

Featured Guest Interviews

Kevin Espiritu (@epicgardening, epicgardening.com)

Kevin Espiritu: [00:00:00] Hi, my name is Kevin Espiritu. I run a company called Epic Gardening, which at this point, I believe we're one of the bigger gardening education platforms out there with the mission of teaching the world how to grow its own food, how to teach people how to grow their own food.

[00:00:14] So we're at Epic Gardening on pretty much any social platform, and we've got a store, shop.EpicGardening.com.

Diego Footer: [00:00:21] You've done a great job building the brand of Epic Gardening over time. When you think about branding a business, what does it mean to you now?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:00:34] Yeah, I think when I first started it, it was called something different. I had called it Xpontics. I was only doing hydroponics at the time.

[00:00:45] I think when I changed the name, that's a huge component of the brand, the idea there was to contrast the market in a way. It was probably more subconscious than conscious way back then, but the idea was, okay, it's about gardening. Maybe I'll put gardening in the title, simple.

[00:01:01] Will help with SEO, will help with people just typing gardening into YouTube or however they're searching online. And then I went with the Epic because a lot of these gardening companies have a flowery or softer branding, and I wanted to reframe how you would think about gardening and decided to go with that route, and sorta try to make it a little bit larger than life.

[00:01:21] And that was—that was the way that I approached it, at least the naming. Now, obviously, there's a lot more that goes into branding we could talk about, though.

Diego Footer: [00:01:30] Yeah, and the name is something that's—it's easy to remember. It's easy to repeat. Like, it just sticks with you. So I think you picked a good name in that sense. As you've grown bigger, how have you tried to maintain consistency across everything?

[00:01:42] Not just using the name in places, but, this is what we do, and this is what we don't do. I think a lot of businesses, they get can...they get a lot of great ideas around what they want their brand to be, and a lot of those ideas start to conflict over time.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:01:59] Yeah. I wouldn't say I'm the best at that. I have done a lot of different things with the business, so moving from the blog to YouTube, so text to video then going into the podcast, going into different forms of video on social and going into physical products like books. And then certainly, with the rest of it, going into raise bed products and other sorts of things that we carry, I've delved into quite a bit.

[00:02:26] And I actually do think that I wouldn't say has caused brand confusion, but I think it's caused some people to not really realize the web of the business that has been built over

time. And so, that to me feels like a natural extension of a creator-style business, which is what I would consider myself because I really started out by putting out content, and then have stacked different businesses on top and below that content.

[00:02:52] And as far as this is what we do, this is what we don't do, there's certainly like values that I wouldn't compromise on. Like I'm not—I'm not about to promote companies that I don't agree with the philosophy of, using tons of synthetic fertilizers or using all sorts of sprays that, for me, it's just not into my ethos.

[00:03:13] So I would say I try to steer clear of that, which sometimes does mean turning down some pretty significant chunks of change. But besides that, I'm actually down to take a flyer on a lot of different ideas as long as it's within the core mission of the company.

Diego Footer: [00:03:27] It's gotta be closely related to what you do.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:03:32] Yeah. Yeah, for sure. For sure. I think if I was going to do something even slightly adjacent, I would do what I did, which is create a sub-brand, I suppose, underneath the main brand with the Epic Homesteading Instagram and YouTube channel, where I'm a little bit more free to post things that I personally find interesting, knowing that the audience size is going to be lower.

[00:03:55] So talking about the solar and talking about gray water systems and things like this that certainly still an audience, certainly still could be honestly its own business completely, but I partitioned it off, so I don't pollute the main channel or the main platforms with that type of content.

Diego Footer: [00:04:15] When you think about the main brand Epic Gardening, how close would you say that brand overlaps with Kevin, who you are?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:04:26] Over time? More and more, I would say. Over time, more and more because I've become more free to post more of my flavor and my approach to things versus being more stayed about it all and keeping the personality behind the curtain a little bit.

[00:04:47] Certainly with the blog, it's taxed. It's tough to get a lot of personality in there and that still runs like a very informationally-dense blog, but as we've evolved with YouTube and the podcast and these sorts of things where you can showcase more of the personality, I've added a lot more of that in is I've seen that people seem to enjoy it.

[00:05:06] I seem to enjoy it, so it's a win-win and things keep going on from there. And to me, the more you do that, the more you solidify the uniqueness of the brand because someone could try to be you or do the video the way that you do it or however, but it'll always come off like they're trying to do it, so there's only one you, and that's, to me a huge strength.

Diego Footer: [00:05:27] How hard did you think it was for you to find that voice? Like, we all are who we are when the camera's off, but then when you start creating content, and it could just be as even in post, the language you use in posts or how somebody might interact at a farmer's market.

[00:05:44] I think a lot of people dial down who they are. And it's only when they lose that reservation and kind of just say, Hey, this is me that I think you start to see creators, brands,

content creators really start to take off because people just...we're all people looking to connect with other people and they say, oh, okay. That's who that person actually is.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:06:07] Yeah. I think it's tricky. I think for me, there's a... There's a self-discovery of things you do in your own life. Like, I did Toastmasters for a long time, public speaking club. I did improv comedy for about 18 months. I went through all the levels and graduated out of the class and did some performing here and there.

[00:06:26] And so that, that helped me because that was in a real-world situation desensitizing you to acting silly in front of people you don't know or giving a speech on something in front of people that you know. And I feel like if you can do those sorts of things, then not only in your normal life are you more free to be who you are, but also when you're putting things out there in the world, you're free to just say, you know what, I've done more...

[00:06:51] Quote, unquote embarrassing things that didn't really seem to harm me that much. And so, this should be no problem. And I also think just you do have to like, it's a personal thing of working through the fears, I suppose, of being judged or being seen, especially when you're putting content out with your face on it.

[00:07:09] A lot of people are afraid of that and that just takes time to get over. Some people never really do get over that.

Diego Footer: [00:07:16] And for the people that don't, do you think Epic Gardening could be the brand that it is today if people never saw you? So, if all your content was just how you see the world through your eyes, it's all looking out at a landscape, at a garden, you talking off video, but it's just not you on camera. Do you think you can make it work?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:07:43] I could make it work because it was technically working, but certainly, the level it's at now, I think there would be less than a 0.1% chance you would ever get to that point because people don't connect with faceless accounts in general to get to scale.

[00:08:01] How many people can you name that are extremely well-known or brands that don't have a face attached to them? Maybe Banksy, and that's it. I can't think of anyone else. And so that's very, very, very hard to do. The truth is pretty clear that we connect typically just with people, even less so brands.

[00:08:18] Even though they do have mascots or faces attached to them. And even less than that, a faceless account that's just looking out at the world and opining, so I think it'd be very difficult if not impossible.

Diego Footer: [00:08:30] And if we look at brand tying into commerce and how it loops into this series that I'm doing is, is at the end of the day, most people listening to this are running some sort of business.

[00:08:40] They're trying to sell something. And a lot of people, customers in general, I think, buy from brands because they like the brand. Whether that's Coca Cola or Tesla or Apple, they just want that product. Now they know that that brand stands for something and brings a certain level of product and quality to the table.

[00:09:05] But there's also just the name itself. Hey, I have this car, or I have this thing and people identify with that. How big of a factor of your audience do you think it is that I...that just supports Epic Gardening because they've read everything you've put out, they've watched the videos, and they want to just support you and be a part of what you're doing? And if they get some good product, then it's a bonus along the way.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:09:36] I've really wrestled with that, and I've tried to design the business in such a way that even if that's true, as in, they are supporting it simply because they liked the content, they've connected with it.

[00:09:48] I am still offering best in class so that I don't have to rely on that because to me it feels like, I think what you're saying is accurate. I think a lot of people have, especially during the pandemic, have connected with Epic Gardening and have discovered a new love, and it's persisting.

[00:10:05] It's not just something they picked up in the pandemic, and they're leaving behind. So maybe it's influenced their life in some way or flavored their life. And they have some gratitude to the content and to the company for that, and I guess to myself, and so they want to support.

[00:10:19] So that's certainly part of it. Maybe even it's more than half right now, but my goal at least, is look, that's great. And I'm very grateful and humbled by that, but I still want to be offering best in class products and services so that it's not the requirement.

[00:10:33] I don't have to rely on the fact that you like me to purchase the product. You should—you should have an amazing experience with the product so that it itself becomes its own marketing. And then, if you've got both of those playing in concert with one another, then it's unstoppable.

Diego Footer: [00:10:52] Yeah, I like that kind of diversified approach to it all, right? Like it's, the product works for itself.

[00:10:56] You help the product or just—and there's...different people come to you through different things. Some see the product and say, I want that, some see you. If you think about people now trying to build a following, and let's say they're not even content creators. Like, they're not going the content creator route.

[00:11:15] They're running a small business, and for businesses to survive, you need that core audience, that core customer base that just comes back over time. How would you advise them to think about building up those into tried-and-true fans?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:11:36] Yeah, the way that I see most people do it, I look at—I'm more, I'm way more in touch with the smaller profiles and platforms in the gardening world than the rest of the content I consume because generally, the people I consume in those worlds are already established.

[00:11:52] But I see a lot of people in the garden and farm world trying to build the audience. And it's clear that they're trying, right? Cause they're doing certain things, and it's—there's a tell that people are doing.

[00:12:03] I think the thing that people forget is there's two sides. There's two ways to look at it, and both, I think, are a bit wrong, and you have to forge some sort of middle way. And so the one way would be, someone who's not concerned, really, about the value that they're offering the people that would follow them.

[00:12:21] And so I see a lot of people that post... I don't know another way to put it, like selfish content where they're really just blogging about their day, and they're hoping people follow along and are interested in that.

[00:12:33] Now, that certainly can work, but that's like sort of aspirational lifestyle content that I think it's difficult to establish that unless you have something extraordinary about yourself, right? If you're really attractive or you're living in a really interesting place or something like that. That of course, would be easier.

[00:12:51] Then the other people I think that perhaps do it incorrectly are those who...they know that tactics, right? For example, right now on Instagram, if you're doing reels, you're probably going to have a better time than if you're posting just normal static image posts. That's just the way that it's working right now.

[00:13:08] So I see a lot of people that are doing that, but at least—this is all my opinion. They're putting out reels that are engagement-bait type of content where you have to wonder, what are they following you for? What do you want someone to be following you for?

[00:13:25] And putting out that type of content to attract that type of person, the classic example would be the Instagram model who has a lot of followers, but the followers don't really care about her at all in some sense, because they're probably mostly male, and they probably just want to look at the photos.

[00:13:45] And so it's difficult—if that's what you want, then that makes sense. And there's ways to build a business around that, but you have to think about the type of content—what's the type of content you're putting out?

[00:13:53] How valuable is it? And then who would it attract? Do you want those people to be the followers of your company?

Diego Footer: [00:14:01] If you think about that from a farm example. Say you didn't have Epic Gardening. And let's say now, you're running a market farm, and you're selling locally in the San Diego area. What would you try and do? What are some strategies you'd try to do to build up that following which in turn helps get product out there?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:14:21] So I would pick my platform first. So if you're not a video person, you don't want your face on video, then you have to accept that YouTube is probably not for you and maybe even, like a TikTok or an Instagram might not be for you as well, unless you're going to just do photos.

[00:14:41] So first of all, you got to pick your platform. And second of all, I would triple down on the platform that you decided to go with, because it's going to take some time. The first platform you build is the hardest. From there, when you have a core base of followers, you can direct them to the other platforms.

[00:14:58] Hey, if you like my longer form stuff, I have a YouTube channel or I'll say, Hey, if you prefer to read, then go check out the Epic Gardening blog, for example. So there's the platform selection. And then as far as like the nitty-gritty practicals of the content I might put out if I was a market farmer, I would be really interested in...

[00:15:16] Just thinking from the perspective of someone who goes to a farmer's market, although I do know a lot of market farmers, so I know the ins and outs, but I would be doing cool tool profiles. Hey, here's how we cut your lettuce for you. And here's how it gets to the market.

[00:15:30] Or I would do maybe a collage or a montage of the using the Quick Cut Greens Harvester on the row, dumping it into the laundry machine washer or the bubbler, drying it out, bagging it up. It shows up at the market. You hand it to a customer, and you have this little quick video where it's the full loop of that product's life cycle.

[00:15:50] If you got really crazy, you'd go from seed, and you just save the video. That'd be one thing I might think about. I might do behind the scenes of different types of tasks that a consumer might be like, Hmm. It's interesting to see every step that does go into making my food.

[00:16:06] Or I do, farm humor behind the scenes, like funny things that happened on the farm, or I might do day in the life, lifestyle content. Here's what happened. Hey, I'm a San Diego market farmer, and here's my day.

[00:16:20] And then you do a whole, maybe it's a YouTube video, maybe it's an Instagram post, who knows, but you do a whole thing of, I wake up at this time. My first task is this, you're narrating it. You're giving us a slice of life. So I think there's a lot of ways to do it.

[00:16:32] The thing I think you have to think about is how do you make this interesting to people who are never going to farm ever in their whole life and may actually not even ever purchase from you? Now, I'm not saying that's who you want necessarily to follow, but if you could make it interesting to someone who's never going to farm and might not even live in the same city, you better believe it's probably going to be interesting to your core market and that'll help it spread and get it out to those people.

Diego Footer: [00:16:57] Yeah. I think that those are some interesting strategies, because you look at a lot of farm accounts these days, and it's like what you were saying around seeing tells. Like, a lot of them are the same, and I think people have lapsed into, I need to post something, so something is better than nothing.

[00:17:18] Instead of thinking about what's the best use of this post? And maybe I only post twice a week, but they're strategic posts. Meaning like what you said, what are you... Why are you cultivating this customer? What is the brand stand for? What do you want this customer to do or to know about the brand and understand?

[00:17:43] And too many just are like, I'm out here, I got my phone snap, a shot, throw it up, and there it is. And it is like some of those posts that you talk about, here's the sunrise on my farm. Okay why am I coming back for more of that if it's just so much of that?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:18:01] I agree. I think maybe, when you look at people's farm accounts, I think there's only so much to be said for taking a shot of your produce or taking a shot of your...

[00:18:14] The thing is, we fatigue to content online. Our attention spans are short. We fatigue to certain things to the point where you do become functionally blind to certain things that you're watching or reading because you've seen them so much, and every time you do stop and look at them, you don't get the reward that you want.

[00:18:34] And so every time you stop and look at that sunrise like you're saying, it probably just says, beautiful morning on the farm. Can't wait to get some produce into your hands tonight. So there's no—unless I know that farmer personally, it's hard for me to get some sort of big interest in that.

[00:18:51] And a lot of value out of that. So I think you're totally right. Video plays—we're in a world where short-form video is absolutely dominating right now. You just gotta think, the best thing I would say is think about what you do online when you're scrolling around looking at stuff and really get honest and be like, if I saw my own post and my own feed, would I just scroll by it?

[00:19:12] Chances are maybe I probably just would, because think about what you do. Would you scroll by your own posts? Probably don't post it. Why would you submit someone else to that content, then?

Diego Footer: [00:19:22] Yeah, I'll never forget. I interviewed somebody once, and there's an, Oh, my wife, when she scrolls through Instagram, it's just her thumb is not stopping.

[00:19:30] And I'm like, ah, that doesn't sound right. And then you watch some people on Instagram, and that is exactly what they're doing. Like, the screen is not stopping. So it's, what are you doing to make them stop, where they know, Hey, I got to stop at this account or whatever I'm seeing, I got to stop at?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:19:48] Yeah. Yeah. And I think to go back to something you said earlier, Diego, where you were saying, would it have gotten as big without me getting out there and putting my face on the platforms? And that's why I think the answer is no because part of it is now that I've put out hundreds of videos on YouTube, thousand, over a thousand podcasts, like...

[00:20:06] There is this piece of me out there online that's connecting with everyone in some way. And so, if they know my face or my voice, they do stop and see, what's up. Oh, what did Kevin put out today? Because I don't post, I do post quite often, but I really try my hardest to not put anything out I don't think is like, in a baseball metaphor, like at the very least like a double.

[00:20:31] And so, if that's the case, like if that's good, every time you look at my content, you're going to look at it every time. If I start wavering, and I have 15 posts in a row or 15 YouTube videos in a row where I'm just missing the mark, that's all it takes for someone to be like, I like this channel for three years, and now I don't like it anymore because he messed up five times in a row.

[00:20:51] I mean, the fickleness of your collective audiences is astonishing. And you really have to be careful to not waste it.

Diego Footer: [00:21:00] Do you plan out your posts on things like Instagram? Looking weeks ahead, countering it out?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:21:04] No. I don't really... I don't really. I have ideas on what is coming down the pipeline based on what I'm growing. But a lot of the times, the last couple of posts I put up on Instagram were just things I noticed that were happening in the garden.

[00:21:21] So I have a—my first figs came ripe, and I had some purslane growing in the garden that a lot of people would think as a weed, it's really common, but it's actually quite edible and quite nutritious. And there's a lot of things you can do with it. A lot of cultures actually just use it as a vegetable.

[00:21:39] And so I was like, okay, my options are just eat the fig and move on with my life or pull the purslane out and cook it or compost it. Or is it interesting enough that I could share something about it that someone would like? And if so, how would I package that that they would find it engaging?

[00:21:58] And so you do have to think about it from that lens, in my opinion. You've got the lens of, is this—is this harvesting this fig, is that interesting? Not really, 'cause let's say someone who was a maybe more new at creating content might just hold the fig in their hand and take a photo and say, can't wait to eat this. It's been a year. This is going to be so delicious, right?

[00:22:23] And so that's not, that's like level zero effort. Whereas, I guess the next step would be like, cut it in half and show a cross section, that's more beautiful. Then, oh, could you do some sort of video around it? Can you add education on top of that?

[00:22:35] Can you add a good pace, almost like you're directing a movie? Can you add some humor to that, some sound effects, some texts? What are you putting in the caption there? There's all these different layers to it that you're building a micro movie almost.

Diego Footer: [00:22:52] How do you view, with your content, the Venn diagram of entertainment and education? Where are you going for, for an overlap there?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:23:02] I would say until recently, it's been almost all education, but I've added more entertainment in because it's sort of like, multiplier on the reach of the education side. And as long as I'm not going full entertainment, because that's not really the mission of what I'm trying to do, if I can add in 20, 30% of something that makes someone chuckle or someone laugh or some stupid little saying that I'll make up, then that helps people because they're going to watch it longer.

[00:23:27] They're going to maybe engage with it more. They might send it to a friend because they think it's funny. That friend looks at it, they learned something. People are going to comment on it more, they're going to remark because the thing that makes things spread is human emotion.

[00:23:40] For the most part, it's—hopefully you don't play on this side, but it's anger or fear. And then you have joy, surprise, and humor, or aspiration. Like, these sorts of emotions, that's

what makes you physically take your thumbs and tag a friend and send it to them because you want them to experience the emotion you just experienced, right?

[00:24:00] Like you send a funny video to someone you want them to laugh. And so, if you don't have any of that in your content, then it's probably not going very well.

Diego Footer: [00:24:10] Yeah, I love that shareable point where you think about the content that we interact with that somebody said earlier, too. The best content that I consume is stuff where I'll watch it, and I'll want to send it to my wife or send it to a friend or somebody and be like, oh, check this out.

[00:24:22] Like, totally true. It's these little quirky things and yeah, I look at content that I've done in the past. I think, how shareable is this? And unless somebody's doing that exact specific application, maybe not really, I think a lot of your content on the educational side, can be very shareable.

[00:24:38] So I think, I think making something that, Hey, it's I want the user to enjoy it. Plus, you can also send it to somebody else, which then helps. Hopefully, they send it to somebody else. And then that's how you build the following.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:24:51] Yeah, I agree. I think you have to strike a balance, right? Cause sometimes, just because a piece of content looks like it underperformed compared to your past history or whatever the case may be, it might be the case that it just is a smaller topic in general.

[00:25:06] And it's meant to reach less people because less people are interested in... I don't know, flame weeding your crop or something like that. Although, I think that has a chance to go viral if you flame weed it, if you filmed it correctly.

[00:25:17] That aside, there are certain topics that have large reach, certain topics that have small reach. So sometimes, you can't judge a piece based on just the raw metrics 'cause you know, sometimes it's just not as interesting or not the reach is not as big.

Diego Footer: [00:25:34] What have you learned about text in the body of your Instagram posts? So we're in a world, we just mentioned this, where people scroll fast and the image stops them, and then maybe they read, maybe they don't.

[00:25:48] And you're somebody who actually posts long blocks of text in your Instagram feed. How have you found that that's worked?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:26:01] Ah, that's a good question. I don't really know. I think what I try to do is... You have this idea of a classic marketing funnel, right? Where you have top of the funnel, bottom of the funnel, and you have sales coming are coming out at the bottom of that funnel.

[00:26:15] And so I almost think of, for example, Instagram is a great one because it's my favorite social network, for sure. So I think about it more than the others, even though YouTube is definitely more important, so I should probably fix that, but either way.

[00:26:29] Let's say I'm doing an Instagram reel. I really want the reel itself to stand on its own, the caption exists as a bottom of the funnel bonus for those who are more engaged. And so

given that framing, the caption should be meatier. It should be more detailed. It should have some more of the nitty gritty, less interesting, quote, unquote “stuff.”

[00:26:49] Because if you weren't interested in it, you weren't going to read it anyways, no matter what it said. You'd scroll onto the next reel or the next video, the next post. And so for those who are, I think the caption is that sort of, Hey, look, you really care about this?

[00:27:03] Okay, here's how I spaced that pumpkin. Here's how I pruned it. Here's how I fertilized it. And here's some problems I experienced, some of the really detailed stuff that, really it is what serves the mission 'cause that's really teaching people how to grow.

Diego Footer: [00:27:17] For people who are doing educational content, I'm sure you see a lot of people who you, I don't wanna say are doing it wrong, but you maybe think they're shortchanging themselves in terms of how they're presenting their material on a platform like Instagram, and you have an education focused brand.

[00:27:37] How would you...what do you think are some of the keys to educating on a platform like Instagram?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:27:42] I think... Something I think a lot of people will do wrong is they assume too much about the audience or the people watching. So they assume that these people watching know every piece of terminology that they know. Obviously, that's not true.

[00:28:01] If you're educating, by definition, they would hopefully know less than you or aspire to know as much as you. So to me, I try to speak in plain English. Or if I'm going to define a term, I will define it.

[00:28:13] I'll say oh, this means a tomato stem has stowed the potency along the whole stem. And I'll say basically all that means is it has the ability to produce roots kind of wherever. And so, is that the botanically perfect definition? It's not, but it's pretty—it's close enough that it doesn't really matter for the end watcher that they get the point.

[00:28:36] And as long as I plain English-ify any real terminology I'm using, I think that's really smart. I think that... It's this idea of sell them what they want, give them what they need. And you could think of the whole Instagram format as something highly engaging to make them watch it so that they then come out the other end having learned something as a by-product of just consuming the content. It's a nebulous phrasing there, but that's how I think about it.

Diego Footer: [00:29:08] What about written content itself? You started with a blog, it's evolved over time as just how we consume content has evolved. Do you think blogging is still something that has a valid purpose for a brand?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:29:22] Yes and no. I think that if you were a market farm, for example, I don't think there's a lot of value in developing a robust blog because of the raw amount of time it takes to get a blog really going.

[00:29:39] I had a friend recently ask me, she was in a completely different area, but asked me if it was worthwhile to start a blog for the purposes of selling more copies of her book and speaking engagements. But also, maybe that blog could generate some income as well.

[00:29:53] And I said, it is worth it. Blogging still can work. You can start a blog from nothing today, and it can still work, except for the fact that you probably have to go at it for... I would say at least two years and committed to it, pretty dedicated, pretty high level for it to really start paying back.

[00:30:11] And so, if you're not going to do that, I think it's smarter to take the example of the market farmer in San Diego. Obviously you'll have a website, and you can put some basic stuff up there, but use the platforms people are already on to communicate your message like Instagram or YouTube or Facebook or whatever.

[00:30:27] Because that's where people already are. They already did the hard work of getting people to one place. Blogs, you're going to have to build from nothing in the eyes of Google and your audience to get people to come there. So it's much harder now, I think.

Diego Footer: [00:30:42] What about another form of written content, emailing? A more direct route to the customer than even social media, because it's... I guess they're making a decision, Hey, am I going to open this or not? And if they open it, they're likely reading it or at least skim reading it. What are your thoughts on dedicating time to consistently emailing a list?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:31:07] I think it's extremely smart because you have to think about what you truly own online and what you don't own.

[00:31:14] And so what you do own, emails. So an email list, you own that. A blog, you own that. And that is another good reason to start when you have an owned asset that you actually—no one's taking your blog down. Someone could delete your Instagram tomorrow if you do something weird, and you own, I suppose if you get into this, you own people's phone numbers.

[00:31:34] If you have some sort of texting signup list or something like that. So you own contact lists, you own a blog. That's it. Every other platform are fantastic, but the trade-off is that you don't really own the audience there because if that account doesn't exist, neither does anything else.

[00:31:50] And so I think it's extremely important to email. I've undervalued it slightly. Mostly because before I started selling products, I didn't really have much to say in an email or at least I felt I didn't. Now that I do have products and we've been building the emails and the texts lists, then it's extremely important to be doing that. The problem I've been running into is just not having stock.

[00:32:10] So it's hard for me to email and educate around, let's say, raised beds or seed starting trays or something and not have it in stock to sell, that's rude, but, yeah, I think if you can do that, you have a one-to-one direct line to each person in that list that they can build a personal relationship with you.

[00:32:27] There's plenty of people out there in all verticals that have email lists that are absolutely crushing it. And that's their main asset, is their list.

Diego Footer: [00:32:38] I love the point about the owning a platform. I remember when I first started Permaculture Voices back in, I don't know, maybe 2011, 2012, at that time.

[00:32:46] Getting on Facebook and launched the Facebook and Facebook just went insane there for a while. And it was like one day, they changed the algorithm and boom posts that were getting, I'll make this up, but let's say 500 likes, the next day it was 50. And if you had built your business around that growth, that amount of reach, like all of a sudden, like it changed.

[00:33:11] So while it's great that we've talked a lot about Instagram and platforms like that, develop a list 'cause like you said, you own it at the end of the day. And if something does happen in the algorithm or somebody buys them out or if something gets filtered, like you said, you do something wrong with your account, it's gone.

[00:33:28] And then what are you going to do? Because as great as these platforms are for selling stuff, they're equally as bad if they're suddenly gone.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:33:38] Yeah. That's what it is. I think when I started building the blog, I was trying to obviously just get some income going. And so, once you solve that problem, then you have the problem of what happens if the income stops coming in.

[00:33:53] And so I said, okay, I guess I'll start a YouTube channel because then at least, there'll be some ad revenue coming in on that side. And then I, on the blog, I had an Amazon affiliate account and I said, what happens if Amazon changes their commission? Much like you were talking about with the Facebook algorithm. And lo and behold, they've done it twice now.

[00:34:10] And they also can just ban your account sometimes. Sometimes that can happen. And so that hasn't happened to me, but it could. And there's—or they just turn the affiliate program off. And so you have to think about all these things that could destroy your business and build the thing next that, that hedges you against that.

[00:34:26] For me, I was like, why work with brands or recommend Amazon stuff 24/7 if I can just develop my own products and sell direct. Then I, again, it's pure, right? No one can take that away from me, except for the fact that my product could not be good and someone wouldn't buy it anymore, but that's really the only thing, no one—no third party is going to turn off the faucet on me.

Diego Footer: [00:34:53] How would you convey to somebody today the long cut? Like, to build an audience, to build a following? While everybody now gets instant gratification on these social platforms to actually, I think, build an audience, for most people, it takes a very, very long time. Now there's obviously some people who go viral very quick, but those are the outliers.

[00:35:25] And in I don't even think they should be looked at, but for most people like platforms are built over years. Like you said, two years for a blog. You know, a long time. And a lot of people, when they start this, they want to see results. Like, I'll post today. I want to see it tomorrow.

[00:35:41] They don't—they have a hard time thinking, oh, I got to do this for two, three years before I might see results. What would you say to them?

Kevin Espiritu: [00:35:55] Yeah, I think we're—there are phases online it seems like where it's easier and harder to build audiences. We were recently in a semi-dark phase, before TikTok existed. For a couple years, it was just hard in all areas to build your presence.

[00:36:10] Unless like you said, you had a breakout. With TikTok coming out, it disrupted a lot of things. And now it's a lot easier to build fast if you're doing the right things and providing value. That said, it's still not overnight.

[00:36:23] And I guess I would say if you wanna—if you want it to be fast, then just go do something else. I don't really know what to say. Like there's very few things that are fast. And honestly, two years to develop like a pretty solid platform that you can then build on for the rest of your life is actually quite fast.

[00:36:40] If you think about it, it's much faster than almost any other career path I can think of to get to a certain level. If you're an investment banking or you're in all these other, like a doctor or whatever, you're looking at taking on debt. You're looking at years and years of schooling, working your way up through a grueling process.

[00:36:57] It's really not as hard as that, that's for sure. And it's also shorter. So I don't think it's honestly too long at all.

Diego Footer: [00:37:04] You think it takes a while to settle into what works for you? That might mean your product, your market, your audience, who you are, your personality. Like, you probably were refined down pretty well now.

[00:37:16] Okay. If I make a post about this, and I make it in this way, it's going to do pretty well, but for somebody new, you might have to try, it's almost like the same post five different ways and say, okay, which one worked? And then I'm going to do the next post this way.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:37:33] Yeah. Yeah. It's tricky because when you're starting like very quickly these days, I can know if something I put out hit or did not hit because I'm put publishing to potentially millions of people now.

[00:37:45] It depends on the platform and the reach and all that, but I can see really quickly, oh wow, this one tanked. And I can come up with some theory as to why that might've happened. There's 50 little variables. You could look at it why it might've happened.

[00:37:54] But when you're starting out, you don't have an audience by definition. And so, it's hard for you to know why something is or isn't working until you get a very tiny little feedback loop going. And so when you're starting, I would say, reach out to every family and friend that you have, every family member and friend that you have, that could conceivably be interested in what you're doing.

[00:38:21] In a real way, not just because they want to support you because if they want to support you, they're giving you bad data because they don't actually care. They just care about you, and that's—you want it to be more pure than that. And you want to get maybe a hundred people that actually really are interested in this new thing you're starting, putting out some farming content, whatever.

[00:38:36] And then see how they respond to the stuff you put out. And then as you notice, over 10, 20 pieces, okay. These were my top two. Why? Try to figure out what it was. Was it 'cause it was funny? Was it unusual?

[00:38:49] Was it very inspiring or informative? You build some thesis in your head. You should really then strip down, okay. How can I make more things that are like those two, because those are the ones people value the most?

[00:39:01] The truth is, what people engage with the most, and there's a lot of ways to define that, whether it be share, save, sends, comments, emails, you get, product sales or whatever, however you want to define it, that is what's offering the most value, so do more of that stuff and just, you'll build a sort of a third eye about it.

Diego Footer: [00:39:19] I think what you said is really, that's the key to life, whether that's business, social media, working out, diet, health it's... It's, we always have the time, it seems like, to do the first step. And we're like, okay, we're done.

[00:39:38] But very rarely do most of us consistently say, okay, I did A. B happened. Why? What was the connection between A and B, and we're too quick to say, oh, it just doesn't work. Or, I stink at it. I'm no good. I don't like it.

[00:40:00] But we don't analyze the process. If it works, great, but why did it work? Or if it doesn't work, why didn't it work? And what did you do to at least try and attempt do to try to quantify that relationship between the two?

[00:40:16] And I think, I think just doing that with anything sales, emails, you can start to notice trends. And then once you start to notice trends, I think, at the very least, it puts you on the right track. It might not guarantee success, but you're starting to see, okay, this is working, this is not.

[00:40:34] I'm going to stick with what is working, and here's why I'm doing this. It gives you a purpose instead of just wandering through the dark.

Kevin Espiritu: [00:40:39] Yeah, you're—I think you're completely right on that. I think really, it's all, I think of a lot of life, honestly. I don't know if this is good or not, but I think a lot of life through a probabilistic lens.

[00:40:53] And so I think, if I am paying attention, like you said, analyzing what worked, what didn't work, and I make these tiny adjustments, as long as my brain works, as long as my brain can understand cause and effect, I guess, then I should end up at better results if I'm just applying that framework.

[00:41:11] And over time, the probability that I get better and better and better at it in the content gets getting better or whatever thing you're trying to optimize for, it goes way up. And the more reps you have at it and in the world of content, fortunately you can post a lot, if you want to, the better you should be getting with each one, thus, the audience that you're trying to build should be responding better over time.

[00:41:32] Thus, it should be bigger, thus, the platform should grow. And then, then you can go from there and apply that same methodology to everything else. Yeah, it's just, to me, it's all sort of a probability thing.

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