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Thank you in advance.

Mike Capuzzi

Mike Capuzzi

Welcome everybody to another insightful episode of The Main Street Author Podcast, the place to inspire local business owners to author, publish and leverage their own short helpful books, or shooks, as I call them. Today, I'm excited and pleased to be able to have a conversation with a longtime friend, client, business partner, and all-around very smart marketer Jeff Giagnocavo. Jeff, welcome.

Jeff Giagnocavo

Hey Mike, thanks for having me. Excited to talk with you about short books on Main Street today.

Mike Capuzzi

Very good, and obviously, Jeff, you and I have known each other, I guess we're probably going on at least 10 years.

Jeff Giagnocavo

Dude, we're coming up on our 10-year anniversary, you're going to give me something nice.

Mike Capuzzi

And vice versa, but we've done a lot together. You've been a member of my different Mastermind groups and we have a business together, a side business, a consulting business, I'm sure you'll probably touch on that. But when I was again getting ready to launch the Main Street Author Podcast, I wanted to initially bring on some folks that are just really smart local business owners. And obviously you, your business partner, Ben, fit that bill. Just in case you don't know who Jeff is, just really quick, and maybe you'll talk about this in the future here, Jeff. Jeff and Ben are the guys that sold Dan Kennedy a \$30,000+ mattress, and literally he bought a \$30,000+ mattress. So, they are some very smart local business owners, retailers, and do a lot of very good things. So, Jeff, let's jump into this. So why don't you tell people about your businesses?

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah. So, I co-own Gardner's Mattress and More in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. We have two locations, our premier location really is the anti-mattress store, from what everybody listening to this would know. When you think of a mattress store you think of, in today's day and age, of the stodgy retailer at the online mattress wonder kids paint the picture of. But we're really the anti-mattress, or have been for the eight, nine years I've owned the business, and we sell very, very high-quality goods. We infuse the pure definition of Infotailing— information-first retailing. We're going to talk today about our books, our shooks, what we're doing to use those. We are opposite of what every one of our peers is doing in the business, we don't follow the three P's – price, product, promotion – we're all

about truly, truly selling our customers a happy and pain-free wake up in the morning, and that's what we focus on.

Mike Capuzzi

Okay, and you also have, just for further clarification, you do have a side business where you help other mattress retailers, correct?

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yes, yes, we do. Obviously, Mike, you alluded that's a business we have together, along with Ben as well, and we work with other retailers in a number of different ways. We actually license our shooks to those retailers that choose to have them. We have a little software tool that we've created to help customers really understand and act the follow-up process and have that be money in their bag. So that's a neat little business that kind of runs by itself right now, and we enjoy that.

Mike Capuzzi

Good stuff, good stuff. So, let's focus on the retail business. And helping consumers all the options that are out there because, obviously, the list hasn't gotten smaller of things that a person could buy to get a good night's sleep. You guys, you and Ben, have been, gosh, I don't even know how many years, it's probably seven or eight years, probably, where you guys have had this information-first, educational-first strategy that you built on, the short helpful book concept. Can you just explain a little bit more why that seemed to really be a smart strategy for you guys so long ago and what that has meant to your business over all the years?

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah. I mean, for us, we actually had a shook from day one, that shook was done, designed, ready to go the minute we opened the doors as owners of the business. So, from day one we've had this educational, information-first marketing approach. Actually, a big chunk of our initial grand-open marketing campaign was to mail the shook to the customer list we bought from the former business owner, and it was kind of neat. We mailed it in a craft wrap wrapper, like your magazine subscriptions come when your subscriptions ending up, there's a craft wrapper around it and they're selling you on the next year's subscription. So, we did that craft rapper as a way to kind of announce what Ben and I've done, and we're taking a different approach to selling sleep in Lancaster County, and here's our first deposit into our relationship, a helpful book. So, since day one it was part of it, and ever since we've been using it, slicing and dicing it. It's the Swiss Army tool of our marketing plan.

Mike Capuzzi

And if I recall, I think I heard you speak, because I know you actually presented this concept at a marketing event five or six years ago, and if I recall – and I probably won't get it

verbatim – but I think I remember you saying something to the effect like, “You could take away all these other tools that other retailers are using, but you can't take away my shooks because they're that important.” I mean, as we move on in this conversation, though, as far as your overall business over the last X number of years, seven, eight years, these short helpful books that you've created, how important are they as a business asset?

Jeff Giagnocavo

I would say they're the most important, you know, that might sound contrived here if you're listening based on what Mike just said, but it's a hundred percent the truth, the way we've been able to utilize our shooks, we've dug in even deeper with some sub-niche shooks that I'll share with you, Mike, a little later, they are our number one asset. We can position them online for lead capture, we can use them at handouts at Expose and home shows and trade shows, well not trade shows for consumer, but you know what I mean, in the store, great authority positioning, just all-around a fantastic piece in the marketing toolkit, all the stuff that we're using to amplify the shooks, the digital advertising across the various media that we use. I mean, look, that stuff changes; it might have changed just since we've been talking on this podcast, I don't know, but there's always people to help us get it out there, but we need to have something, we need the “it”, and the “it” for us are the shooks, it's the three that we use on a regular daily basis.

Mike Capuzzi

Yeah, I think when I talk to business owners about the investment of time and money and energy into creating their own short helpful book, you've got to realize it's an asset, and I don't use that term to be kind of a marketing guy, it really is a business asset. How many years have you been using these, Jeff, again? You may have already said it, but just so people get this is something you built how many years ago and I know you've tweaked it and refined it.

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah, you know generation one, we opened the doors May of 2011, so we're coming up on nine years in May. We're eight-and-a-half years in.

Mike Capuzzi

Yeah, to have an asset that works for you like that year after year – and again, you're updating and stuff like that, and adding new ones, we'll talk about that in a second – but that's the power of having a helpful book that's a true book. You already heard it, Jeff has printed copies, he has digital copies, so this is not just some little PDF that he's putting on his website, that's one of the ways they use it, but this is a true printed book. So, Jeff, one of the things that you guys do that I think is very smart, and I've said this to you over the years also, is you've identified places in your business, the consumer pathway, if you will, where having a helpful book is important for instructing people how to buy, what they

should buy etcetera, tell me about that strategy and share your library of shooks that you guys use.

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah, so we have our main one, *“What’s Keeping You Up at Night?”* which is just our general helpful mattress buying information shook. Then the second one we wrote was *“Sleep Naturally”*—the organic and natural bedding and sleep products-focused shook. That’s really kind of an insider viewpoint, dispelling all the myths about greenwashing that are out there about the various natural organic products. As a listener, you’ve probably been skeptical of some of those products in your life from produce to clothing, and there’s a lot of nonsense across the spectrum of consumer products, but especially in mattress-related products, there’s a lot of nonsense, so our shook there helps. Then we have our adjustable bed base shook, *“Why Do We Sleep Flat?”* That one is all about lifestyle adjustable bed bases where the head and foot elevate and really can make a good mattress great and a great mattress slap-your-mama amazing, really, really good.

So, those are the three we have, and we leverage them in different ways. One of the simple ways we do is if we’re not making a sale that day, we’re offering somebody a quote in our point-of-sale system for future follow-up, we’ll say, “You know what? Let me grab some information specific to you.” And we go to like our little library rack and we’re really choosing one of three books, but we’re giving them what’s most important, what we feel is going to be their biggest questions they’re going to have at home across the dinner table or the sofas, or talking about their day to reinforce what we reviewed in the store. That’s one simple way, the other way we use the bed base guide specifically is in our seminar that are really beginning to take off that we’re doing in store, targeting bed bases to older customers that can really get a lot of use and benefit from them.

Mike Capuzzi

Good, and I do want to talk about that in a moment, but I just want to, again, sort of clarify for those of you who are listening that this is an important strategy and I think a lot of folks that either want to write a book or write a book about their business and for their business think they have to tell the entire A to Z story in one book, and now all of a sudden becomes this overwhelming task to even start, and then it’s even more overwhelming for the reader because they have a two- or three-hundred-page book, who has that kind of time? And what Jeff has alluded to is this idea of literally slicing and dicing, and rather than having one book on how to buy a mattress, sleep better, etcetera, they have literally chunked it up into, in this case, three short books, and I think for the eight, nine years you guys have been using this, do consumers like – this is a leading question, but I’ll ask it anyway – do consumers like short helpful books or would they rather read the entire encyclopedia?

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah, I think they really do like the shorter books, we're in a bite-sized age, for sure, the whole gaming industry has built this financial empire, as of recent, on micro purchases, microtransactions. So yes, there's no doubt in my mind that's where our society has gone.

Mike Capuzzi

Yeah, you and I may not like it, Jeff, being old-time marketers, if you will, but it is a reality and it has to be faced and dealt with. Now you mentioned seminars, I know you guys also – which is very unique for a retailer let alone a mattress retailer – you offer educational seminars on specific topics. Tell us more about those and how your shooks fit into that equation.

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah. So, over the years, we did maybe five or six very casual seminars, or we had a chiropractor come in, a physical therapist come in, and just talk about the benefit of sleep, how you can impact your sleep at night. We took what was the higher authority of their educational and authority position of being in the health community. We took that information and repackaged it in what I call a fountain of youth seminar, that's a seminar targeted to baby boomers, elderly people who really have a lot of aches and pains, they have a lot of problems, and even when they buy a nice new comfy mattress, it still doesn't solve all of their problems they have because they're sleeping flat. Sleeping flat, if you're listening, do a little exercise with me, take your hand and point your fingers, make your hand as perpendicular to the floor as possible. It's funny because I'm doing it right now as I'm saying it, but if you if you stretch your hand out and make it as perpendicular to the floor, seat to your car if you're listening while driving, and just stretch it out while I continue to talk, and you imagine your fingertips at your head and the palm with the bottom of your hand is your feet, by now, you're probably beginning to feel some tension in the middle of your hand where your lowermost knuckle joint is, and that's all your tendons, your muscles, your ligaments being pulled tight.

Well, that's what you do to your body when you sleep flat. So even a nice new mattress can be a problem because if you're flat, you're pulling all that connective tissue tight, and for years these elderly folks and baby boomers have been sleeping flat, they've been sleeping wrong all along. So, we position these seminars around, "Hey, don't sleep flat, sleep adjusted, even if it's inches, and we can help you understand why that's a benefit." And I give about a one-hour talk in the store on a lazy Tuesday afternoon, if you will, and we turn those days into \$15, \$25, \$30,000 days now just by setting up the seminars. Now where the shook comes into play is, we've really been testing and trying various things out, have little worksheets where they could get involved, fill in the blanks of the information I was giving them, and I just said that's like a ball and chain around my neck as a presenter, what I just need to tell people is, "Listen, everything I'm going to share with you is right here in this handy little book, I'm going to give you okay, I don't need you to read it now, I don't even want you to look through it now, but everything I'm going to talk about I'm going to bring

to life, so when you go home later today, and you think about what I shared with you tonight before you go to bed, you can read it and reinforce it and you don't have to worry about forgetting anything, it's right there for you."

So I literally talk about the shook for about maybe 30 seconds, but it is one of the most powerful parts of that presentation because I immediately am able to ease the room of, "Oh my gosh, this guy is going to sell me something," which I very much am, and I immediately ease that tension, if you will, because they're like, "Oh, okay, this is cool, I can just focus," which is what we all want from our best prospects: focus. We want them hanging on every word, and that shook allows me to do that, and many other things, but for that seminar, that way to use the tool, I reference Swiss Army knife, a good Swiss Army knife has a couple different blades on it, right? Well, I choose the short little stubby blade. It does a good job for me right then and there, it's the only time I might use it, but it does the job I need. That's what I would say about using it that way.

Mike Capuzzi

And when you advertise and market these seminars, and I know you do offline, you do online advertising and marketing, are you promoting the fact that attendees will get a copy of your one of your books if they attend, is that something you do today? I know you've done it in the past.

Jeff Giagnocavo

We've done it in the past. It's not so much a forward-facing part of the seminar materials, more that we're going to give you an abundance of education and information, but I'm making a note now, I probably should, yeah, I probably should highlight the little educational gift bag they're going to leave with.

Mike Capuzzi

Yeah, the reason I bring that up, Jeff, is I have a future episode of The Main Street Author Podcast with someone who you know, Julie Steinbacher, and Julie is an elder law attorney who does local seminars in the same way you're doing them. And her print ads or digital ads actually feature a 3D cover image of her shook, actually her shooks, and she promotes it like, "Hey, when you attend the seminar, you're going to get a copy of my books."

Jeff Giagnocavo

That's very smart.

Mike Capuzzi

It's just people want to see what they're going to get, certain people, that will definitely mean something, but promoting the value of the actual things they're going to go home

with, and you're not going home with a brochure, because God knows nobody wants that, but you're going to go home with my book. That's a powerful statement to be able to say.

So, Jeff, there are probably folks listening, I would think a few that like what you're saying, but they're probably thinking, "Oh, there's just no way I'm going to get started. How do I write a short helpful book for my business? I'm busy yada, yada, yada." You have done several, you have updated several over the years, just talk about that a little bit, what advice would you give to somebody who likes the idea but just doesn't need to know where to start, how to start, if they should start?

Jeff Giagnocavo

Right, I mean first of all, yeah, you should start, and start now. As far as getting started, you've heard the saying, "The hardest part is to start." For me, if I look way back when I wrote the first one, "*What's Keeping You Up at Night?*" The first draft of that was terrible, it was basically 60 pages of brochure speak. It was not good. And yeah, we're still cutting my teeth in my marketing career and education, if you will, but it was not good, and I just kind of took a step back and I said, "Boy, that's terrible. No one's going to want this. No one's going to see value in it. What questions do they want answered? What are the things I need to remind people of on with the knowledge base that I have?" At that point, twelve, thirteen years in the industry. What are the should-ask questions that people should be talking about, what are the things they can avoid, the pitfalls?

And that's really where I began, and really, what it turned into. because I remember handing it to my wife, it turned into a basically a long sales letter. She was almost upset, like, "This isn't a book, you're pitching something." I said, "I'm not pitching something. I'm giving good information that's going to help people." She's like, "Well, yeah, but it can only come back to your store." I'm like, "Yeah, that's the point." So when you're writing these things, certainly weave in and think about what's unique to your business, and that'll make the book easier to write, because you know your business, you know what's unique, you know the value against your competition, and it's easy to speak to that. Just remember, it's got to be in a way that benefits, the person reading it. It's got to speak to them first. You have to just tell the story.

Mike Capuzzi

And as far as getting started, any tips or strategies on just what that looks like, any advice? Again, you've done it for yourself, you've done it for clients, what would you say to someone who's sitting there thinking, "Okay, I like this, I want to do this, I know I want to write a book." And again, I think it's critical that everyone gets what Jeff said and what I share: these are sales devices, these are sales tools. Yes, we are providing good helpful information, there's good content, but the outcome of a shook is to get a reader from point A to point B, and point B is closer to becoming a customer, client, patient, student, whatever you have in your business, we don't shy away from that, right, Jeff? I mean with shooks, that's the point of a shook, if you want to write your memoir, if you want to write the next

literary masterpiece, that's something else, but maybe you want to further clarify because people might be a little squeamish about that but also, again, how to get started.

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah, either you're going to do one of a few things, you're going to just lock yourself in a room and grind through it; you're going to swipe and deploy; you're going to go to my website, which I think, Mike, you'll let me say later; you'll go to other peoples' websites and read that; or you're going to do what's very popular today, and you're going to outsource. And Mike, you've certainly got a toolkit and offer ways that you can help people craft their own book. In this day and age, you have to move faster, fail faster, succeed faster. You don't have time as a business owner to sit back and twist in the wind over this decision. You just don't, that's the way I look at it. My business in this last year, when the broader bricks-and-mortar Main Street retail mattress business is down five to eight percent, my business is up twenty-seven percent. That's about 35, 33-point swing, I believe, okay, that's a home run and I'm not afraid to say it. It's because we're doing these seminars, we're positioning ourselves as the expert, that shook, the books, give us the ability to be an authority. We're retooling referral campaigns where the books are a bigger part of that. They bring the best customers.

I would just tell people if you're consternating about this as a tool, about making an investment – whether it's your own time, on your own, whether it's a swipe and deploy, whether it's hiring somebody to do it. What would you pay to have an A-plus salesperson on your sales team? 50 grand, 60 grand, a hundred grand depending on your industry? The best decision I made years ago, about five years ago now, I guess it is, was to invest in a top-quality sales guy who is now our sales manager. Okay. The first best decision I made was to do a shook. But since I had that already, the next one was to go get Drew, my sales manager. So, if you want your sales to explode and have something you can build on that doesn't call off sick, that doesn't give you mouthiness back, doesn't take vacation days, doesn't have to be managed, you need a book. Because you make sales from it, that's the way I think of it.

Mike Capuzzi

It is true. I don't do a lot of convincing as to why people should have a real printed book, in their repertoire of marketing, advertising, promotion sales devices, but it's without a doubt in this day and age, Jeff, as you well know, you've got to stand out, you've got to be different, you've got to be unique, you have to be a person with something important and helpful to say, and a short helpful book, a shook, does that. So, Jeff as we start wrapping up here, what's one big thing you'd like listeners to take away from our conversation today?

Jeff Giagnocavo

Well, for me, in talking about this, I hope you learned something, I learned something. I got something right away from this interview about positioning what people are going to get in my seminars. So, I hope everybody was able to take away more than one thing. But for me, we're wrapping up the year here, probably got, I don't know, four, five, maybe six weeks

left on the year, and it goes quick because it's holiday time, you got two major holidays crammed in there. Right now, I'm in 2020 mode already. So I'm really working hard to get that stuff done because I like my holidays be focused on family, and you, as a business owner, gee whiz, if you're an entrepreneur business owner, if you can't take some time off at the holidays, you have a job, sorry to say it. But the one thing I would take away from this, I'd connect with Mike. That whole, "new me, new year" nonsense that's out there, it's coming this time of year, you'll start to see it with fitness advertising, what not. Do "new me, new business," "new me, new book." Work with Mike, get it done. So, come January 1 of 2020, you've got a fantastic marketing asset in your toolkit ready to go, and it's a new year, new information, you're now the authority in your marketplace. Look, you have a couple ways to be an authority in this day and age, you can do something silly on YouTube and get notoriety, you can dress fancily on Instagram and have notoriety, or you can have a book and be an expert in your local marketplace, and I'm sure your mother would be more proud to know that her child is a published author.

Mike Capuzzi

I don't know if I could have said it any better, Jeff, but kicking off the new year, whether it's working with me, doing it on your own, there's all different ways of doing this, but the bottom line is, if this is something that you've been thinking about, by all means use this conversation as that proverbial kick in the butt to get started and get it done. So, Jeff, why don't you just share, as we wrap up here, how folks can learn more about your business.

Jeff Giagnocavo

The best way to connect with me is through the website gardnersmattressandmore.com. Go there, check out our site, you kind of see it's opposite what you would expect from retail sites nowadays, we're just now, in 2019, putting pricing on our site, but that's how you connect with me, that's where you can go.

Mike Capuzzi

And, Jeff, if there's anybody who wants to connect with you personally, maybe it's a retailer who likes what they've heard, maybe a mattress retailer even, is there an email or something you're willing to share that they can connect with you directly?

Jeff Giagnocavo

Yeah, probably the best way would be jeff@renegademattressretailer.com. That would be the best way to go there.

Mike Capuzzi

Well, Jeff, as I fully expected, this was a powerful conversation, a lot of little tidbits of insights and wisdom, so I appreciate your time. I know you have a scheduled marketing day

where you're brainstorming some new marketing ideas, so I want to let you get back to that and I just appreciate your time.

Jeff Giagnocavo

All right. Thanks Mike.

Mike Capuzzi

All right. Take care.

Jeff Giagnocavo

All right. Thanks for having me.