm very

into self-improvement, I'm very into constantly working on myself, becoming a better person. Originally I was really scared of the service industry because I knew that I would have to hire people, I would have to train people, I would have to build a team and manage and grow. As well as manage and grow a client list and all that kind of stuff. At first that scared the crap out of me. Once I realize that I could use this as a personal growth tool, I needed to become a better person to build and grow this business. I needed to become ... able to hire. I need to become ... able to manage and train and inspire as well as sell my services and work well with customers and provide good customer service and all that kind of stuff. So, it became as much a personal growth tool as it did a income source.

Andy: Explain that more because I think a lot of people ... did you ever watched the Last Lecture by Randy Pausch?

Ben: No.

Andy: It's an incredible talk. They used to have this last lecture series. I can't remember if it was ... I can't remember what. It was like an Ivy League school. The last lecture series was like if a professor had to give one lecture in their life what would it be? It turned out this Randy Pausch is one of the best professors there and he was diagnosed with cancer. And he gave a talk and he talks about one of the biggest things in school and like in sports is what he calls head fakes where in sports they teach you ... they tell you that you're learning how to play football but really what you're learning is discipline and leadership and all these different things. I think people miss that about building a business – completely.

Tell me like an example of where that's really run true in your business. [Inaudible 00:28:39] something that you had to face or you had to become a different person to deal with the issue or to rise to whatever the issue is.

Ben: Yeah. I got [inaudible 00:28:51].

Andy: [inaudible 00:28:52].

Ben: I think the best one ... and that's good because that shows that I'm growing as a person. Obviously we only grow when we're uncomfortable so the more uncomfortable we can get the better off we are – even though it's a little bit frustrating sometimes.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: But I think the best one for me is ... Growing up I was ... I grew up in a Roman Catholic family, it was very much a ... when the adults are speaking you keep it to yourself and then you'll get your turn. And so you're always polite and you ... Modesty was always number one and you kind of keep your head down and do your thing. [Inaudible 00:29:33] is one approach. When you get in to selling a service or something that you provide, you have to believe wholeheartedly that the person you're working to sell the service to will hugely benefit from that. It is your duty then to sell them your service or your product because, you know, if you have the cure to Alzheimer's are you going to keep it to yourself and not be willing to go out and believe in yourself and believe that this is the best cure for them?

That was the biggest one for me was coming to grips with the fact that, number one, my service was a huge, huge benefit to podcasters but also just coming to grips with myself and the fact that it is okay to promote yourself, your own services, your own ... everything. Because before it was ... my mindset was very modesty. You don't toot your own horn, you don't do any of that stuff. And you don't have to be a flamboyant me, me, me to be a marketer, you just need to know their problem, know how to solve it and then be confident enough in your solution to offer it very confidently.

Andy: Yup.

Ben: That's probably then the biggest one for me. And I've noticed going to conferences I used to be the kid that would sit in the corner all by himself and now I'll walk up and ... if there's somebody that I want to meet I'll be the first one that's there, shaking their hand and introduce myself and just shooting the ball

with them.

Andy: Yeah. It's funny how entrepreneurship like puts you in to those positions and then you see the ripple effect throughout everything else on your life. From the little (crosstalk)

Ben: Yeah. Yeah. And I think the last trickle down effect was when I started to get enough of a following via my podcast and Authority Engine TV and some of these other things I've been doing. When I started to get enough of a following that I was getting basically fan mail on the regular to where people were saying, "Oh man, this stuff is ... this is really helpful. This saved me four hours last week," or, you know, "I'm really excited to get my new podcast going for my business and you taught me how." That kind of stuff. It just fuels the fire because when you're having those days to where you're like, "Oh man, I wonder ..." you start questioning, you start bringing up the question marks and then you get couple of those emails or a couple of those voicemails and you're like, alright, yup. We're doing good.

Andy: Awesome, dude. Thanks for coming on today. It's been fascinating hearing your journey. It feels ... You feel really grounded in where you're at and where you're headed. Feels awesome.

Ben: Yeah. Really appreciate coming on. I love sharing this because it's something that ... I do feel really grounded and really centered now and it's not something that I felt before.

Andy: Yeah.

Ben: So I really love sharing it and hopefully, you know, if that rubs off on even one or two people I'd be thrilled.

Andy: Awesome man. If it does where can people find you out? Where can they reach you? Where can they get in touch with you?

Ben: Good question. So you can find me over at authorityengine.com and you can get in touch with me via the website. There's a couple of different contact options so if you just

take a quick look around you'll find me there. But you can also find me on Twitter at [benwkrueger](#) and that's where I reside.

Andy: Beautiful dude. Thank you for coming on today.

Ben: Thank you, Andy. It was an absolute pleasure.

Closing: Thank you for joining us. We've taken this interview and created a custom action guide so you know exactly what action steps to take to grow your business. Just head over to [thefoundationpodcast.com](#) to download it for free. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next week.