Over $300,000 From A Website About Model Trains – Ian McConnell Reveals His Online Business Success Story

YARO: Hello, this is Yaro Starak and welcome to the Entrepreneurs’ Journey podcast. Today, I have a fellow Australian on the line. His name is Ian McConnell. He's coming all the way from "Bunbury," am I saying that right?

IAN: Bunbury.

YARO: Bunbury.

IAN: Yes.

YARO: Gosh, I have to admit, I have never been to the Western Australia so, I'm not too good with the geography on that side of Australia.

So, Ian thank you for joining me.

IAN: Hi Yaro, it's an absolute pleasure to be here.

YARO: You sound slightly like a Kiwi, Ian.
IAN: It's Zimbabwe. I was born and raised in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and moved out here in '98. I guess, there's a mix of Australian and Zimbabwe which, yes, I quite often get told I sound like a Kiwi but, yes. That's not a problem at all.

YARO: Like my business partner and friend Gideon who's got the South African/Kiwi/Australia thing going.

IAN: Yes, that's exactly right. I often laugh when I listen to his videos because I can hear it coming through. There's a tendency to go South African in a few words and then, back to Aus... But, it's all fun.

YARO: [Laughs] Well, so today, we've got Ian on the call to tell a fantastic story, I hope which will be about your success with a niche website which are always really popular stories on my podcast. I think people really identify with a person setting up one successful site and in particular, when it's in a sort of a passion niche.

Let's talk about that but, of course, I want to go into your background a little bit first. Just to set the scene, the niche site in particular, it basically was, I guess a full-time income source. I got the numbers in front of me that you sent through to me, Ian.

Am I okay to say those publicly?

IAN: Yes, go ahead.

YARO: In his first year with this niche site he made $82,000. The second year, it was $90,000 and then, you sold it for $150,000. There's a little teaser. We'll dive into what site that is in a moment.

But first Ian, can you tell me, well we know where you're from now. You were born and raised in Zimbabwe. Can you maybe tell us a little bit going forward? Did you go to University and have a normal job?

IAN: No, basically, straight out of the school intern apprenticeship as an electrician. That was obviously still in Zimbabwe. Over there, if you're not
quite challenged, you basically don't have a job. It had to be quite diverse because sometimes, there wouldn't be any work in electrical work so, we would build automatic gates. We'll do electric fencing just to supplement our income.

Eventually, what I did is I built up a business with 40 employees and sold that to move over to Australia. The reason was we had kids that were four and two years old. We just wanted a better life for them so, we came over and next year settled in Alice Springs. It was the only place I could get a job as an electrician.

I worked in Alice Springs for two years and then, moved from Alice Springs to Bunbury in 2000, worked for an electrical contractor here in Bunbury and just realized that if I was going to stay as an electrician, I was limiting myself and having owned a business, I had learned a lot of marketing to operate that business and to get more business in.

I just started online and just dabbled in a few websites trying to do a little bit of this and a little bit of that, started with eBay. I actually got involved with a company that would give you fully built websites, actually get two every single month and they were in different niches.

After trying to operate with that for quite a few months, realized that it didn't focus on one. I wasn't going to get anywhere.

**YARO:** Okay, well before you tell us more about the websites, I am curious regarding the move from Zimbabwe to Australia and even starting off as an electrician. You said you had to basically find your own work. There's no jobs going in Zimbabwe at all? Is that it? Everyone is an entrepreneur?

**IAN:** Basically, as a tradesman, because of the large amounts of local labor and obviously, the rules are quite different over there, you could hire somebody off the street to go and rough in the cables in the houses and the buildings and things like that and you would be paying them $10 or $15 an hour compared to the electrician that was up $80 or $90 an hour.

You would never get those jobs. The target market was very limited. We only had about 30,000 people that we could work for in that particular area.
that we lived in. You either settled for the lower income or you went out on your own, become the boss and then, hire these guys to actually work for you.

Then, because there was just so much labor available, you've got a fair amount of leverage. But, what happened was we ran out of electrical work so, we actually moved in because of the security situation in Zimbabwe, we actually started manufacturing and installing automatic gates. I actually set up a factory that used to manufacture these gates and then, we'd go out and install them with the lights and all the automation and all that sort of stuff.

**YARO:** So, you pretty much became an entrepreneur because there's no other way to become successful in Zimbabwe in terms of financial security?

**IAN:** Yes, that's exactly right. It forced you into that area. It forced you to become a leader. It forced you to do marketing because when you're selling automatic gates, they do around a $30,000-mark. You were very limited to who you could sell these to.

You had to be pretty good. What I did is I went out and I found a company that used to do a lot of marketing and basically hired them and said, "All right, come and help us sell these gates."

Then, I learned from them how to market them and then, I actually went away on my own and made it even better.

**YARO:** Wow, so you really got the entrepreneurial experience in the real world and not the online world first, which would have, well you tell me, was it helpful going forward when it came to online business?

**IAN:** Well, it was absolutely incredibly helpful. I never realized at the time but, when we actually moved across the Western Australia, I met up with [Null Hemri??]. He always used to say to me when he was coaching me that even though your business is in selling automatic gates or whether it would be selling cars or fridges or whatever, you're actually a marketer of whatever you're selling.
You have to be really, really good at marketing. We're not starting online. I actually found that it was quite easy because I understood the psychology. I understood that when somebody wanted an automatic gate, there was a certain process that I had to go through to get them there because there were so many decisions that needed to be made, what color, what style, whether they wanted a slide or a leave open, there was a lot to work down to exactly what they wanted.

If I just left the options up to them, they would never make a decision. They'd never come back and say, "That's exactly what I want."

It was sales funnel. I actually guide them through the sales funnel and speaking to them for about an hour, I knew exactly what they wanted. I would then get the check, the deposit because we were asking 50% upfront, and then, we'd go and manufacturer.

When I came online, I understood that and it was just [unclear]. All I had to do was learn how to create a squeeze page, create the website and just get it all in place.

**YARO:** You said you landed in Alice Springs. I'm assuming you left Zimbabwe, like you said, for a better life for your kids. Just for anyone who is listening, what's so… I don't know, I have to actually personally experience from growing up here, a couple of my closest friends, their father often went to Zimbabwe and it sounded like it just got more and more dangerous to keep going back there.

Is that just pretty much it, usual life safety violence?

**IAN:** Yes. All business revolved around security and we did exceptionally well because the security was just getting worse and worse so, we were erecting electric fences and automatic gates around people's properties.

How we got the leads was actually from opening the newspaper everyday and saying, "Okay, so and so just got broken into." There was a volunteer tech there and then, we would go mile drop in that area. It was just horrible way to do business because we were relying on their violence and their lack of security to get more business and, I guess, we were protecting
these people but, I got to see firsthand what was actually happening and there was a lot of stuff that wasn't being reported and I just decided, no, I didn't want to be there anymore.

When you've got young kids, the Zimbabwe dollar was absolutely worthless than anywhere else in the world and although we had beautiful places like Victoria Falls and Lake Kariba and all those wonderful places, you were always in fear of going there.

Would your wallet get stolen? Would you get mugged? And, all these sort of things. We just took our kids and said, "No, we got to get out of here." It was the best thing we could have ever done.

**YARO:** I'm guessing because the Zimbabwe dollar was so weak, having a business with all the employees did not make you extremely rich on global standards so, just enough to get out of the country.

**IAN:** Well, not even that. We sold the business for $3 million and by then, what happened is I had actually sold that to a large security firm that had guards that would man all these shop fronts and that sort of thing.

I sold that to them and then, I stayed on as a manager and director and managed the place. We sold the thing for three million and that 3 million at that time, that's fourteen or fifteen years ago, was worth about 300,000 in Aussie dollar terms.

So, I basically came out with nothing. It was a case of pack your suitcase and just come over here under certain VISA, try and get sponsorship which I did. That was far the reason why I ended up in Alice Springs was because nobody would hire me, because I actually wanted to settle initially in Brisbane.

**YARO:** I know.

**IAN:** Yes, and the government there wouldn't allow me to reset the [unclear] so, I came to Western Australia. They would allow me to set it and then, I couldn't get a job anyway. The only job I could get was in Alice
Springs where they would care to go through the whole sponsorship deal and get me into the country which was fantastic.

**YARO:** That was as an electrician?

**IAN:** Yes, it was as an electrician. That's a whole story on its own because I'd been a managing director and any management positions for the last ten years or ever since I've left school basically.

Likely, when people see that and you're applying for a local electrical job, they won't give it to you because you just don't have a hands-on experience. So, it was case of, "We got to whittle down this reason down to where it just says I was an electrician and just hope you get a job," but they picked up. Within three months, I realized I wasn't an electrician. I was actually in management.

They had a vacancy luckily and they promoted me into that position. I was an operations manager within three months of getting into Alice Springs and then, just progressed from there.

**YARO:** Okay, let's take this forward. Alice Springs then, you moved to Western Australia. When did the Internet become a part of this for you? Maybe you can date us like what year were you in when you moved to Western Australia?

**IAN:** All right so, in 2000, we moved across to Western Australia. I actually didn't start on the Internet until 2006 in May. In fact, I actually had to get to the Warrior Forum and look at my profile there.

When we moved across to Alice Springs, I was working for a local electric contractor as a supervisor, realized, I just had this hankering I just wanted to get back to having my own business.

What happened was I was approached by LG. LG have a series of telephone systems and they needed someone locally to manage this dealership for them and actually go out to commercial businesses and install these telephone systems.
I actually took on that leadership and that's when I broke out unto my own. I opened up a brick and mortar business and started installing telephone systems locally.

Then, I did until 2006. I was actually, when I was installing these telephone systems, I had been studying Dan Kennedy. How we sold the telephone systems was using direct mail leaders and mailing out to all these businesses on a monthly basis. That's how we got all our leads.

I was looking for a way of how to do this better and trying to go more, like operate in a bigger area because we're in Bunbury which is between Margaret River and Mandurah and Perth. There was a much bigger area we could cover but, it was too conversant to do the direct mail. It was just too slow.

I went online looking and saying, "How could I cover a big area?" Obviously, the easiest way is to put a free report up on the Internet and say, there was seven ways to choose the best telephone system for your business.

That's what I did to set up a real basic HTML page with a squeeze and just said, "If you want this, put in your email and your name." Then, we would just follow up with email after that and say, "This is what we got available. I see you have made the inquiry. Would you like someone to come out and have a chat with you?"

**YARO:** Well, that's a fantastic way to get introduced to the world of online direct response marketing.

I love the fact that you went from selling something based on fear in security fencing in Zimbabwe to the story you're about to lead into which is very "soft and fluffy" [*laughs*].

**IAN:** [*Laughs*]

**YARO:** Much nicer. So, maybe we can put everyone out in misery and tell them what this actually niche is. Tell us how that squeeze page for the
electrical business led to a telephone business or led to your own Internet business and a niche website.

IAN: Well, what happened was I had this, which wasn't converting really well but, because these telephone systems were 10,000 upwards, we didn't need any leads to make a substantial amount of money.

But, what happened was I had employees. We had to have vans, we were fully staffed to go out and install these things. The overhead was just killing us. In fact, we weren't making any money.

I was looking for other opportunities. While I was trying to make these HTML pages, we were really cognizant with Dreamweaver. I actually came across Daryl and Andrew Grunt because they were part of the [mail in?] we set up. So, I went over to Canberra. I was part of the same group.

They came up. There was about 40 or 50 of us and they told their story how they had actually sold the infertility eBook and they just made $250,000 in that year. So, my ears picked up, "Wow, this is just fantastic."

I already had this knowledge on how to make this stuff and then, I got introduced to Wordpres which was just some [unclear] and then, I was looking at different niches.

When I was about eleven or twelve, my parents gave me a model train set for Christmas. When we moved to Australia, we could bring nothing. We couldn't bring furniture. We couldn't bring anything because we basically just packed our suitcases and left.

But, we had friends when we moved away from Alice Springs, they came across from Zimbabwe and took over the position [unclear] and they will bring a container.

The only thing I could bring across was this model train set. I was looking at the niche and I went in and Googled model trains and tried to get information and couldn't find any information.
So, I thought, hang on, let's set up a website on model trains. Then, what happened is we had a Perth model train show that came up in Perth. I said to the kids, "Let's go down there and let's have a look," and I will take some photos. We can use the photos on the website and obviously, went in there in the marketer mindset.

I kept on going to these stalls and I kept on hearing these people, these dads and moms and kids saying, "How do we get started? You've got HO scale and you've got N scale and all these other scales. How do you know which one you start?"

I'd listen to what... But, obviously, they were very well experienced what a railroad is and they were talking in a language that these people didn't understand. They were talking about DCC controls and all this stuff. I could see just from the looks on their faces that it was going straight over their head.

I thought, "Wow, here's an idea." So, we went down to the next stall and the next one. Are there really good ideas on how I would put this product together, this eBook about how to start with model trains and put it up on the Internet and sell it. That's basically how it started.

**YARO:** Wow, take us through this process. So, I'm assuming it's a Wordpress blog.

**IAN:** Yes.

**YARO:** And, you're writing all the content yourself?

**IAN:** Yes, I'm basically, being an electrician, I obviously understood all the controls and the computer controls and because I had sold telephone systems which were all computer controlled, I could understand exactly the difference between a standard direct control where you put power into the track and the train goes around at a certain speed but, if you put a second train on there, it's going to go at the same speed. I knew all that stuff.
What I did is I just started writing information on this blog about how to decide which scale, how to decide which control, should you go and buy more train set, etc etc?

What happened was, I started getting ranked in the search engines and people were coming back with comments and saying, "Okay, I understand this part but, I don’t understand this part."

So, what I did then—

YARO: Just to stop you there for a second, Ian. You didn't have any guides on how to do blogging.

IAN: No.

YARO: You just put up a website and knew about this topic and started putting up content, right? Let's give people the URL of this site so they can look at it while you're telling the story.

IAN: Yes.

YARO: It's…


IAN: Yes.

YARO: Okay, so keep going. People started asking you questions.

IAN: Yes, so people started asking and I learned how to set up the Wordpress blog just by [unclear] at the conference. It wasn't a conference. It was a coaching group. I was obviously talking to other people around in that group. We learnt how to do that. That was the easy part.

And then, I just put content on the blog. And then, I got people coming to the blog and asking these questions. What I was doing is I was taking
these questions, and I was just making a note of all the different questions and that's how I would write the next content was basically based on these questions.

What I do is if somebody asked about a certain scale, I would go up to YouTube and I pluck out the best video that I could find. I'd watch the video and then, I'd add my own take on it and just come up with affiliate links and blog posts.

And then, what I did is I started saying to this people, "Okay, can you send me photos of your model train set?" I'd like to know what stage it's set and then, I've got a whole heap of people giving me before photos and after photos.

They just brought in more and more content. Then, what I--

YARO: Are you doing this part time though?

IAN: Yes.

YARO: This is like after work because you're still running that telephone installation service, right?

IAN: Yes, I'm still running a telephone installation and I'm doing this part time. It was really just after hours on the weekend. And then, what actually happened is I still remember [Mel Henry??] saying to me that I was in a Morris minor of a business and not a sportscar.

He said, "You got to get rid of that telephone business because it's just killing you. It's not making you money." So, I actually sold it for $50,000 which just paid off the overdraft and got rid of the problem.

Then, I actually went back to a little bit of contracting and worked for myself. I actually had a beautiful contract with a billionaire up in Mandurah and I just had to work one day and I was making $1000 a day as an electrician. That covered all my expenses for the week.

Then, I had the rest of the week to devote to this website.
YARO: Nice [laughs].

IAN: Yes, it was absolutely --.

YARO: I wish you could teach us how to replicate that situation here.

IAN: Yes, it was just absolutely marvelous and I remember distinctly going and during the lunch breaks, telling these people about the smaller train slot I had and they were all laughing. That's ridiculous.

It was in November 2009, I walked in to them and said, "I can't come here anymore because I'm making more money on my model train set than what I am here." They were absolutely shocked.

YARO: This is a one-day a week job.

IAN: Yes.

YARO: So, you started making enough in the model train set that you actually need to quit a $1000 a day job.

IAN: Yes, that's true.

YARO: Wow, okay I think you skipped a few steps here. And so, how did you bring money from the site?

IAN: So, what I did is I had this blog up there. I had been through a [unclear] challenge and he had taught that what you do is you go and get an affiliate eBook or product out of Amazon or Clickbank and you stick it up on the top right of your Wordpress and you see what sort of response you get.

I grabbed a competitor's. There was only one competitor on ClickBank and I stuck his eCover up in the top right of the blog and just put an affiliate link and it started selling. It was selling three or four of them every single day.
But, the trouble was I would sell three and I'd get two refunds because it was such bad quality. But, it showed me that there was potential there.

What I did is I sat down, and it took me about ten or eleven days. I actually wrote my own eBook. I started with the table of contents and I wrote down different headings, just going through what would the people need to know about scale, about tracks, etc. etc.

**YARO:** So, an intro to model training.

**IAN:** Yes. When I was finished, it was only 97 pages. I hated writing. It was terrible. It felt like gritting teeth. It was just really, really tough because probably, not in my sort of forte.

But, I've got it done and I replaced the affiliate book with my own book and yes, we started selling three or four a day but, we weren't getting the refunds.

**YARO:** So, just to clarify this, did you write the sales page? Did you fill this book up with pictures? How much have you charged for it?

**IAN:** I charged $27 because that was what the competitor was charging. I bought all the images because with a model train eBook, obviously, you need a few pictures and things to show them what you're talking about. So, I just went to iStockphoto and places like that for the images.

We also had our own photos from when we went to the model train shows and taking our own photos and we just created this 97-page eBook and I'd learned, well, at that time I was also following John [Forneo?] who was putting up sales pages.

I forget which product he had but, he was selling one product and he basically took, looked at the copy on his sales page and just got a notebook and just wrote out his copy in his notebook but, when he was talking about his own product, I would replace it with my model trains for beginners product and then, I just took that and then, tucked it in and created my own sales page. That's how I created my own sales page.
YARO: Wow.

IAN: I think it started as a static HTML because I hadn't quite worked out how to get a sales page into Wordpress. I didn't want the side bars and I hadn't worked out at that stage how to get rid of the side bar.

I created the stand-alone HTML page and then, that would go and then, obviously, the product was in Clickbank so, they'd go over to Clickbank, pay and then, come back to my download page which was just a static HTML page and get the download.

YARO: And then, you're rich [laughs].

IAN: No, not quite. So, it started selling but then, my experience had told me that I needed to grow the transaction venue because it's no good getting one person to come along and pay $27 and you don't see them again.

So then, I thought, "How can I get them to spend more than $27?"

What I did then is I looked around at membership sites because I figured well, hang on then, I had twelve or thirteen different areas inside the eBook that could be scaled out because when you're talking about scenery, there's the trees and the grass and the rocks and just huge amount of stock. You could scale out on this eBook.

I figured, well, hang on, instead of just selling the one book for $27, I'll get them into a membership site, charge them $27 a month that then, the first month, they'd get access to the intro and where do you start. Next month would be the track and the bench, the actual model railroad bench. Next month would be something else, the scenery or the landscaping or whatever.

So then, I eventually went for the wish list product and that's what the product is now. It's basically you'd come in there. You'd still get the eBook but, that's your first payment. You get the first month free for the membership. And then, if you want to stay, obviously, you keep paying $27
a month until you feel you've got enough information and then, you cancel. That's the product.

Now, we grew it from $27 per transaction to over $100 per transaction over a period of 3.4 months because that's the usual stay.

**YARO:** So, when did you feel that this was enough to actually quit the one day a week job that you had going at the time, like was there a certain amount of money needed or did your wife tell you when this was okay? How did it work?

**IAN:** No, my wife was very, very nervous about me quitting. When I started selling product eBooks, there were days that I quit which was nowhere near what I was earning but, I realized that there was so much potential in this that I could take it easily to $80,000 or $90,000 a year income. I just needed to focus on that.

So, what I did is I actually quit the job and then, I hired a coach through the [unclear] John Robinson who is into bird watching and had written his own bird watching book and had sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

I actually hired him as a coach and he helped me to get over those humps, I guess and get quickly up to the $80,000 a year mark.

**YARO:** What were the humps?

**IAN:** It was fear. I had a lot of fear for some reason and I was allowing people, when I used to go and talk socially about this model trains and how I developed this eBook and all that, I felt like people were... I just felt like I couldn't succeed with this. It just didn't feel real.

So, I had instilled in myself these barriers and I was starting to procrastinate. I wasn't getting things done as quickly as before because when I was working, I would come home and I only had an hour or so to get things done. I will just get into it, I would focus and get it done but, what happened is when I quit work and I had all this time, I found I was procrastinating really, really badly and I had gone backwards in my motivation.
So, John, he was just holding me accountable. He was saying, "Last week you told me you would get this and this done. You now haven't got that done. What's going on? Now, you got to get that done as well as the next week's bunch of stuff."

YARO: If you weren't working, especially because, I mean, I'm surprised you quit a job that only took one day of your time to begin with but, I can understand maybe the need to feel like, "Okay, I am now fully into my online business. There's nothing else that I want to focus my mind on and my energy on." That, I can understand. But, how were you procrastinating? What were you doing? Watching TV?

IAN: No. What I did is I made a silly mistake. I, a while mentioned, I subscribed to this company that was providing two different niche sites every single month and what was happening was in January, they would give you a [unclear] site and raising finch site… And the next month, they would give you a leopard gecko site as well as a bad breath site. The whole idea, I subscribed to the effect that if I had 50 or 60 different sites, each making one or two sales every single day, I would have an income of $250,000 to $300,000 a year.

I was spreading myself across all these different sites and I knew that if I got two sites this month, I'd get them up and operational before the end of the month because then, I'd get another two and I didn't, I guess, that's just the way I operate.

I was in this constant getting them up and getting them working but, I wasn't promoting any of them. I was just very fortunate that the model train site was just organic, just making sales and the affiliates were coming in and they were starting to make sales.

YARO: It's not necessarily a mistake. There are people out there who build niche websites and then, move on making a couple of hundred but, I guess, the mistake in your case was you had a site that was doing well which had a lot of potential to do a lot better so, you could have gone deeper which you did eventually in one niche rather than expanding it to different verticals.
That's a really good lesson. I think a lot of people have troubles even deciding when is the right time to focus more on something that's working or try and go and do lots and lots of things in different areas.

I know from my experience, it's kind of hard to get one thing to work so, when you do find it working, it's almost always better to go deep or build an authority site which sounds like that's what happens with you.

IAN: Yes, that's exactly right. But, I was procrastinating because I was coming in in the morning and saying, "Okay do I work on site 1, site 10, or site 20?" That's just the way it didn't work for me.

When John came in, he said, choose one, okay. The model train site is showing signs that it can do exceptionally well. Let's focus on that. When we've got it ramped up and doing really well, that's when we'll move to the second one.

YARO: Right. It's hard to control more variables as well, isn't it compared to one site. So, it's not surprising that you had that procrastination problem. It's just too much to think about.

IAN: That's right.

YARO: So, you brought everything back eventually to just the one site and you just got rid of the other sites? Did you sell them?

IAN: I still got them. There were seventy sites just waiting there and they were all developed and they were out there and with the recent Google updates, they eventually went back and put Adsense across all of them but, with the recent updates, they were all nowhere to be found.

At some stage, probably sell them on Flippa or something. I actually did sell the [unclear] site. I was very fortunate. I list it on Flippa and got a thousand dollars for it which was quite amazing because it wasn't generating any income.
YARO: Tell us about this training site because obviously, you sold that for 150,000 so, maybe you can tell us what happened going forward like, I'm assuming you're still a one-man show, just you writing the content.

Are you still updating the blog everyday? Every week?

IAN: No, what happened was once I bought out the membership component, I had been focused on all the affiliates because I looked at the traffic and I noticed that I had all my goals set up in analytics and I realized that the affiliate traffic was the one that was converting the best whereas organic traffic was less than 1% conversion. My affiliates were converting at 20% or 30%.

YARO: Where do they come from?

IAN: Clickbank. They're coming from Clickbank because as the gravity was rising in Clickbank, I was getting picked up by other affiliates and then, they were promoting the product and I was paying a 70% commission. It was quite lucrative and being in membership, they were, I think, when I look at Clickbank, the average dollar per sale for affiliates is $108 per sale.

It's when you do the Clickbank sort, it's obviously going to be quite a tempting one to promote as an affiliate.

What was happening is they were coming in. They were promoting it. They were making more sales than what I was. What I did is I bought an affiliate blog and I actually started focusing just on the affiliates' traffic and started coaching these affiliates.

As they were coming in, I would make them go through squeeze so, they would register. I had a list of all these affiliates and we built it up to over 500 of them. I was just blogging about how to sell this product better.

If you go to modeltrainsforbeginners.com, down at the bottom, there's an affiliate link. I'd like to show you how that actual affiliate blog is set up.
YARO: So, at this point, just to clarify, you're not writing any content for the actual visitors of the blog. It's almost like you realized you actually had an eBook business more so than a blog at this point.

IAN: Yes. I completely stopped writing content. I stopped everything. All I did is I focused on affiliates as a traffic source.

YARO: Got you. So, I'm looking at the page right now. Modeltrainsforbeginners.com/affiliate and you got an optin form and a little squeeze page. I'm guessing did you do anything more to promote this page to get more affiliates?

IAN: No, because it was all organic by Clickbank. As the affiliates were promoting more, the Clickbank revenue was going up and I was encouraging more and more affiliates to find [unclear] Clickbank would come across to my affiliate opt in page because what I did is, in the Clickbank description, I put the affiliate link in there so, they were finding it all the time, coming across the affiliate opt in.

They were opting in and then, I was communicating with them via autoresponder. There was a weekly message that would go out and say, "Hey, it's Ian McConnell. How can I help you? I'm offering free coaching. I need to know what site you set up, what's the domain, what problems you're having, etc. etc."

Then, I was talking to them one on one and saying, "Okay, this is what you got to do. This is what you got to look for." I knew exactly what was converting and what wasn't converting so, I was giving them all that information which was helping them.

Then, they would go off to Facebook or they'd go off to Google Adwords and they'd start sending out their ads. I just helped them set up their spreadsheet, monitor their conversions, make sure they're actually making money and it just brought up a lot of momentum with the affiliates.
YARO: Did you do anything to increase conversion at your side of the fence? For example, the actual sales page for the eBook and the membership site?

IAN: Yes. I did a lot of split testing with the actual sales page.

If you look at the sales page now, it's under OptimizePress theme and we tested with testimonials. We A/B split tested the headlines and some of the copy probably, only the first two paragraphs but, we were getting such a great conversion because what was happening is I was saying to all these affiliates, "Don't waste your time direct linking to the sales page. We know it doesn't convert well because I can see that from our organic conversions."

You've got to get your traffic to opt in and I gave them a complete autoresponder sequence. I gave them all the messages for I think about two months.

What was happening is they were a building a list. They were sending the list via the email messages back to the sales page and I was monitoring that conversion and split testing the sales page.

YARO: So, they were putting those messages into their own autoresponder sequence.

IAN: Yes, that's exactly right. So, they were building their own assets, their own list and what I was also teaching them was not only to rely on sales pages.

I think this is where it made the affiliate program really successful was because I wasn't saying, "Hey, if I'm going to teach you stuff, you only promote my product."

I was actually saying to them, "You know, there is eBay. There is a huge amount of model train stuff on eBay and you can use the eBay Partner Network."
We were making $1000 a month for no work, just for eBay, just via simple link and email message saying, "Hey, go and look at this new products on eBay," because what was happening is [unclear] and things like that, the family didn't know what to do with these huge model train set. They would just go to eBay and just trying everything on there with no idea how valuable the stuff is.

YARO: It's not a cheap hobby as far as my understanding of it.

IAN: Yes, it's a very expensive hobby in fact and experts mostly spent $30,000 on average just on the basics of the hobby so, it's an expensive hobby.

YARO: It's great for affiliates, as what you said, eBay or wherever the case may be.

Okay, so it sounds like your blog didn't have as big a part in this picture as I thought it did. Really it's an eBook business and an affiliate, you became a really good affiliate manager.

IAN: Yes, the blog's value was in the sale. But, we'll get to that.

YARO: Well, take us forward, Ian. This is working. You make eighty grand in one year and ninety grand the next year. What year are we at when this is happening?

IAN: Yes, so 2010 I made $82,030; 2011, I made $97,762.

YARO: This is eBook sales and membership site recurring, right?

IAN: Yes, membership recurring is the large component there. Then, in 2012, I realized that my passion wasn't helping these affiliates and I'd completely forgotten to update the blog so, there was no new information there and we were totally focused on the sales funnel, getting the affiliates traffic into the autoresponder, through the sequence, to the sales page and make the sale.
I was just enjoying that and I'd completely lost the… I don't think there really was any passion in model trains because I'm not a model railroader myself. I had one when I was eleven and that was it but, it was just an idea that worked out.

YARO: Just to stop you on that point. You built an entire membership site and an eBook and a blog without actually having your own model train set at home.

IAN: Correct.

YARO: Everything like this is a great for anyone out there who thinks they actually need to know about the subject really in depth. You just researched and got photos from the train fair and from iStockphoto and just watched each of the videos and read out of people’s eBooks and websites and just collected the best information.

IAN: That's exactly right.

YARO: Fantastic.

IAN: There are so many people out there when I started the forum, there was a guy from the US that actually joined and he eventually became our moderator. He was just an absolute guy at model railroading.

Any question I had, I would just send him the question and he would answer it and give me this hugely detailed information. That's all you need is other people.

Also, what happens is, although the site was model trains for beginners, we were attracting a lot of expert model railroaders that were opting in which I never could quite figure out why but, they were coming in there and just so willing to help out.

I've got some blog posts on there that had costs a thousand comments because the beginners have gone in there, asked their question, I haven't seen it quick enough and these other experts have gone in there and answered. They've got different points of view and it was just fantastic.
Now, no definitely don't need to know anything about the niche.

**YARO:** Okay, so 2012, you realized trains is not your passion. You actually like being the affiliate manager more. How did you change because of that?

**IAN:** What I did was I was actually masterminding with a group of guys and the guy in the UK, the guy that was doing all his video work that knew a broker over in the UK and said, "Why don't you list for this guy and see what happens?"

**YARO:** When you said that, you meant the entire business like the affiliate program, the eBook?

**IAN:** Yes, all of them. Absolutely every one.

We just spoke to the guy on Skype and he said, "Yes, it might be a bit hard because model trains, not enough many buyers out there. They'd prefer the ecommerce and that sort of stuff but, we'll give it a go."

We listed. I think initially, we listed at $220,000 because we valued the business with everything in there at that sort of price and I didn't want to sell too cheap.

But, assets, we listed for three months and as we got two months into the listing, I really wanted to get rid of it. I really wanted to just focus on dealing with affiliates and helping them out.

I also knew that even if I sold this entire business, I could still go and promote this product as an affiliate and make the 70% because when I actually did the numbers, even though I was making $97,000 in 2011, I was only making 30%. They were making the 70%.

There were affiliates out there making a lot of money from this very, very simple product.

**YARO:** Kind of ironic really. You sell the business to become an affiliate of the business because it's more lucrative.
IAN: Yes, that's right and that's where the cash flow is going to come from every single month so, it was the best case scenario and what happened is Thomas found a bar in the US. It was for $150,000 cash and yes, it was just a done deal. There was actually no sale contract. There was nothing. We just risked all the money, handed out the username and passwords and the deal was done.

YARO: You didn't think, $150,000, that's less than double what you've made in a year. Did you not think, "I could just run up for another year and a half and make that money and still own the business." What was your thinking? You just wanted a clean break?

IAN: My thinking was I wanted to be the affiliate rather than the vendor and--

YARO: But, you didn’t have to sell the business to do that. You could have just start promoting instead of--

IAN: Yes, I'm a bit of a perfectionist. It was bugging me that I wasn't updating the blog and by then, there was a Facebook page with 6000 odd fans…

YARO: So, you wanted to see the business do things that you weren't prepared to do. You preferred to sell it and then, do the part of the business that you liked as an affiliate.

IAN: Yes, and obviously, what's happened is I promoted my own websites through the Model Trains for Beginners affiliate programs. A lot of those affiliates had opted in to my list sites or had dealings with them.

The cash flow would continue because I would still promote the program. I would then make a 70% commission. So, my cash flow essentially would just continue but, I would have got that cash upfront and that just helped me. I can buy an enormous amount of traffic with that.

They will then now build the business bigger and better because what's happened is there's Model Trains for Beginners and there's really no other
competitor and we've been hoping competitors would come on board because then, we can partner. We can do things because there's a big gap between the actual manufacturers of the model train stuff who are absolutely huge and then, Model Trains for Beginners, which is very small in comparison. There's a massive amount of growth.

But, I didn't have the resources to grow that. I tried outsourcing. We tried doing things but, it didn't really work because I think model trains is fairly technical and even though I was telling outsourcers, "Okay, you just need to speak to this expert and they will give you the information," it was getting relayed incorrectly and it just wasn't working.

So, I figured, "All right, let me get rid of this and we sell this portion of the business." I will then go out to promote it and it will allow me to continue with the promotion of that. I will still get the income from the membership but, I can also deal with the affiliates which is where I'm more passionate about.

YARO: So, when you say deal with the affiliates, if you sold the business, how are you still the affiliate manager?

IAN: I am not the affiliate manager but, what happened was, when I was running the affiliate side, I had links to my own website which was my diary of what I was doing with other websites.

A lot of them were coming like I had a resource page on my own website and so, to get access to that, they actually had to go to my own website and opt in again.

Even though there were affiliates on the model train sites, there were coming across to my site and they were opting in there as well. A couple of hundred [unclear] across and known me on a more personal basis.

YARO: So, you were going to work with them to promote other products?

IAN: I would just work with them and coaching. What I'm doing is I'm being like their accountability. I call myself a consultant.
YARO: Like for a fee?

IAN: Yes, that's right.

YARO: So, you became a consultant?

IAN: Yes.

YARO: That leads me into probably the last question. The second last question I've got for you, what's a day in a life like for you now? Do you sit at home and do all these?

IAN: Yes. We've got a whole bedroom house and the back bedroom is my office. My wife is a personal trainer. I love to do exercise, I always had my whole life. I basically get up at seven o'clock. I like to do an arms' worth of exercise. I usually take the kids to school, whatever needs to be done. And then, do my promotions.

It was a bit strange when I sold the business because I went from being fairly busy to having nothing which was a bit of a shock but, now it's full time again because it's been four weeks now since we sold it.

YARO: How long?

IAN: Four weeks.

YARO: Wow, so you only sold it a month ago.

IAN: Yes, that's right. In fact, I just got the last payment last week because with Clickbank, the payment is 82 days' worth of payments that they withhold in case of refunds and things and I just the payment last week, Thursday. Yes, it was really quick.

YARO: Fantastic, so I really caught you when this was all fresh. You're pretty much living now I guess, an established Internet marketer lifestyle. You had your success story. You've made some good money from that. You've built a lot of contacts and you got people who are willing to pay you
money to get help. So, I guess it’s a case of doing that and also figuring out what's next.

IAN: Yes.

YARO: Is there a "what's next?" I know you have a website now that we can point people to if they're interested in getting in touch with you which is…

IAN: Inmyhomeoffice.com

YARO: All right. So, that's inmyhomeoffice.com

IAN: Yes, that's the one.

YARO: Okay, and is it just a case of continuing to I guess, help people to make money online and in particular, with affiliate marketing?

IAN: Yes, what I'm doing is I'm actually, my wife is a personal trainer and I'm going to be a personal trainer for Internet marketers. What I noticed with my travels is that with procrastination and getting over the hump, there's a lot of people out there that have a little bit of fear, need a little bit of handholding and need a bit of accountability, and that's what I'm offering.

It's just, "Let's talk. Let's talk about your idea. Let's talk with how big this thing can grow. We can go over this and get on a week and call for instance and say, 'Okay, have you got this done? If not, why not?'"

Because there's just so many shortcuts. When I look back at Model Trains for Beginners and I look at the amount of work I put in and what actually made the sale go through, I could have whittled that down into probably 10% or 15% of the actual work and got the same result than what I did.

There was a lot of energy that was wasted. I just feel that I'd love to help people get the same end result.

YARO: Okay, well fantastic, Ian. I think that's pretty much the whole story from start to finish. Thank you for sharing all the details and how you did it.
Very inspiring for sure to go from Zimbabwe and having a business based on fear to model trains and selling it and now, doing what you like living on the Western side of Australia. Thank you for that.

I'll wrap this up. Any last comments you want to pass on to anyone listening?

IAN: Yaro, I really appreciate this. It's the first time I've ever been interviewed and it's been a huge amount of fun actually. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I can just say to everyone out there that when I first started, I had a lot of doubts and I didn't think I could get there. I know it's hard when you're hitting at the keyboard every single day because you don't really know what it can be but, you just got to keep going. You just got to persevere because it's phenomenal. The light is there. It's a great business. It's a great career.

YARO: Awesome. Thank you, Ian for the inspiring words. For anyone listening, if you'd like to listen to some more interviews like this, we have plenty of stories like Ian who have had success online with all kinds of different businesses and different models, you can find the archives on my blog. You can go straight to entrepreneurs-journey.com or Google my name, YARO and just click the Podcast tab. You'll find Ian's interview there as well as all the others.

Thank you again, Ian, to all the listeners and I'll catch you all on a future recording very soon. Bye!
Relevant Links Mentioned in this Interview

- Modeltrainsforbeginners.com
- Modeltrainsforbeginners.com/affiliate
- iStockphotos
- inmyhomeoffice.com
- Warrior Forum
- Dreamweaver
- Flippa
- Clickbank
- OptimizePress
- eBay Partner Network

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