

Eric Howerton Final Transcript

[00:00:00] **Andy Murray:** Hi, I'm Andy Murray. Welcome to It's A Customer's World Podcast. Now more than ever, retailers and brands are accelerating their quest to be more customer-centric. But to be truly customer centric, it requires both a shift in mindset and ways of working, not just in marketing, but in all parts of the organization.

[00:00:27] In this podcast series, I'll be talking with practitioners, thought leaders, and scholars to hear their thought. And what it takes to be a leader in today's customer-centric world.

[00:00:49] Hello, everyone. Over these last several episodes, we've been covering the hot topic of retail media networks and the promise they hold in helping retailers and brands become more customer centric. There's a lot of new things to learn about retail media networks as this space is changing almost every day.

[00:01:06] But one thing I know for certain, it is how connected the digital shelf is to effective retail media network perform. Sometimes the digital shelf is seen as a tick box, Set it up, move on to something else. But in fact, getting your items set up properly and continually monitoring and optimizing them, it's a job that's never really.

[00:01:26] To talk about what it takes to get the digital shelf I have with me today an expert in this area, Eric Howerton , founder and chief development officer of WhyteSpyder. Welcome Eric to the program.

[00:01:37] **Eric Howerton:** Thanks, andy. It's honor to be here.

[00:01:39] **Andy Murray:** Eric, before I ask you about WhyteSpyder, tell me about your journey that led up to creating this new thing, WhyteSpyder.

[00:01:46] Then we'll get into the WhyteSpyder offer.

[00:01:48] **Eric Howerton:** Yeah, it's it's an interesting one. So my studies. In school were photojournalism. And I didn't even really realize that I wanted to do that until one day I was out when I was a whitewater raft guide in college In the summertime, right? Yeah.

[00:02:02] Did a cool summer job. It was back when the internet was just starting. There's actually a website called cool summer jobs.com. Oh, nice. And I found this whitewater rafting cake. And so I'll go out there. Really love nature. And I was like, I would love to go around and take pictures of waterfalls for the rest of my life.

[00:02:18] Okay. Yeah. And I found out that doesn't make much money. Yeah. Yeah. Very cool though. Yeah. Extremely cool. You get it. And then I started, as I started studying photojournalism. . I started really appreciating, content writing, telling a story, interviewing the who, what, when, where, and why and how.

[00:02:35] And it was just invigorating to me that I, as a human, we have a power to tell stories and to do that well. And so I applied the outdoor enthusiasm to that education and I wanted to start an outdoor magazine for Arkansas called Get Out Magazine. Okay. And that's when our moved to northwest Arkansas from Arkansas State University.

[00:02:53] Now, what year is this about? Around 2000. Okay. Yeah. And so I moved over to Fayetteville to work with the Northwest Arkansas times as a photographer. But really my ambition was to start this outdoor magazine because of the Ozark Mountains. Yeah. It was just paradise around here. Yeah.

[00:03:07] Beautiful place. Beautiful place. Thought what better place to start an outdoor magazine. And then I actually started that at age 20. At age 20. When I started my own magazine, you know how great the magazine publishing business is Andy .

[00:03:21] **Andy Murray:** Fantastic. I've been there a little bit. It can be quite a business model challenge.

[00:03:25] **Eric Howerton:** For sure it was. And so .Started that up 22. Didn't really know what I was doing with business. Didn't sell as many ads, but I did produce a really excellent publication. Yeah, I bet you did. Yeah, it was really, it was great. As ahead of its time, and we were talking about mountain biking before it was cool in northwest Arkansas, fast forward that journey that kind of pulled me into helping other publishers with their magazines and their desktop publishing, and that pulled me into more of the photography and the creative design, the print design, high end print design. Then of course, digital really started becoming stronger. And I got some opportunities to do some web development.

[00:03:58] That's when I met my co-founder with WhyteSpyder. He was actually studying his at the University of Arkansas earning his master's in computer science. And we started WhyteSpyder to be an e-commerce agency. Yeah. And we actually Whytecomes from Whytehat technology online. Okay.

[00:04:14] Spyders came from the Google crawlers, the search. And that makes sense. And so we went, we set out to do search engine optimization the right way and helped a lot of regional businesses with their national e-commerce stores. And then along the way, somewhere we had somebody, we were always trying to get into Walmart.

[00:04:31] But we were bumping up against some of these strong shopper marketing agencies that were around here. , They, in store was all, it was all in store, right? It was all in store. But we saw the digital, just this digital shopping behavior really taken off. And no one really believed it at the time, cuz in store was so strong.

[00:04:49] And then, but eventually, as Walmart developed their connected content partner program, we were happened to be at the right place at the right time, doing the right thing, new at A to Z. And so we set out to help suppliers win at Walmart online.

[00:05:01] **Andy Murray:** If you would've given me a hundred guesses on your background, I never would've picked photojournalism.

[00:05:06] Yeah. But it all makes sense. The digital storytelling and how that evolved and how the industry evolved over time makes a lot of sense that you landed in this space you're in right now. So well done.

[00:05:17] **Eric Howerton:** Thanks, man. And I agree. Like I look back at journalism, I'm like, I really appreciate it more and more specifically because you just learn how to ask questions at the root of that.

[00:05:27] And then even better is, we start applying it to the product detail page, right? Which is where we work on Walmart. The headline. The title, Yeah. How to Write a Great Headline. Then How to Write the Bullet Points, How to Write This Description with the Lead sentence, The answering all the questions, it just really helps you, that studying helps you understand readers user experience, how you know images impact, how to tell story through images.

[00:05:52] As within shop marketing, how do we tell that picture digital? So that we can communicate the value of the brand and the items to the customer.

[00:05:58] **Andy Murray:** I bet if you go back, I don't know how many years, maybe five or six, maybe not that long ago, most item description type brand information seemed really technical, and I dealt with this even in putting out shelf labels in store and how they get concatenated in the text and it felt the whole environment felt very product description from a matter of fact technical side. Yep. But you have been working to take it. A more creative storytelling space, which feels more natural from a consumer interaction. Or probably what you would expect to find. , do you still get into that challenge?

[00:06:29] Where is everybody caught on that You've got some brands, probably brand manager wants 15 different, everything you could possibly think about for the brand to be on the page. And probably others that are little more technical. So how do you bring it to a more creative consumer facing space

[00:06:44] **Eric Howerton:** It's been interesting over the years watching the industry evolve.

[00:06:48] Right? And specifically at Walmart, it's funny, like a lot of times brands really understand it on Amazon, like it makes complete sense. But the second you get on Walmart, Like it dissipates like the, that knowledge of understanding the product detail page just isn't present. And I think that's a lot of the split between, internally structures at the brands but even still like the right type of imagery and how you're telling that product story.

[00:07:12] You gotta really be able to articulate that with that opening the box, showing the content. You can actually go further than you can in store if you do it correctly. Same thing with the descriptions too. How do. Write that content so that it's grabbing that attention very quickly cuz you only have a split second to keep their attention as but then how do you tell that story even deeper? Because a lot of times shoppers might be in the store looking at an item, they go online to learn more about it. And so you have to be very thorough at the same time.

[00:07:40] **Andy Murray:** I bet many people don't think about the fact that they're on the item page, but might be standing in front of the shelf.

[00:07:44] **Eric Howerton:** Happens all the time, and and Walmart just released some data not too long ago about just the impact of that. They're like saying 60% or more shoppers are actually doing that, going online before they're purchasing in the store. In the store. Yeah.

[00:07:56] **Andy Murray:** Eric, I guess I'm gonna imply here and make an assumption because you're saying you're focus on Walmart pretty much for WhyteSpyder.

[00:08:03] , That assumes to, for me, that each retailer might be different. Yes. Otherwise you might, you could be, if it's all the same, why not all the retailer. Sites and e-commerce platforms. But it sounds like to me, explain to me what are some of the differences and why Yeah. Why they are so different perhaps.

[00:08:17] **Eric Howerton:** So I'll give you two of the fundamental reasons. Number one, and even before this, I guess the digital shopping really took place more the omnichannel approach. Number one, the retailers are competing for search within Google. Okay? And so that discoverability, if you have if I have an on page on Amazon and I take that same content, replicate that on Walmart or Target or wherever, the first usually wins in seo.

[00:08:45] So if I've already got that page live on Amazon first, the Google bots are going in and index and that saying, Hey, that's this page, right? And then they see that duplication, that mirroring effect. It's gonna keep that Amazon as the number one. See, it just gonna duplicate down the chain. And it's also gonna look at the other content as not original content.

[00:09:05] Okay. So it's actually getting dinged down even further than the organic results. See, I didn't know that. Yeah. So if you're a major brand at Walmart, right? When, let's say that I'm, selling laundry detergent at Walmart and it's by far my biggest account in store and, really on, in store.

[00:09:23] But yet all the while, When you do the Google search, my laundry detergent on Amazon's popping up, that's not a very good balance there. Kinda. And so you go back and you have to explain to your relationship at the Merchant at Walmart why you're not showing up and driving new eyeballs to Walmart.

[00:09:39] **Andy Murray:** How many people you think know this because this is a really important detail that could affect a lot of results. Do you still get into this being a black box area in the CPG world?

[00:09:49] **Eric Howerton:** Yeah, I do. I think that whenever we get outside, So what, what is happening? You mentioned retail media networks, right?

[00:09:54] I think within the retail media search or the retailer search box, we're starting to, we started catching up on the brand side, right? Right. I think we're

probably about 70% there. , and I can tell you where the 30% is lacking, in a second But when you get into the Google space, it's a whole different ballgame.

[00:10:08] I think we're only about 20% there. There's so much opportunity as a brand to be the greatest partner in the world with Walmart. Yeah. By driving more market share to Walmart through Google search.

[00:10:22] **Andy Murray:** And through the item page. It's the PDP page and so I mentioned the intro that, this retail media network explosion and the fact that some may see it as a step past, got the digital.

[00:10:32] Done. Tick box, move on. Now it's retail media networks, but from what I'm discovering, these two worlds are forever dynamically interconnected. And if you wanna get really great results from retail media networks, and you have a poor item page, or you've left it, sit there. . You're missing out on something that's really fundamental.

[00:10:50] So how are those two worlds? Like how does the, getting the PDP item page right and keeping it fresh and updated, how important is that and how is it connected to retail media network effectiveness?

[00:11:02] **Eric Howerton:** That's a great question. So on one side there is, if I'm spending, and I'm investing in the media side, driving discoverability to a.

[00:11:11] Once that shopper hits that product detail page, if they're not convinced and that story's not told your conversion rate is drastically lowered, any little bit that you can continue to improve on that PDP, the greater conversion rate you're gonna get. A lot of people are always wanting to know conversion rates.

[00:11:28] I, my statement is just always have the best PDP in the world. , especially when you're dealing with an omnichannel retailer like Walmart. That click and that drive might be occurring from an in-store environment or something to that effect or delivery environment. We don't know.

[00:11:42] And so when you're in there, they have to convert, you need to increase that, and so that's your prime opportunity. The advertisement drives the discoverability and the search, but it's really that PDP that converts, and even the images that are laying on. The second part to it. And the way that these worlds come together is also the second piece to in, in, into just understanding this whole space that we were talking about earlier is, Oh, that you asked about the uniqueness of the content, right?

[00:12:08] So that, there's two points to that. And the second point also applies to the second point of the retail meeting network. Not to confuse you and myself. And, but there there is the catalog, the taxonomy of the catalog. And When you look at a retailer, Amazon versus Target versus Walmart, anybody.

[00:12:25] Every one of those retailers have different catalogs. There wasn't something back 20 years ago when the digital shopping started, that there was some sort of great software that said this is the proper way to set up your retailer e-commerce site. And even if there was, none of 'em would've used it because all of 'em are trying to be competitive against each other.

[00:12:44] So the taxonomy, the actual attribution models, and the specifications needed. To internally have the search algorithms work at Walmart are drastically different than that of Target are different than that of Amazon. Now, I bet we could all understand really quickly if I was to say, Hey, I'm with Walmart.

[00:13:03] I just called Amazon and asked 'em for their search algorithm and their catalog to send it over so we could be universally synced for brands. That's never gonna fly. No. That's like asking, it's like Pepsi asking Coca-Cola for their Exactly. I get that. It's never gonna happen. Yeah.

[00:13:17] And that is another reason why that unique content brands take a unique approach for every single retailer. And man, it is daunting. It is taxing, It is, frustrat. And it's go, but it's gonna never change. It's gonna continue to escalate and get worse.

[00:13:34] **Andy Murray:** Especially if you think about what I've read 600 retail media networks out there, obviously.

[00:13:39] Oh yeah. A CPG can't handle 600 retail networks. . But I think people have a hard time maybe understanding at times why it's so labor intensive and I think you've. Picked a bit at that because these are not just automated, all easy to populate. It takes time and thoughtfulness to understand what do I wanna, what's my right assortment strategy, catalog strategy for this retailer versus that retailer.

[00:14:00] And then the detail to set it up. A lot of that is still manual process, right? Absolutely. And if you get the product description wrong, is it easy to change?

[00:14:07] **Eric Howerton:** No, it's not easy to change . It's hard. Yeah, it's harder than you'd think. And kind to that point, what's pretty interesting, I know a lot of times we'll have Amazon suppliers that might be coming over to Walmart for their marketplace.

[00:14:19] They think it's gonna be an easy transition, and they just hit very low ceilings on their ability. They, because the cata, they can't advertise as. Because the catalog and the taxonomy is different. And so to your point, when you're looking at these 600 networks where there's also 600 different catalogs.

[00:14:36] Yeah, great point. And you have that same approach because if you can make the catalog work well and you have the right attribution, your right shelf is set up all the things that the algorithm needs to operate on that retailer, then you tap on that search. That paid search. Or even if you do it in reverse order, it's still fine, but you're going, those things work together.

[00:14:56] To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of your spend at a retailer.

[00:15:00] **Andy Murray:** It's interesting the complexity of this and how you've been able to dive in on one network and really master it. Is your client pace mostly brands or do you also have sometimes buyers? Cause you know, I worked at Walmart and Yeah.

[00:15:11] I would say there could be a chance. There's a lot of opportunity to help them even Absolutely. Understand how this works.

[00:15:16] **Eric Howerton:** Absolutely. At least talk to merchants all the time. We're always working with the global tech team working with the marketplace team as well at times. The content acquisition, working with a lot of 'em to help them understand this complexity or not even understand, just get the work done.

[00:15:30] , there's a couple of departments where we, over the last two years, they've started recognizing the value of, at the end of the day, a merchant's job is to buy really great products and make sure that they're the right ones for the store and for.com and to sell through. It's hard to do whenever you're the thing that's in the way are these content quality scores or.

[00:15:50] Attribution or these style guides and the suppliers and brands aren't resourced on their side to handle it right and take care of it. And so there's this gap there that no that, that, it's just difficult for anyone to fix, but we can help

them. We're that bridge between 'em. And the same thing on the Walmart Connect side.

[00:16:07] A lot of times there might be brands or suppliers that are trying to invest in the media network. Walmart Connect would love for that to happen, but there's something going on that's not allowing the spin to be appropriately applied and to be effective. And so we're helping that bridge as well, and helping brands achieve a higher ROI.

[00:16:26] **Andy Murray:** And when you start to do that, diagnostic does it. Oftentimes the PDP is not set up properly.

[00:16:31] **Eric Howerton:** A lot of times. A lot of times, and when we say PDP, I generalize that there's, the, there's the front end where the customer sees, but then there's that back end where the robot sees That's right.

[00:16:40] And so we put 'em both together. So there might be something, when you look at a PDP, it might look fantastic to everybody on the planet, but when we look at the back end of it and we start checking that source, there is a lot of things missing and it could be completely on the wrong shelf. Got it. That has zero volume to.

[00:16:59] that no one not, there's not a customer on the planet that's really trying to navigate and find and discover that product. And if it's not, it's just like in store. If it's not on the right shelf, no one's gonna see it.

[00:17:09] **Andy Murray:** Yeah, a hundred percent. It's a great, it's a great metaphor to connect it that way. Yeah.

[00:17:12] Is there a big difference in marketplace PDP pages versus first party or a one p. Pages, if someone's in from marketplace, they have all of a sudden picked up in store distribution. Is it a complete doover starting process or is an easy evolution, or how does that work?

[00:17:26] **Eric Howerton:** It's a fairly easy evolution in this now, not on the setup side, but as far as when it comes to the product detail page, there's just some of the backend things that need to be checked and make sure that that they're set up correctly.

[00:17:38] Because we've also experienced a lot, even one piece of Ps that don't have certain things checked off. And these are very small things. , that are not audited or sub correctly. That are literally not allowed for them to be able to

show up for a delivery or in-store pickup. We discovered a lot of that and it's, it is just a small little thing that everybody's missing or looking at their sales, not understanding why it's not doing well.

[00:17:58] It wasn't set up there because it's just, there's this little check mark. That has to be transactable.

[00:18:02] **Andy Murray:** Tell me a little bit about how you see the the opportunity to. Get better return on the advertising spend by optimizing the PDP. Cause apparently there's a big impact on the algorithms from how the quality scores or the relevancy of that is there. And if you're looking at, if you're not understanding that piece of it, You might say my retail media network's not giving a very good right incremental row as, or however you're trying to measure that. But what you're not doing is connecting it to the quality of the digital shelf, right?

[00:18:29] **Eric Howerton:** That's right. Yeah. You're not, you have to the algorithm that's feeding that search for the media side, is connected in some capacity to the same one that's trying to deliver back an organic result. , to the customer as well, they have to be playing in a fair space.

[00:18:44] Right? And that's started by Google, right? Because Google, when it's allowing sponsored ads, if it quits showing you very relevant organic content, you're not gonna trust Google anymore, right? Same thing's gonna happen at Walmart or Amazon or wherever else. So those things have to work together.

[00:18:58] Basically at the end of the day, the customer, and you've pointed this out in your Whytepaper, right? You know the customer has to have a good experience. That's right. Whether it's organic or paid. And so by those two factors, if I'm doing well on both of those spaces, then things are gonna work better at the end of the day for the customer.

[00:19:14] Cuz there's a lot of times that we see, advertising, not, you're not able to advertise on certain shelves because your product is not seen by the algorithm as relevant to a search query. And that's because the shelf that you put it in, set it up in is incorrect. That makes sense. Yeah. Yeah. And it and it can, and it's very defined and Walmart's very different than the way it is on Amazon, right?

[00:19:38] It can be, Amazon can be a little bit more global, but Walmart's a very focused kind of deal, which I think, a lot of people might get frustrated about that. But at the end of the day, Walmart is in Amazon on steroids when it

comes to retail. It has a greater responsibility and it has a huge trust factor from my perspective.

[00:19:54] I'm a big Walmart fan, but but I so there's more to it in this shopping experience for a Walmart customer and for Walmart's responsibility than maybe other retailers that are out there.

[00:20:04] **Andy Murray:** You look at how fast things change. I said this in the intro. Your knowledge of this space is incredible.

[00:20:09] But it seems every quarter at least, there's new things happening. Yeah. That's changing the rules, not changing the rules in a bad way, but improving or new features and such. And how or how do you stay on top of it? It's such a fast moving space. And how does cpg, your brand suppliers, how do they stay on top of it?

[00:20:26] Mainly through you to get that intelligence of, Hey, this has changed. Let's pivot.

[00:20:30] **Eric Howerton:** Yeah. I think that's one of . The greatest questions I have to give all the credit to the team. really do, and it's not being cliché, but our culture, our number one value is adaptability.

[00:20:39] We believe in that. We expect that every day to be coming to work. It's not, we don't feel discouraged or frustrated because we can't ever get the job done. And that's really bred into our culture and it's very different than, I think, than a lot of other industries. That we don't have this one core responsibility.

[00:20:57] And that's okay. Like we allow ourselves to continually build this plane as we're going. And over time we just, we know we, we also do a good job of listening and we listen to Walmart. And so I've seen so many instances, especially over the last few years. It's probably a little bit different now, but in the beginning with the digital omnichannel shopping experience, you need to see Doug Millon say something about that, on, on media, you see a quote.

[00:21:23] Omnichannel is just floating around and people are like, Yeah, omnichannel, this and that. But I, we were actually like, What is he actually saying right there? And then we, That's great. Then I'd start studying a little bit more and watching more on social media, LinkedIn, and like investigating what is this thing?

[00:21:38] And then you'd see the pickup towers. That's interesting. And I'd put it together. That's some pretty prime real estate to put into a Walmart store. A massive pickup tower like Walmart doesn't really. Throw things out there, they have a serious intent, then you start seeing the pickup lanes.

[00:21:54] So it's our ability as a team to see the. Believe in the intangibles, have the adaptability, and to then build products and services that meet those things.

[00:22:05] **Andy Murray:** You're describing an attribute about this power of observation that is really a right brain creative core trait, cuz you, if you're a, if you're a photojournalist, You're looking for things that other people don't see.

[00:22:17] And that being in the moment, and I would think that this space to be successful is a very left brain, almost an accounting based attention to detail in some ways, but in other ways it's the power of observation that a creative right brain could really thrive in. So that's good. What is the.

[00:22:32] Profile of what, of the person you think would be successful. You described some really good value traits about patients and listening but what are the, what's the kind of typical profile that would make a person or help a person be successful if they're working in this particular space?

[00:22:46] **Eric Howerton:** Yeah. I think that when we, some of the folks I've seen to join our team that have been, very fruitful in this Are coming at it with an excitement approach to to contribute significantly. It's, they don't come to it as just a job and a piece of employment necessarily. They're coming in to, to create and spearhead change.

[00:23:03] And, there's, it doesn't happen every single time, but funny enough, or culture like the more folks that we keep adding, just keeps doing that. We've grown quite a bit in the last 12 months, 18 months, and I look around these people. Are all just, they're just legitimately figuring things out on a meeting by meeting, by phone call basis.

[00:23:22] And it's just the most invigorating thing that I've ever seen. And so I think that like even on your Whyteor your podcast to listen to, I love that about this leadership change that's happening. I In, and at the end of the day it's not something special we've done.

[00:23:35] It's, and it's not driven by just our idea, it's driven by this culture of technological advance. And a long time ago we realized like there's no way we

can keep up the technology, but what can we, what does all this technology need in order to be successful? And I don't care if it's the smartest AI robot in the world or whatever it might be, it needs the content, it needs that human creation that can feed at this food in order for it to operate correctly.

[00:24:04] So I think as a brand, it's like puts this core and at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if it's being flown in by a drone. Or zip line to your house. It doesn't matter. It that everything needs that information. And so that's what you can do is and then if as a brand, how do you be better than your competitors?

[00:24:21] If you could build a team that is like legitimately building the library of Congress for this particular product and with images and video and attributes. And research and all this stuff that I know that they, a lot of times they already do their science behind the things that they're doing. How do you get all that information into a spot that can then be distributed?

[00:24:44] The distribution of all this stuff is the hard, is the really chaotic part, but the central core, right? That story. That's where the magic happens to these folks. Like how do you make that process perfect? And it's hard to do that.

[00:24:56] **Andy Murray:** Yeah. love that. It's interesting if you're the type of person that probably that has to put together a gas grill and you never wanna look at the, you just, I got this and throw the instructions away, you probably wouldn't do well in this space.

[00:25:06] But , that's I point. you'd also have to be one that can be patient and follow the instructions, but then when things don't look right, Making those adjustments real time and have that agility to figure the problem solving ends out of it. Because I'm sure half the time you're solving problems.

[00:25:22] Yeah. Not just following directions on the perfect formula for a site. That's right. Great. It's the problem solving too. You have to figure it out.

[00:25:29] **Eric Howerton:** It's almost like the perfect person, Andy would be Who? Who are the people that are rotten? The encyclopedias like dictionaries. Like they. Or have to have an ambition.

[00:25:37] **Andy Murray:** Yeah, exactly. Or someone like that, spend their free time updating Wikipedia pages where it's a volunteer thing, boom. But they care about the content subject so much that they're willing to research and put that extra effort in, so it's perfect. Yeah, and it sounds like that's the kind of person that, that this looks for.

[00:25:55] **Eric Howerton:** Or even like the YouTubers. That, that are geeking out on something they love they have to have that passion to it and they just do it because they want people to know. And there's a lot, And when you think about that YouTube landscape, there's actually a lot of people out there that are doing that.

[00:26:08] Yeah. So finding, bringing that into the mix, I think is, would be powerful.

[00:26:12] **Andy Murray:** I'm now beginning to understand more why you're in the space with the background you have as a photo journal is creative because. Photo photojournalist, my experience has been never really a hundred percent satisfied. True.

[00:26:23] Always. See, it could be a little better. Yeah. And like the fus with it and levels that I would never be able to discern that wasn't color graded properly. And you can pick it up immediately. Yep. And so it's seeing that because I'm sure algorithms will see it. Oh yeah. In this kind of context.

[00:26:36] **Eric Howerton:** That's a good point. I never thought about myself so much like that. Andy , glad having this talk. You're gonna feel so much better today I feel normal. .

[00:26:43] **Andy Murray:** Okay, so let's shift to the future. How do you see the space evolving? Machine learning, ai you already talked about that's probably not gonna put this industry out of business in terms of people doing this work, but are any other big things that might be coming that you see?

[00:26:56] Of course no one has a crystal ball, but.

[00:26:58] **Eric Howerton:** Yeah, I think that one of the things that I'm most excited so you have a lot of front end technological advances, whether it's the pickup lanes and, and we keep seeing, more advanced pickup lanes coming in where it's making it easier on the customer to get in and out, to delivery, to drones, autonomous vehicles, all that stuff.

[00:27:16] Which by the way, nobody believed five years ago just FY didn't exist. Yeah. This, those intangibles that we went forward and we could see that they were serious about it. So I think that the front end is, there'll still be advances there, but what I'm most excited about is the back end type of stuff.

[00:27:31] So my analogy is I like to eat more vegan. I do eat eggs and, but I'd love to send to Walmart or go in there and just say, Hey, I. I want eggs, I want high protein, vegan based meals. I do like smoothies, and by the way, I don't want any sugar added and I don't want this and that, and this.

[00:27:52] And I submit that to Walmart. The algorithms take it and they robotically go pick my basket and do exactly what I need based upon the attribution models that have been inputted by the suppliers. And that's all done autonomously and then it gets delivered to my house.

[00:28:07] **Andy Murray:** That's perfect. If you're shopping for your family, some are on keto, but I had some plant based and it's not easy to see that shelf.

[00:28:14] Without picking up it, it really extends your shopping trip. But if you could feed those attributes in, I get that picture and I love that picture. know, If you look back at your entrepreneurial journey and starting a company obviously you went through a decision point to sell. And so I'd love to hear about that.

[00:28:31] Decision process for you, and then anything you might want to share with students that are looking at, should I be an entrepreneur? I'd love to be an entrepreneur. , when's the right time? Can I do it out right outta school or is it something I should wait for many years? You went in early.

[00:28:44] Yeah. So just those two, two pieces of your, what would you say to students and before you get to that, How did you process that decision to sell? Cause I've been through that journey myself. Yeah. And it's not an easy decision.

[00:28:56] **Eric Howerton:** It's not any easy decision. I think that the number one thing is we wanted to have the right partner that came in wanted to ensure that our culture stayed intact.

[00:29:05] Wanna make sure that our people their ceiling got lifted up. And. And also that their kind of, their mission was the same as ours to an extent of just constantly moving forward and growing. And, we've talked to a lot of folks over the years and then, essential came about.

[00:29:22] And we could really tell quickly just the culture, symmetry that we had and that felt really comfortable at the end of the day. Andy liked most things. It comes down to relationship, right? And the people felt good, the ideas felt good. The, the processes did the ability for us to continue to be free birds, and.

[00:29:40] Thing was a really big deal.

[00:29:41] **Andy Murray:** Have you had a lot of pressure to go beyond the deepness in Walmart to many other places, Or have they been allowed to continue to mine the expertise in this area?

[00:29:50] **Eric Howerton:** So we they want us to continue to be the experts. Here's great. Yeah it is great.

[00:29:54] And the integration though in understanding the outside platforms and how do you, how do you know what the left and right hand are doing is the challenge, right? There's part of a bigger organization, like there's a greater mission, there's a greater vision for all market, all these top marketplaces across the globe, which is not something that we were in the middle of.

[00:30:12] But making sure that we understand that, how do we fit into that puzzle piece to be a contributor for that overall mission. It, it's not necessarily, it's a challenge. It's just a lot. There's a lot more to consider and to, and you have to, my opinion on it is you have to be active in that. You have to be contributing to that.

[00:30:27] **Andy Murray:** And you gotta be here. I think you gotta be here and connect up there. I've just, that's why, I've focused in this market. The student question, entrepreneurs. Yeah. Yeah. Talk to me about that.

[00:30:35] **Eric Howerton:** Yeah, I think that my message for an entrepreneurial lifestyle, is, it's like, to me, it's not a position necessarily, right?

[00:30:43] I think that you have to be a little bit cautious and have something beaten your heart. Because it is ultimately at the end of the day, it's a pretty, pretty significant sacrifice. I think you and I could probably sit back and have a lot of stories about that, will your family be impacted?

[00:30:57] Absolutely. Will your finances be impacted? Absolutely. Your health be impacted. Absolutely. Your time, all those things, every, it takes everything that you have. And if you're willing to put everything you got in it and go for it. And by the way, if the words no, don't discourage you, but they.

[00:31:16] I mean they encourage you to continue to push forward, then that's probably a good pathway for you. Yeah.

[00:31:22] **Andy Murray:** You have to be resilient. Absolutely. I don't feel like I had to sacrifice on the family front, but what I did have to sacrifice to not have to sacrifice there was I didn't play golf like I wanted to.

[00:31:33] Yeah. I just couldn't, cuz you have to, be focused in a lot of other hobbies and stuff I had to set aside to, to make it work through that season. Where it's all. Yeah. And it couldn't be a side hustle for me. It had to be, full on commitment. That's it. Which is, that's the same for your journey.

[00:31:48] Now speaking of side hustles, so we're here in a very unusual place for me to record. First time I've been here in your studio. Tell us a little bit about what your plans are for this. For those that might be just in audio, I'm sitting in a very cool spot and pinnacle that is a looks like a something being born into a very cool Podcast, video production spot.

[00:32:08] I know this is early stages for you and what you're doing. , but just, know, tell me about it.

[00:32:11] **Eric Howerton:** Yeah. Appreciate it. So it's podcast videos.com and its intention is really to provide a turnkey solution, for this wonderful medium that has been created. For podcasts and videos slash you know, podcast videos too, for an individual organizations, nonprofits, and then companies to come in and be able to cut these things in a very effective and efficient way.

[00:32:37] Reasonable cost. We can do the whole economics of scale to it. Having multiple scenes eventually. You just have this one scene right here. It's an incubator, right? . It's fine sometimes when Andy, don't look too closely. Cuz there's a lot of imperfections. So that's where the fun is, know you.

[00:32:49] It's a start point though.

[00:32:50] **Andy Murray:** I love it. Yeah. I'm a nerd that way. I've done loads of these and I saw your equipment. The Sure. Mic, the roader. And I'm like, okay, this guy absolutely knows what he's doing.

[00:32:58] **Eric Howerton:** We got that. We got that. And you know what's been fun about this? It's been like a little, like a Lego set man.

[00:33:03] I mean we, cuz we've done, we've redone this particular table about five or six. You know how the cameras line up, there was one time we had cameras right in front. I had look around to see it, yeah.

[00:33:12] **Andy Murray:** There's so much you learn in the craft. Fun. There's a lot to learn. If you're just starting out or you're a thought leader, or you wanna produce something, I'd suggest stopping by here because you'll shortcut the.

[00:33:23] Thousands of dollars of investment and hours of learning and trial and error, but at least starting here. Yeah, agreed. And yeah, so there you go. Free plug for thanks, man, your time. Appreciate that for that. But Eric, it's lovely seeing you.

[00:33:34] **Eric Howerton:** Hey, know, you ought start a retail media network on your podcast channel.

[00:33:39] **Andy Murray:** I'll start a show about it. I'll do interviews, but no, I'm not gonna start, you're not gonna start a network. I'm not getting back at anything that looks like a grind of work trying to avoid work. Gotcha. But. Yeah. Boy, I followed your journey. I've always wanted to sit down, talk to you about it.

[00:33:51] I love what you're doing. I understand now why WhyteSpyder focuses in what you do. , because it is very complex. You gotta be here. It's a hands on keyboard and hand in hand relationship world. And and I think. For me, it's really important for our listeners to understand, especially coming from a media or advertising space, that you've got to look at these channels more than just a media channel.

[00:34:13] It's also a media and digital shelf and commercial channel, and they all are really connected, like a three-legged stool. Exactly. And so love what you're doing and thanks for being on the show.

[00:34:23] **Eric Howerton:** Hey, it's been an honor to chat with you. Yep. Excellent. Thank you.

[00:34:26] **Andy Murray:** Okay, so something cool for our listeners too.

[00:34:28] Eric just told me that if you go to [podcast videos.com](https://podcastvideos.com) and sign up for a session to do recording and you use the coupon code Big Quest, you'll get a 10% discount on your first session, which is already cheap as chips and so they'll probably end up ONU money, but it is a good deal and highly recommend it.

[00:34:49] That's it for this episode of It's a Customer's World. If you found this helpful and entertaining, I would be so grateful if you could share our show with

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