



John Jantsch is an author, speaker and expert in marketing. Richard asked John to discuss some of the things he covered during his keynote speech at The Youpreneur Summit in London in November 2017.

RT: I think it's fair to say that most IT business owners aren't great at marketing.

JJ: Nobody is! People start a business because they know how to do the technical side, such as IT. Marketing is not only foreign but there is a fear about it and a notion that people can create a system for everything in their business except marketing.

Marketing is viewed as a strange thing and people need a marketing guru to help them with it, when actually nothing could be further from the truth. There may be some strategic elements, tactics and expertise that you can use to implement tools, but there is no question that looking at marketing as a system is a good idea. What you try to do in your marketing should be done in a systematic manner, rather than just looking at it where you try something new every week.

RT: Consistency is key, isn't it? Like the phrase says: 'marketing is not an event, it's an ongoing process'.

JJ: That's right. I tell people all the time: "You're never done with marketing". It's a process where you may have a hypothesis and create a few things, you try and test and give things time to become effective and weed out what doesn't work.

RT: For those people who think: "I should be doing more marketing, but I'm a technician. I'm really good at the IT side of things and there are so many other things to do on a daily basis..." what would you say to them to encourage them to get started tomorrow?

JJ: When people come with that idea, which is a problem for all industries, they sometimes think they need to find someone to create content for them. I would recommend that they start developing strategic relationships. Are there other businesses or industries that serve the same clientele who are good at marketing and you could take advantage of that?

Have they built a good community but don't have what you have? They're not competitors, so there could be a way for you to educate their community or share with them things that you've built and get referrals to people who trust them.

RT: You've talked about this concept in your book 'The Referral Engine'. Getting started with a strategic alliance and finding other people to do things for you is good advice. How would you recommend people structure these relationships? Particularly to ensure that they're mutually beneficial?

JJ: What's hard is that the relationship might NOT be mutually beneficial straight away, and you can strangle the relationship if that's the way you approach it. If you find after a while that you're sending a lot of referrals to someone and they aren't reciprocating, then you might want to reevaluate.

However, it's about mindset. When I develop strategic relationships what I think about is not "will I get referrals?" but "will this help my clients?" If I have these relationships and the other person has a problem or need and I can bring a trusted partner in, that makes my relationship with my client more valuable.

If you start with that mindset, you won't be as concerned about what you're getting, because you'll realise that what you're actually getting is a win with your client, and that might be enough. Humans, though, have a need for reciprocity, and what you'll find are ways to benefit over and above that.

RT: Let's talk about social media. Every business I talk too, particularly IT companies, feel that they should be on social media and every channel out there. For those who don't have a presence on social media, or don't feel that their presence is good enough, where could they go on social media?

JJ: Just go all in on Snapchat! It's odd, because people feel pressure but it's not always real. They think that because everyone else is doing it they're getting left behind, and because there's so much chatter on social media, you hear it all.

That pressure is one of the real challenges that people feel, and what I tell those who are trying to get started with social media is to start with their existing clients. How could you use a platform to do a better job of communicating to and serving your existing clients?

If you can do that, you'll ultimately make the time you spend there pay off. Could you have a group on Facebook made up of IT people speaking about a certain type of technology? That might be a great use for social media. Trying to build large followings or posting stuff randomly that only two people see will not benefit you.

The other thing I tell people is that it's really important to find somebody who enjoys using social media. You won't do it if you don't enjoy it, and a channel will only be useful to you if you invest time and energy into it.

If you don't have the stomach for it or don't enjoy a platform then just ignore it. Choose something that's going to be a better use of your time, especially if you're time-constrained. Throwing yourself at 20 different channels you'll end up doing nothing substantial with won't benefit you.

I tell people to find one and go as deep as possible with it. Right now, LinkedIn for professional prospects might make sense for you. For IT companies, I'd also recommend Facebook advertising, as it gives highly-targeted ways to reach out and find folks to join a group or have discussions with you. That's an easy way for a service business to dip their toe into social media in a strategic way.

RT: What about traditional marketing? Things like direct mail and telemarketing – what role does that have in the modern world?

JJ: I think it still has a huge role, but like many of these things, if they're not integrated they're going to be less effective. Direct mail can be targeted by group or by title, but it can be hard for B2B companies to reach the owner. However, if you're using it as a way to promote an educational series and drive people online, that can be great.

It won't be effective if all you're trying to do is to sell services without moving people along some stages. If you have a webinar, for instance, direct mail could be a way to drive people to participate. It can be a nice tool in the sales cycle, so if you have outbound sales efforts direct mail is a great way to warm up a cold call someone might have to make.

RT: Let's talk about blogging. Tell me about your joined with blogging – what did that look like?

JJ: I came from a traditional background, before the internet but I always produced content – I wrote articles for newspapers, for example. When I saw what we could do online it made total sense, because it gave me a publishing platform that would allow me to reach the world.

I continued to write for article directories, which at the time were great for SEO. When blogging tools and software appeared, it made sense to get involved with that, because it was something I already did buy offered technology to make it easier.

We've progressed now, and I don't call it blogging anymore – I call it content management software. It's just a way for businesses to produce specific, thematic content, so you could call it your 'education centre' or your 'resource centre' rather than your blog.

People don't go to your site looking for a blog, they go to find the answer to a question or some specific information, so you want to make it as easy as possible for them to do that.

RT: What does your content strategy look like? Where do you spend most of your time?

JJ: Like a lot of people, I was blogging every day for a lot of years. After a while, it didn't make sense for me to produce it all, so we started taking guest content, but at more or less the same rhythm.

Now, we're shifting to backing off on the frequency of the content output and going deeper into what we're calling 'content packages', so there'll be themes and sections such as Q&A, video and a foundational post, along with interlinking to existing content.

RT: What about on the book front? You've got a number of books out there (they've had a profound impact on me), so what's next?

JJ: I've written five books, the last of which was 'SEO for Growth' and was a lot of fun to write. I don't have a marketing book that's waiting to be written, because I feel I've written a lot on that topic.

There's a book in the works which I hope will be more inspirational, as I've been dipping into transcendentalism and American authors from the mid-1800s – that's a period which doesn't feel that dissimilar to where we are today, so I'm going to take a lot of that material and write something that will be called 'The Self-Reliant Entrepreneur'.

It will be structured so you can dive in and read part of it daily, with a quote or an additional reading as well as my thoughts on the topic. I feel that I'd like to have a book like that.

RT: Will it focus more on mindset?

JJ: It won't be prescriptive at all, but it'll be a quote I want to share or a piece of writing from Emerson, Thoreau or similar, and then my reflection on that writing for the day – how it applies to some of the primary themes and characteristics of the entrepreneur.

RT: Let's talk about Duct Tape Marketing. It had a profound effect on me and I talk about it a lot to my IT community. When was that published? What's the biggest change been in the world of marketing since you wrote that book.

JJ: It was officially published in the fall of 2006, and it was revised in 2011. In 2006 we were on the cusp of social media – the book mentioned blogging but not Twitter or Facebook, and the revised edition mentions them only briefly. When I wrote it originally, the intention was to make it as evergreen as possible, so I don't talk about the latest thing.

I've always done it that way, because the platforms don't really matter. Some make it easier for us to do the things we have to do, but the principles of what we're trying to accomplish hasn't really changed. The biggest thing to evolve is probably how people buy, but in my mind, strategy before tactics is really unchanged, and I don't think it will change.

RT: My readers tell me that one of their favourite blog features is something I do every week which I call 'Friday Favourite'. I feature a cool tool or an app that I've found. I have to give you public credit for this, because it was inspired by you and your 'Weekend Favourites', which you still do to this day, I think?

JJ: That's right, I've been doing them for about 10 years. It's a similar idea to what you do, because that seems to generate more response than my 2,000 word, carefully thought out and impactful articles! We're all a bit tool obsessed, and there's an idea that having the right one can help us change, so we play on that a bit.

One of the fun things about it is that because we've built a substantial following, I'll feature a start-up business which doesn't even have 100 visitors, and you can have fun from that. If we feature them they often see a spike in traffic, and they're so pleased to have that help.

RT: You featured a tool called Missing Lettr and I met the guys from the company at an event. I told them I'd seen their stuff on your blog and although they hadn't realised you'd shared them, it dawned on them that it was the reason for the spike in traffic.

JJ: That's great to hear!

RT: What's your favourite tool at the minute? The one thing you can't live without?

JJ: I'm travelling, so I'd say Trip.It, which is pretty old school! I use it all the time and I've been a member since about 2006.