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— August 2020 —

“How a Hard-Nosed Military Veteran ‘Surrendered’ to BGS and Made \$137,000 in Sales with Only \$33,000 Ad Spend in Just 7 Weeks”

Be a fly on the wall as we interview new EI member **Mike Armstrong** on what he did to build, grow, and scale a **wildly profitable POD Store (with little funds) from scratch!**

Hey Insiders!

Grab your pen, highlighter, notepad, and favorite beverage because there's GOLD in this month's GSD!

Rarely does an EI member have to start a NEW store so early in their membership, but in Mike Armstrong's case, he had no other choice.

For reasons you'll read below, Mike was suddenly put under financial stress and forced to try and pull off a miracle to turn things around.

It was far from smooth sailing, but on June 10 this year, Mike went live with a new POD store and made a whopping \$137,000 with only \$33,000 ad spend, in less than eight weeks!

How did he do it?

You're about to find out.

Join Tanner and myself (Bret) as we grill Mike Armstrong on how he went from zero to hero at breakneck speed!

That said, let's roll out the red carpet and introduce you to ...

MIKE "POD-PRO" ARMSTRONG



BIG shout-out to Mike for showing his true "El Spirit" in this GSD. The way he and other guest experts share the inside stories of their business is incredibly generous and will help YOU and every member. It's this kind of selfless generosity that makes EI the #1 ecom community in the world!

Expert Share

~ MIKE ARMSTRONG ~

Bret: So Mike, tell us your story and how you got into this crazy world of ecom.

Mike: Yeah. Okay. So I joined the British Royal Navy at the age of 16, and I've kind of always been in the Navy since I was a kid, so it was destined to happen. Did 17 years as an engineer, first on submarines, and then changed and became a pilot. And I mention this because it's relevant to the recent successes, that one of the things I was always good at was doing a good job of whatever I picked up. And that's relevant to what's happened with my store.

So I did 17 years, came out, then I ran a franchise business, figured out I couldn't work for anyone else ever again, ran a franchise looking after old people—I did that for 10 years looking after old folks in their home. Sold that; I lost all the money through some technical contractual nonsense. Around the same time, I ran the domiciliary care franchise, I started the helicopter business with a buddy of mine. And in the UK, we very quickly became the top helicopter pleasure-flight business ... After that ended, I then became a hippie, lived in Africa, playing the drum and running a cultural music school.

Tanner: Wow. That's quite a story.

Mike: I know it's crazy. I eventually stopped being a hippie—that was probably a midlife crisis. I came back into the UK, bummed around a little bit, then was living in Africa, West Africa, for about four years on and off. Then I moved to Asia, to Thailand. Had one year retired, then got back into work again because my daughter went to university, so she needed some money.

Mike: I got a job in maritime security. I co-ran a maritime security company with an old buddy of mine, putting guards on ships passing through the Red Sea.

Did that on and off. My ecommerce I started on the internet years ago when computers first came out. And back then, ecommerce was anything to do with the internet. Any business that was on the internet was called "ecom," but of course it's narrowed down. So my introduction to business on the internet was when I was in the UK with our helicopter business. I contracted a local bunch of guys to do some SEO for us and get us ranking for "buy gift for man," because we figured out that the helicopter flight was actually a gift. So we contracted this SEO company and after a year got a pretty good ranking.

But I looked at it and thought, you know what? I can do a better job than that. They're obviously just treating us like a contract. So I did a better job than them and started getting us ranked in Google. And that's how I kind of got introduced to ecom. I made some money by taking my West Africa cultural music school thing, where we were selling people holidays, cultural holidays, where they came out to Africa and learned drum and dance. And I got our site ranked number one for "drumming holiday," "Gambia drum," that kind of thing. So that's how I got into ecom.

Bret: **Wow. Awesome. So when did you transition into physical products, and did you have any successes and failures to share?**

Mike: Yeah, that happened three years ago. Whilst I was in Thailand, I stopped the maritime security [business]. I was teaching in oil and gas as well. I stopped there, and I met a guy, well, I met a couple of guys in Thailand. And one of them was into ecom, what we call "ecom" now. They were selling services and products online, and I teamed up with one of them to sell drums and percussion instruments worldwide. It was my first dabble into Shopify and all the apps and things. And it failed. It was rubbish, but it got me into it.

And these youngsters taught me a little bit about ecom and selling online. I very quickly decided to start a veterans site, selling pillow cases, all kinds of stuff that was branded toward British and American military veterans. And that took off. It was great. I made money pretty quickly—but as a business and as a brand it was terrible. I wasn't publicizing myself. I was trying to stay

hidden, because we were shipping from China and the quality wasn't that good. So I was kind of hiding behind a parapet whilst running that business.

Mike: I went through various trials of working with people. It was not working out. And I had several stabs at working with younger guys that had more experience in ecom. And, for whatever reason, it just didn't quite work out. Maybe I was too old and too grumpy or just had my own views about how to do things. And actually, I've ended up going alone now rather than teaming up with anyone. Yeah.

Bret: **And you made a connection with Archer at some stage, right?**

Mike: Yeah, that happened about a year ago when Archer [Ecom Insider member] was in Thailand, because we were all mixing together, all the ecom guys were having a social night out. And I met Archer, and he heard that I was running the veterans site, and we sat down together and talked about it. It was him that really got me started on the idea of branding. And I hated the whole idea of branding. I know what branding is, but I just didn't want to get into it. I just wanted to sell stuff online without this branding nonsense. But bless him, Archer, he's a lovely guy, as you know, and very experienced and very talented, and he kind of steered me towards BGS and I got my first sniff of BGS. And once I saw what was going on and what he was doing, it was a no-brainer for me.

Bret: **Awesome. And so the success you've had with the veterans site back then, is that the same store you have now?**

Mike: No. What happened was that when COVID hit at the beginning of this year, I'd already been selling survival products on the site, but I'd never run ads to them because our primary products were pillowcases and T-shirts and stuff. But I ran some ads to the survival gear—nothing contentious: it was just a water-filter drinking straw and a survival blanket. And Facebook knocked us. They knocked me and closed down the ad account, closed the Business Manager and at one point even closed my personal Facebook account. What happened was [done] through ignorance rather than trying to deceive Facebook: I had two personal Facebook accounts so I didn't know it wasn't allowed. So that whole Facebook site got shut down completely.

So that was about February or March ... I lost the business, which was taken away from me. That business in two and a half years generated revenue of about \$600,000 with a fairly okay net profit margin. And it was just pulled away overnight. I had some organic searches coming through, but it wasn't enough to stay alive. Yeah.

Tanner: So that was the beginning of COVID, like March, right?

Mike: Yeah, and I kind of gave up completely. I decided to just take a complete break from ecom. And that's when I took a couple of weeks off, bummed around, did nothing, and realized that was too boring and decided to get back into it. So the site I have now is completely new. It's not related in any way to the old site other than—

Tanner: So hang on. Did you already join BGS when the original site went dead, or did you join us afterward?

Mike: After, yeah.

Bret: So you had a bit of a hiatus for ... doesn't sound like too long. And then we jumped on a call sometime in April, right?

Mike: Yep—not long. Around the time [I joined], in one week, I moved apartments. I was sick, my MacBook battery burst the computer open, I ran out of money, PayPal turned me down for the third loan, Shopify turned me down, and I was under a thousand dollars in the bank. I was ready to retire again. And even then, when I was talking to you, I was considering giving up completely.

Bret: Yeah. Yep.

Tanner: So what made you pull the trigger on BGS at that time? Like, you obviously didn't have a store at the time, but something made you want to start up again.

Mike: Yeah. Boredom, to be honest. I decided to try and retire again, and I'm not particularly good at it. I just get bored. So I got back on the computer and opened a store. I went against the best advice you teach, and I opened up a worldwide store in the family gift niche, which isn't a niche really, as you know—it's just the whole world, doing mugs and T-shirts and things. And I broke even on it. So this was, again, about March time. After joining, I also tried doing this new gift website. It was okay, it looked fine, broke even. But of course, it wasn't a real niche. And I was competing against the rest of the world trying to sell stuff around Father's Day. But it was a great learning ground to get me introduced to the BGS system. Because I did that, and it's still there. It's still sitting there, there's just no ads running to it. But because I learned through creating that site, creating this new website, the successful one was very easy because I'd already done it.

Bret: **So, do you want to talk about the decision of starting your new store, and how you decided on that? And how that journey looked at the start?**

Mike: Yeah, when I decided to do something, I looked at the options. Because the worldwide global site just hadn't worked [for] the family niche. So I went back to basics—which you preach, of course—which is to get into a niche that you know something about. So I looked at the military veteran thing and thought, well, let's do what Archer was trying to suggest to me, which was to run a brand, even though I hated it. Once I got into BGS and saw what you do, I wasn't afraid of running a brand anymore. It wasn't a brand, the brand just comes along with it. It was running the whole system that creates the brand for you. So I decided to get back into the veterans niche, I did a bit of research and took all the lessons I've learned previously, all the mistakes, tidied everything up, and went straight back into it.

Mike: And that's why it's been successful—I've made so many mistakes doing it previously to the same niche that I was able to approach it fresh.

Bret: **Okay. So it was the same niche, same or different products?**

Mike: Same niche. Although previously I'd been targeting British and US vets, I decided to do British only. Yeah.

Tanner: **And then, originally, you were doing pillowcases and stuff, shipping from China, but now, if I remember correctly from the jam session, you actually found a UK POD printer and everything is UK printed and shipped, right?**

Mike: Correct. And that's one of the things that encouraged me, and I decided that I'd identified—as a lot of other people that shipped from China—[that it] is going to be a problem in the future. People are just going to go against it. They're rebelling against it already. So I did find a very good UK supply that's now given us direct support lines through Slack. And talk about paradox of choice: It was forced upon me that in the warehouse, they only had black T-shirts, Gildan black T-shirts, and white mugs. And I thought, "Okay, I'll get the store going and I'll just sell black T-shirts and white mugs, and then I'll add the other colors and other variants later." I didn't need to. The success was amazing. It was a classic example of the paradox of choice. And it's amazing—I would never have taken that as a strategy of just selling black T-shirts and white mugs, yeah.

Bret: Wow.

Tanner: **What kind of an impact do you think going with a same-country supplier and manufacturer has had on your ability to sell, build a brand, influence, all that stuff?**

Mike: Yeah. It's been a big factor because I knew that people were rebelling against me in the past when I was shipping stuff in from China. Of course, I get feedback from customers saying they had no idea that it was coming from China and they wouldn't have bought it. So I knew that was an issue. So now on the site, I use that as one of the unique selling points, that it's made in Britain, and people are loving that. The comments on Facebook, people are voicing that [they're] so pleased to see [they] can buy these products and they're done in the UK. So a major, major factor.

Tanner: Okay. Yeah. I would imagine that it would, especially with your audience, right? Your audience is all about king and country and then throwing in a

third-party supplier, or even worse, worse than China, America, that wouldn't go so well [laughter].

Mike: [Laughter] You're absolutely right, Tanner. My biggest buyer is 55. It's me. It's 55-and-up British veterans. And they're very patriotic and they want to buy British, so it resonates beautifully. Yeah, you're absolutely right.

Tanner: So I want to help people kind of get a feel of what you did differently. You had this other store that worked—it got sucked out from under you. And the other store, the general store, didn't work. And you said you basically kind of put all your best feet forward to make this next store work. Give us some specifics. What did you do differently this time that you were very intentional about, the way you built and did things?

Mike: Yeah. Well, the first one was adopting a brand, which Archer had pushed me onto and I dragged my feet and got into, but primarily the success all comes from what is taught in BGS. I had a baptism of fire because I needed to get into BGS to start making some money if I wanted to be successful again. But one of the traits of veterans, one of the blessings I got, was that doggedness of being able to be focused ... Military guys are very good at following instructions. So when BGS presented to me the system and what to do day one and the 30-day onboarding, it was so easy for me just to do that. So I spent 30 days immersing myself in all the information and everybody else that's in Ecommerce Insiders have all been through that as well. That 30 days of just masses of information coming into your brain, I just took it step by step by step.

Tanner: That's great. That's what we wished more people would do!

Mike: Sorry—I'll reinforce that. Yeah, you're absolutely right. And I see that of course as well. And I could see that other people ... I mean, you present the system to everybody in the same format in just the same package, but I saw some people deciding to do it their way. And I think this is something I'd like to pass on to other people is [that] you kind of have to surrender to it and say, "Forget what I think I know and just give up to the BGS system." And say, "Okay, I'm going to follow that." And that's exactly what I did. I followed

it to the letter. And that's one of the main reasons for the success of that site. It's not me or my experience or the niche—it's following the BGS [system]. Sounds like I'm trying to sell your product, ha, but it's that good!

Tanner: I'll buy it.

Mike: I think that's one of the key things isn't it? If you follow what you've given people, you at BGS have given to people, to the letter, of course, with a bit of experience and insight and knowing your niche and some other things, then it works and of course it works. Yeah.

Tanner: That's a big thing. We, and by we, I mean Bret, worked really hard on mapping out the sequence of that initial 30-day onboarding. And we want it to go longer than 30 days, but we really put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into the thought process of what we should talk about in those first 30 days and what we should not. And it's just amazing how many people ... Everybody who uses it has success. The ones who don't have success didn't use it, or they read all through them, but didn't do it.

Mike: Yeah and decided they knew a little bit better.

Tanner: Yep, or I'll do that later or that sounds hard or I'd have to hire a developer, whatever excuses they want to tell themselves. So I mean, obviously you said you're good at following instructions, but when you came up against something that we were saying and it was contrary to what your previous experience had been or what you had thought, how hard was it for you to just stay the course and follow what we were talking about?

Mike: Oh, easy, so easy. As I say, I use that expression: "I surrendered to it." I just said, "Okay. These people know far better than I do so I'm just going to go along with it." Yeah. I mean, let's be honest. The first time I tried it, which was going to the worldwide niche of family, it didn't work, but you tell people not to do that. Archer even said to me, he said, "Mike, Tanner says do not go broad." And I thought, "No, I know better than Tanner." And I tried. And I failed, so I came back. Yep.

Tanner: Got it. No, that's great. Good feedback on that. So basically you jumped right into using EI. You jumped on a copywriting call, you got on the Facebook Fridays, you got on the jam sessions right away. Most people wait months before doing any of that stuff, but you did it right away. Tell us about the impact each of those calls had on your store and your journey.

Mike: Yeah. Okay. So I was kind of lucky because I had so much time on my hands that during the 30-day onboarding, I went through what you recommend. So I was building my site day by day, which was nice because I was able then to do each day and do it. And then, even though at times I felt a bit overwhelmed, I thought I needed to start dipping into some of the live calls, like the copywriting and the Facebook Friday, just to get an idea. But in hindsight, it was actually probably a bit too much at the time because I was focusing so much on building the store that all this other stuff—it wasn't really sinking in. So I was more of a spectator and not participating on all those calls because my site wasn't finished.

So I backed off a little bit. I even decided not to ask questions on the Facebook group because I knew the answer was probably in there somewhere. It was going to come to me anyway, and I didn't want to waste people's time. But then, once the store was built, I was able to focus more on the specific calls and what they could do for me. And the key things that come into my mind very quickly, especially with Christina and the AMA [Ask Me Anything] sessions, I began to see how helpful everybody else in the group was. I mean, genuinely, ... without mentioning names, there are two or three people in there who are probably eight-, maybe even nine-figure store owners, and they just give up all of their experience and knowledge and keep people on the right path.

And that was just wonderful. It really was. I'm a bit of a loner by choice, but they kind of—

Tanner: They sucked you in?

Mike: Yeah, they did, absolutely, and made me part of the family. And it was a really good feeling. I was a bit hesitant at first and thought, is this genuine? But it is. It's just great. I mean, there's the BGS business side, but there's the ecommerce cyber side, which is the family trying to help each other and really celebrating the successes. So coming back to the calls, the copywriting call. So once I built my store, it was then time to refine it and then try and get that conversion rate higher. I mean, it was high anyway, but to do all the little tweaks. So in the copywriting sessions, I remember Bret, we were talking about my product description—tweaking that by putting in their reviews at the top and making it look different from the other text with 5 stars and the italics and invert the commas.

Bret: I've got to say too, I loved how you were able to nail your conversation-style military language ... it wasn't the boring, plain vanilla, cut-and-paste description like other POD stores. You were using terminology and lingo that felt like you were sitting at the pub with your military mates.

Mike: Yeah. Good. Thank you. We know that don't we, that if you're going to go into a niche, you have to learn to speak the language.

Tanner: One hundred percent.

Mike: So I do that. Slowly and steadily, I refined the site to make it better. So that's through the copywriting ... [and] Facebook Friday: One of the problems I saw for me as a Facebook ads user—I mean, I use it a lot, it's predominantly what I do—[is] it changes so much, and there're so many courses out there and so many of them are out of date. But Victoria [Ecom Insider host/teacher, Facebook Ads], of course, gets you straight in there. I'd be like, "Okay, I tried this last week" and she'd say, "Great, now do this, don't do that." And that's been fantastic. So the copywriting is great. The AMA [Ask Me Anything] is superb because you get that family feeling and people passing advice to each other, things that you didn't even think of.

Mike: And the Tech Tuesday, of course, is great. I'll be honest, it was a little bit challenging because when I have a technical problem, I want an immediate answer, but of course that would cost the world to be able to do that for

everyone. So I appreciate how that works, but the Tech Tuesdays—brilliant.

And then of course, the Jam session. Oh yeah. I mean, I was looking forward to that. I really was kind of nervous, but looking forward to it as well, but that was a great session too. And I scribbled down lots of notes, and I'm sorry if I've not done all of them yet, but I've done most of the things that we talked about in the session. Yeah. Brilliant.

Tanner: If you had to sum it up, if you were telling somebody else about a jam session, what would you say the biggest value is to you and why it's important to them to use it?

Mike: Great. Yeah, I'll tell you what I was telling other people. I was telling my son and other people that were on the fringes of BGS and thinking of joining that having gone through the BGS system, ... I've had to build the site—what to incorporate, how to link up Klaviyo, Wheelio, all those other things. Of course, I think I've got it right. So the Jam session is you guys, the experts, looking at my site. You see, before that, it was me looking at my site, and I thought it was probably about 90% there, but actually it wasn't 90% there. You showed me it was like 70% there. That jam session was specific to my site and allowed me to improve it even more.

Tanner: Cool, all right. Also, seeing that you live in Thailand, I don't know if it actually did or not, but did your welcome kit show up to you?

Mike: It did, but late. Yeah. I'd already finished everything by the time it arrived.

Tanner: I was going to say, so you probably didn't get to jump into the *Revenue Optimization Handbook*.

Mike: No, but there's enough online. Christina pointed me in the right direction where you've got it somewhere in the BGS membership site. I was able to go through it enough. And actually by the time the package arrived, it was good. I was able to go through the book and just check that [I'd] covered everything, which I had.

Tanner: Yeah, you kind of went through things backward in terms of the way a normal member would, because they usually get their welcome kit within the first week.

Mike: Yeah.

Tanner: That *Revenue Optimization Handbook* is one of the first things we tell them to start with. You didn't get to do that, but you still had everything you needed in the members' area to do it, which is awesome.

What do you think the value of that handbook is? Does it line up with everything else you were doing? Do you feel like it's on point and would have helped you that much better had you had it?

Mike: Yeah. The way that it happened where the book arrived after, the book would have been much more helpful right at the beginning, of course. That thing about surrendering to the system and then just doing step by step by step, I had to find my way through the members' area for the right section. But of course the book has everything in one place.

Tanner: Laid out, yep.

Mike: It would have made life much easier. Yeah.

Bret: Hey Mike, can you run through your numbers?

Mike: Sure. The new store opened on the 10th of June. Yep, I think I ran my first ad on June 10th. And between then and now, that's about seven to eight weeks, the revenue has been US\$137,000. And about US\$35,000 on ad spend, Facebook ads. The figure I love the most as you know, is the Klaviyo list is now at 4,900 emails.

Bret: That's nice.

Mike: Which is outstanding ...

Bret: Yeah.

Mike: AOV started at \$27 and is now at \$34. Over the whole period, the conversion rate is 4.71 at the moment. Yeah, over the whole period: 4.71. It's slowly increasing as we know.

Bret: So awesome. I remember you shared your numbers with me after about two weeks and then at six weeks. I'll share the screenshots you sent me.

Email sent **16 days** after going LIVE

EMAIL: 26th of June, 2020

Hey Bret, hope you are well.

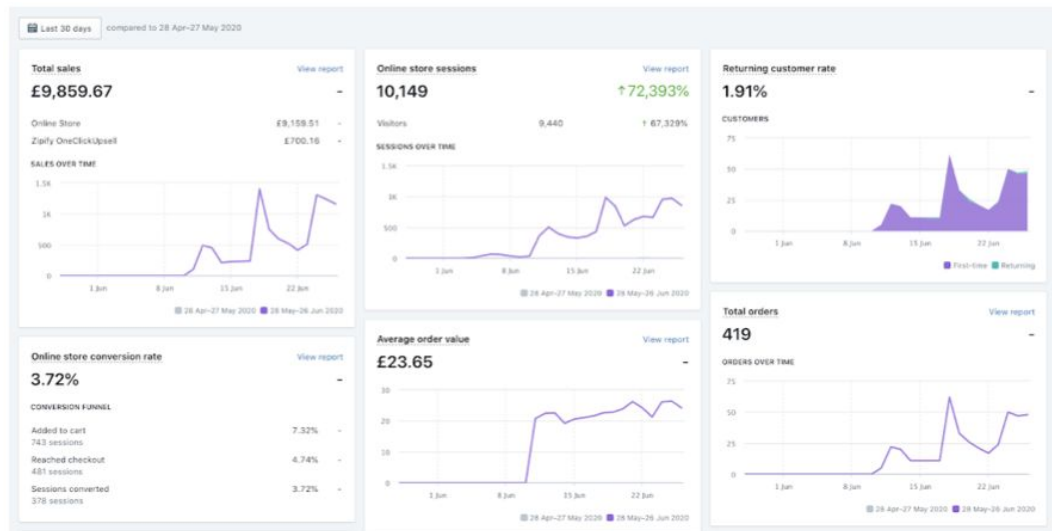
Just wanted to share some great news with you and to show you that your faith was not misplaced. My new Veterans store went live 16 days ago, and this is what's happened since then

Total sales £\$9,859.67 (US\$12,817.57)

Total ad spend—£1,900 (US\$2,489)

Klaviyo list already at 550

Thanks once again for your faith, support, and kindness :-)



Email sent 3 weeks after going LIVE

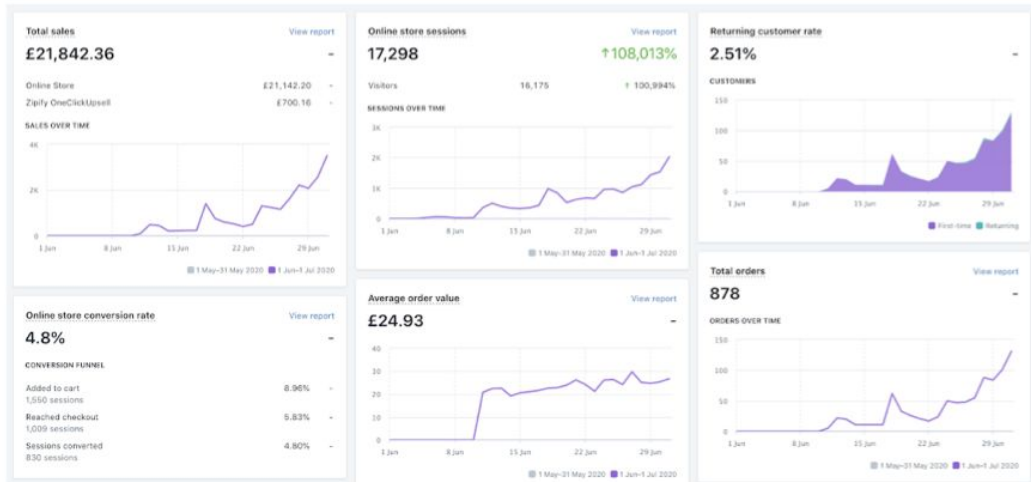
EMAIL: 1st of July, 2020

Hey mate, thank you so much. I'm just riding on a huge wave right now, thanks to some good luck, the BGS model, and help and support from the BGS/EI family :-).

The store went live on the 10th of June. Here's an update of what has happened in about 3 weeks.

Total sales £21,842.36 (US\$28,395.07)
 Total ad spend £2.948 (US\$3,832)
 Sales yesterday: £3,496 (US\$4,544.80)
 on an ad spend of £286 (US\$371.80)
 Klaviyo master list 1,110

Thanks once again for your support and kindness, mate.



Bret: And as of today, say, seven to eight weeks from starting, it's about:

Total sales US\$137,000

Total ad spend: US\$35,000

Average order value: \$34

Conversion rate: 4.71

Klaviyo list is now at 4,900 emails, right?

That's awesome, mate.

Mike: Yep. My favorite number is my Klaviyo list. It's outstanding. When I ran the other site over the space of two and a half years, the list got to 10,000. But in seven weeks, I'm already halfway there. It's just amazing.

Bret: So good. Do you have GA [Google Analytics] on the backend?

Mike: Yeah, I have ... I've set up analytics the way Aleks taught. So it's set up, but other than the bounce rate, I have no idea what it's telling me. But I know further down the line it will help.

Tanner: Okay, something else you mentioned was Klaviyo.

Mike: Yeah.

Tanner: So with your previous store, the one that did over \$600,000 but got shut down—was email a big part of it?

Mike: No, not really. I was using Mailchimp, and I didn't really know what I was doing. I had some reasonably successful campaigns, but it was very amateurish. There were no flows. I would just send out an email saying "new product." The sell rate was great.

The conversion rate on those emails was superb because it was my audience and they wanted new products. It was good. But there were no flows. You know this, a lot of the Ecom Insider people know this, that once you have Klaviyo set up, it's one of the joys. You just sit back and watch ... and let it do its thing.

Tanner: Yeah. So with this new store, I'm guessing one of the things you wanted to do better was your email.

Mike: Sure.

Tanner: Jumping into BGS, obviously we're big on email. You joined Klaviyo instead of Mailchimp, which, right there, makes a huge difference just in terms of automation.

Mike: Monstrous.

Tanner: But the other side of that is, talk to me a little bit about GSDs, and all the different GSDs that we give you and flows and all that kind of stuff.

Mike: Yeah. Everything is great, but I haven't even finished adding all the flows yet. I wished I had someone on my shoulder from BGS saying, "Okay. Do that now. Do that GSD, do that GSD, and now that one." Yeah. That would have been a help, I think.

Bret: You mean, after the 30-day onboarding?

Mike: Correct.

Tanner: We actually have training from BGS LIVE event 2018 and 2019. We did a training showing the whole customer life cycle and each of the 13 campaign types, where they go and when to implement them, and all of that. That's the one.

We're working on turning that into a training for everyone, but those presentations are inside the members area.

Mike: Absolutely. I know Christina does this very, very well, and she did it during one of the AMA sessions.

Tanner: Which flows have you used so far?

Mike: Abandoned Cart and, let me just have a quick look to remind myself—not many, to be honest. It's kind of next on my list of things to attack. Sorry, bear with me a second.

Tanner: It's fine.

Mike: Okay, yeah: the Abandoned Cart and the Welcome series. The only other flow I've got is to get a review when someone buys twice. The British veteran, 55+-year-old man seems to love Trustpilot [reviews website]. Many of them go there to check it. So I've got a flow in there that anybody that's bought twice, they get sent an email: "Please pop over to Trustpilot and give us a good review."

Tanner: Great.

Bret: Okay, cool. What I love is that even with your success so far, you've still got a huge opportunity to get that email backend up to 40–45% monthly revenue.

Mike: Absolutely. It's my next thing to focus on. Is there a BGS flow to get reviews?

Tanner: We do have a GSD about review apps and which ones are the best. And we do have a flow for feedback. It's the predelivery one that Aleks does with a gift-card flow, and it's store credit. It's super powerful. It usually results in more sales because the gift card is never equal to whatever the shirt value or product value is, and then they come back and spend even more.

Mike: Yeah, absolutely. It's something that people in the group don't seem to concentrate much on is gift cards. I learned something great in my previous commercial experience. I used to work for Virgin. One of the things we did was selling gift vouchers for experiences as a birthday present. The non redemption rate of those gift vouchers is 35%.

Tanner: Oh, yeah. It's the same online, and on any type of normal gift card.

Mike: Yeah.

Tanner: It's ridiculous.

Mike: It's immediate profit. Profit just goes straight on the bottom line.

Tanner: Yeah, you're right. We've talked about it several times. We've taught it a few times, but we've never actually put together a dedicated training on gift cards, which is something we should do.

Mike: Yeah. I tried it on my other military site. It just didn't work, probably because I didn't market it well enough.

Tanner: Are you using them on this site?

Mike: No, not yet. It's on the list.

Tanner: Okay.

Bret: What about the campaigns? Have you been taking advantage of the holiday campaigns or any other?

Mike: No, not yet ... I will. Again, it's on my list. There're so many things to do, which is great.

Bret: Imperfect action, right? It's great. Inspiring for all the members who might doubt themselves for not doing everything fast enough.

Mike: Oh, it's wonderful. Keep feeding me. The only campaigns I've been doing is ... now that I'm capturing an audience of 4,900, they're loving the idea of new designs because the new designs are always all targeted toward that niche.

I've already got in the can 60 new designs that are not yet on the site. And I'm adding, not exact numbers, but about four a week, because my niche is broken down into Navy, Army, Air Force and Marines. So that's a nice number, four. So every week or so, I put four new products in there that are

targeted to each of those sub niches and then send them an email that says, "New product! Get in there quick before it's advertised." And I did one a few days ago, and the opening rate was superb. I'm so amazed by the opening rate. I'll just have a quick look.

Bret: And that's an email once a week? So an announcement once a week?

Mike: Yeah. That's my intention is to email once a week. And it was Archer who told me ... Bless you Archer. Back then, I said, as most people do, "I'm not emailing people. They'll go away," and Archer said, "Yep. They will. Those that don't want to buy, they'll go away. But the ones that will buy, will stay." And I thought through that because I'm reluctant to do it. And I'm going to do that every week.

Okay, so the email I sent on the 31st of July—the opening rate was 43%.

Tanner: Wow!

Bret: Wow! Man.

Mike: Amazing.

Bret: And also, I'm keen to hear, how have you gone about getting designs? Has that been an easy process or a lot of trial and error?

Mike: Yeah, a bit of trial and error, but I had the experience of running my other site before. At the moment, I'm blessed. I've got two ... with degrees in industrial design.

Tanner: Oh wow!

Mike: I know. They're awesome. I'm not going to tell you how much I pay them an hour, but it's good. They're creative, and because they're professionally trained, their output rate is immense. They can come up with three or four designs an hour. So I just keep feeding them. I use Trello.com, and Trello hits them up. And what I've done is, I've put the concept in the left column and I don't assign the designer. I said to the designers, "Go into that column

and choose one that you think you have a good idea for or [that] you could mold." And hot off the press, a couple of days ago, I recruited a veteran graphic designer, which is great. And he'll go on the "About Us" page.

Bret: Okay, great! So do you mind unpacking your process for finding design concepts to send to your designers?

Mike: That's a recent change. My process is, I just scour the internet of competitors, but not just my direct competitors like other veterans sites. I might go into Etsy because Etsy is a wonderful tool of memes and sayings and expressions that are selling well. And I translate that across and think, *"Well, okay, if I modify that slightly into my niche, it would still resonate."* And I'll be honest. I got that from Gearbubble—Don, bless him. Don Wilson at Gearbubble, he teaches that process of using other sites to trigger ideas.

Tanner: Totally.

Mike: Yeah because I'm not particularly creative. That's not my thing, but I'm good at copying.

Tanner: That's a really good piece to share is that you're running a POD site, but you're not an artistic or a creative brain type and you're doing it successfully.

Mike: Yeah.

Bret: Okay, so ... what does your week look like? Is that something you do every day or once a week or what?

Mike: Well, I've changed recently. One of the great things that's happened within the past couple of weeks is that my son, 32-year-old son, Louis, he's a marketing director of a telecoms company. And for a couple of years, he'd been watching me and saying, "Yeah, Dad's just tinkering around." But when I showed him my figures, he kind of sat up and thought, y'know, I might have a go at that. Because of COVID lockdown, he's got a little bit of time on his hands.

He's in the EI group. And he's already doing his own onboarding of learning the whole ecom thing because he's not really aware of ecom. So he's training himself, and I'm drip feeding him the right things at the right time. In summary, he's very quickly going to take over as what we would call the COO or and even the CEO.

So my intention is that he'll take over all the operational side, customer support, managing staff, all the VAs and things (“all”—there's only three or four of them). And I will look after technical bits of the site, the back end of it and do the process of coming up with new design ideas.

Yeah, so that's changed recently. So I've identified [that] as much time as I can possibly spend on maintaining that process of coming up with ideas, the better it will be. And that's why I've now got 60 in the can, which is awesome. They're all good designs that might sell a few, might sell a lot. The more I can do that, the more money we're going to make for sure because that's what we do. There's something—

Tanner: You're finding your highest and best use.

Mike: Yeah, absolutely right, yeah. And because I'm a veteran, ... if a veteran's complaining about something we've done, it hits me too much. So, I'd recommend it to a few friends that are starting off: as soon as you possibly can hand over that job to someone else, that shields you from the negative.

Tanner: I couldn't agree more. I've said that for years because I'm the same way. I get emotionally involved because it's my baby and you're insulting my baby and all of a sudden ... So, the best thing in the world was for me to get out of customer service and the best thing for the customer too, [was] for me to not be involved.

Mike: Agreed.

Tanner: It's hard for me to be objective.

Mike: Very much so. Absolutely. Sorry, I've just remembered: the thing I wanted to pass on to people is that—it might just be the POD heads that this applies

to; there's plenty of those in the group—the designs that I thought wouldn't sell well have turned out to be my biggest winners. There's a T-shirt that we've run (over the past four weeks), and it was “Kneel for the Fallen.” It was just a picture of a guy kneeling down for his fallen buddy, rifle turned upside down.

I looked at that design, got the designer to do a different version that I'd seen and I thought, I'll just stick it in the store. We sold 1,600 in the span of two weeks. Crazy.

Bret: That's crazy.

Mike: It's mental. And other designs that I thought were going to sell well, they fell flat on their face. Yeah.

Bret: There you go.

Mike: The advice I'd pass on to people is trial. And now I give my designers very often, about 90% of the time, I give them a creative liberty. I actually put in the Trello card, "Up to you" [and] "I want these words, but you come up with a concept," and quite often I look at it and go, "That's horrible. I would never buy that," but I let it go through because I'm not a judge. I've learned that quickly, yeah.

Bret: I was wondering if you can share any Facebook ad gems with the POD guys that's been working for you? Are there any things that have worked well, or do you just throw it and see what sticks?

Mike: I'm a real amateur at the Facebook ads thing. It's something I either need to strengthen or contract out. Victoria's been extremely helpful. And actually that's the only advice I could pass on is, as I mentioned earlier in the call, the Facebook strategies change daily. Victoria has that experience and live testing that she's doing, that she can pass on to us. About two weeks ago, I hit her with about six or seven questions, relating to me, to do with retargeting lookalike audiences. And she answered them beautifully. So that's on my list as well, to build up the lookalikes and things. Yeah.

Tanner: Bret, that's actually a good way to summarize as you wrap up ... He's living proof that traffic's not your problem. Even being a complete novice at traffic, ... he's getting ridiculous results because, like he said, he followed what we teach and he focused on revenue optimization over becoming a traffic master.

Bret: Yeah. Awesome.

Tanner: Bret, I think you nailed it. I think this is awesome. I really can't think of anything else to ask.

Bret: Okay, yeah, I agree man. Thanks so much, Mike. We appreciate how honest and open you were. This will help fellow EI members tremendously.

Tanner: Yeah, and this is actually the truth of what EI is about. It's that open, sharing family, everybody, all ships rise together, and you're demonstrating that. And I appreciate that very, very much.

Mike: Thank you. Thank you.

Alrighty ... That's all folks!

You know what's next. Go and "GSD" and then report back in the Facebook group with your results, or do a post to say, "THANK YOU" for Mike's awesome share!

Tanner, Matt, and Bret