TALKSHOE™

PODCAST HOST PROFILE

Cliff Ravenscraft

Generally Speaking Podcast Network

What do an insurance man, a pastor, a father and family man, and a podcaster have in common? No, it's not some bar room joke, but it does describe podcasting zealot Cliff Ravenscraft.

Cliff has been selling automobile, home, life and health insurance for the past 11 years. He's also an associate pastor in a large church, and is married and has three young. Still, Cliff finds time to pursue his latest passion – podcasting. "Podcasting used to be my number one hobby, but it's so much more than that now. I pretty much work at the office, spend time with my wife and kids, and podcast the rest of the time!"

"I answer every single email. I sometimes get as many three hundred or four hundred a week. I reply to everyone."

As it happened, a podcasting icon led Cliff into podcasting. "It's all due to Leo Laporte and his This Week in Tech podcast. I was a huge fan of Leo back in the ZDTV and Tech TV days which was a cable/satellite TV network station that was all technology 24/7." After the network had shut down, Cliff was surfing the web and found out that Leo was doing a new thing called podcasting. "All the people that I grew to love on the Tech TV network were there in This Week in Tech podcast, and I got addicted to the show." Best of all, he says that he could listen while bike riding, or just walking through the neighborhood. "I could listen when I wanted, where I wanted, however I wanted."

A podcast on the ABC TV show Lost, which Cliff calls the best show on Earth, was the next podcast Cliff came upon. He showed his wife the podcast called The Transmission, which is devoted to Lost. They listened to it on their couch and experienced their very first podcast together. "It was that very night that I started to look into podcasting."

Like so many of the over 100,000 podcasters, when Cliff got started, he had no previous broadcasting, radio, or TV experience. Though Cliff says, "I have quite a lot of experience in talking. A lot!" He also has a lot of experience being passionate about things, and says that it doesn't hurt that he's been preaching for six years. It seems that the word passion creeps into just about every discussion about successful podcasting.

Cliff's passion has grown into his Generally Speaking Podcast Network (GSPN) www.gspn.tv which now consists of eight (8) podcasts and receives over 50,000 downloads per month. Naturally he's learned a lot about podcasting, and advises doing podcasts on specific topics, and says that general podcasts don't cut it.

Cliff started his first podcast with his laptop and a fifteen dollar headset microphone from Wal?Mart. Today, his hobby has grown to include over three thousand dollars worth of equipment. Still, he says "I'm not an audiophile. Originally, when I would look at a mixer, I would get cold, clammy feelings." People often ask if a good podcaster needs to have a 'voice' to be successful. "I don't necessarily think that you have to have the voice," says Cliff. "You can compensate for the voice with great content." He also says that audio production is equally important, and that getting good production requires spending hours preparing for every single show. In addition, to do a top?notch job, he feels that eventually podcasters need to invest in equipment.

Over time, Cliff felt the desire to enhance his show with guests and other listeners passionate about his topics. Again Leo Laporte lent a hand when Cliff found himself on Leo's live show net@nite, hosted on TalkShoe. Cliff began exclusively using TalkShoe, a website that uniquely enables him to connect with his listeners through live interactive podcasting. People can call in via phone, Skype or computer (VoIP), and can simultaneously text-chat. TalkShoe records the podcast and provides the RSS. In addition, he was able to move his previously recorded podcast episodes over to TalkShoe taking advantage of their free hosting and bandwidth. He now does virtually every episode live on the Internet, where guests and general Internet users can join in and become part of the podcast. "The interactivity is one thing that keeps me going," comments Cliff. "I can really connect with my audience."

Cliff partially attributes his large audience base to the Lost show itself. His first show had four hundred listeners, and within six weeks, he had four thousand listeners. Cliff didn't put a lot preparation in to the show at first, and admits that his audio was poor. But the content was in high demand, and there was a very large audience of people who were hungry for anybody to talk about Lost as much as possible. But in order to continue to increase his audience, he did feel the need to improve the show's quality over time.

He also attributes his success to the relationships and the community that he has established, including his playing every voicemail that he can possibly play during his podcasts. "I answer every single email. I sometimes get as many three hundred or four hundred a week. I reply to everyone."
But for Cliff, the podcasting Holy Grail is to make a career out of it, though he doesn't think he'll ever make a living strictly from creating podcasts. Right now, he's primarily focused on covering his operating expenses. He has incorporated a donation program whereby listeners can contribute, and automatically make recurring payments through PayPal. This is an often-used technique among early podcasters, and many of them report surprising generosity from their listeners.

Another key source of revenues is monetization of his podcasts through advertising. TalkShoe enables Cliff to monetize his podcasts by inserting pre- and post- roll ads, as well as host-read affiliate ads. "TalkShoe is helping me to make money, and I've been very appreciative." The company cuts Cliff a check every month based upon his number of downloads. He's already received checks totaling over $5,000.

Still, even with the monetization of shows, Cliff doesn't see himself being able to totally replace his income as an insurance agent. "I'm going into a career, not only as a podcaster, but also as a podcast consultant." In fact, Cliff has already earned some money doing consulting for other podcasters. "I see businesses finally dumping their antiquated paper newsletters. Also, instead of standard commercials, people want to hear you talk to them personally, one?on?one. I'm going to teach companies how to reach people and have a community among their clients or prospects who will become dedicated to their business because of what the company is able to provide for them."

The idea of becoming a podcast consultant is appealing to many podcasters. Because podcasting is such a new phenomenon, even those podcasters who have as little as one year of experience, are

already considered experts. Companies are hiring consultants because they don't want to just take a leap of faith and start spending money. They want to get someone who knows what they're doing, and someone who's been doing podcasting, learning the ropes, learning the equipment, learning how to monetize, and learning how to talk and prepare.

Still, the measurement of a successful podcaster is illusive. “Does it mean making lots of money?” says Cliff, “or does it mean having a show where you can talk about something you're passionate about, and having a very large community of people who support your passion. If that is what you mean by success, I feel anybody can feel successful.”

Cliff has solid future goals for his podcast network. “At this point in time I don't have any aspirations of growing outside of what I would call a self?produced podcast network. I will remain the executive producer and have my hand involved in every single part of overseeing every single episode produced on my network. Like Leo, I want to have my hands in every show.” He hopes, like others, to one day grow his network to be as large as Leo’s TWiT-TV podcast network.

However, he adds, “The one thing that it’s not about for me is thousands of downloads. People don't like to be viewed as a number, and if you view downloads as a statistic only, you've already failed as a podcaster.”

When asked about the future of podcasting, Cliff compares podcasting to blogging. “About nine years ago, I started a blog, and I would say, ‘Hey! I've just started a blog.’ And people would say, ‘Bless you’. Today blogging is everywhere. And ‘podcast’ was finally the word of the year and it got put in the dictionary.” He predicts that it’s just a matter of time before podcasting becomes as universal as blogging.

Cliff foresees a day when there will be more podcasts than there are blogs, but doesn’t think podcasting will ever replace blogs. He does believe that podcasting will become everyday language for people in a few years. He adds, “And I definitely know for a fact it's not a fad. It is here to stay.”

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