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Clay Collins -- Founder Of Startup LeadBrite™, Pioneer Of The Prelaunch, And Serial Entrepreneur Shares His Story

YARO: Hello, this is Yaro Starak from the [Entrepreneur's Journey](#) podcast. Thank you for joining me today.

The guest we have on is only someone I have recently connected with using our voices. I'm about to talk to him now but, I have certainly heard his name around the place, in many fields actually. His name is Clay Collins. Hi Clay! Thank you for joining me.

CLAY: Yaro, I am grateful to be here. Thanks for having me.

YARO: So, Clay has... and you can correct me if I'm wrong. We'll find this out. But, I'm pretty sure he's gone through what you might almost call a traditional life cycle now for an Internet marketer going from a newbie to information products to now, software.

He is currently focusing on his [LeadBrite™](#) company which does lead pages which is I believe, is sort of in development at the moment, not a public release.



CLAY: No. It's public release. We're in the cloud. It's a SAS model. There's three different levels. We're live.

YARO: Okay, so they're live. And, [LeadPages™](#). And, you probably have seen [LeadPlayer™](#) as well which is his sort of funky opt in tool for video which a lot of people like [Pat Flynn](#), [Chris Ducker](#), [Mixergy](#), lots of great podcasts and video guys are talking about and using to collect leads among other things. So, hopefully, we'll get a chance to talk about that.

But, one of the things that Clay was really well known for prior to becoming a software guy was preselling everything he does. In other words, being able to take customers on before you create what you're going to create which is obviously a fantastic strategy for launches because you get paid to make what you're going to make.

That's what we're here to talk about. So, Clay, let's do this!

CLAY: Thanks for having me. Yes, with [LeadPlayer™](#), it's starting to almost become ubiquitous. I mean, [David Siteman Garland](#) from *The Rise to the Top* is using it, [James Schramko](#) is using it for everything he's doing, Pat Flynn is using it for all his videos on *Smart Passive Income*, and just like from video blogger to video blogger to video blogger to really, it's starting to be everywhere even if you don't necessarily see that it's [LeadPlayer™](#) in a lot of cases. I don't know that I have the data to say in more cases than not but, in a lot of cases... [James Wedmore](#), yes, it's being used. I am really happy about that.

In terms of preselling, I came to this insight a while ago that most people perceive that there are two ways to get a product funded. The first way is to self-fund it, right?

So, you reach into your pockets, and into your savings, and into this reserve of cash that in a lot of cases is earmarked for anniversary vacations, or your child's college fund, or retirement, right? Things you should never touch. And then, going into that is one way to fund your business.



A lot of people see that there's a second option which is raising venture capital or private equity or whatever, raising investment funds. I really saw that there was this third way to do it which was to have your market fund the product.

In a lot of cases, that is actually the better way because it forces you to get your value proposition down from day one. You get the marketing right and then, you reverse engineer your product based on what your audience said it wanted.

In the same way that it's often the best way to create a product, at least in information product is to write the sales letter first and then, create a product based on what you know would sell. It's a really good idea to do that for events, for information products, for [inaudible] programs, and also for software. That is sort of the avenue that I took.

There's this third path and it is audience-funded. [Kickstarter](#) has explored that in some ways but, I think it's a really limited and shallow way to do it. There's a lot more that can be done.

YARO: So, I think it's pretty clear. Clay is very excited about all of these too. I can almost tell from your voice that you live and breathe this.

Now, I'd love to know how did this happen? If it's a personality trait or a growing up thing so, can we go back in time? At the moment, you got a lot of experiences. You're running a seven-figure company. You've got twelve staff and you presell the whole bunch of different things. So, you know how to do it for software, for events, for information products.

But, how do that all come about? Can we go back to even your first venture. Did you have a lemonade stand as a twelve-year-old or something like that?

CLAY: I did. Actually, I grew up on a citrus nursery. My grandfather was my hero. My grandfather is kind of a remarkable person. He has grown more citrus trees than any person who has ever lived, like ever on the face of this earth.



He started a citrus nursery with my grandmother the day after their two-day honeymoon. They had \$16 in their pockets and they started doing that. My grandfather hadn't even graduated from high school. He had severe dyslexia. Probably he had dysgraphia, and he probably had ADD to be honest. But, he spent his entire life perfecting the art of growing a citrus tree and what I learned from my grandfather, well, two things.

The first thing I learned was that something as seemingly simple as growing a citrus tree is something that you could perfect over the course of your entire life.

A lot of people think, “Yes, you just grow a tree.” But, he told me that something that was as seemingly as simple as that could be turned into a process or something that could be an art form that you could perfect over your entire life. That was the first thing I learned from him.

The second thing that I learned from him was that, it's really okay to be you. My grandfather was not a normal person. My grandfather, basically, his existence showed me that you can simultaneously buck almost every single rule or trend and still be wildly successful.

My grandfather used to drive around in jeans and a t-shirt. That's all he wore every single day. He wore like the same clothes, I mean, not the exact same clothes but, it was like he had twelve Fruit of the Loom pocket t-shirts and twelve Levi's jeans.

YARO: Homer Simpson stuff.

CLAY: Yes, totally!

YARO: [*Laughs*]

CLAY: And, he drove around in this beat-up farmer pickup truck. But yes, he always had a few thousand dollars in his wallet and he dropped a \$100 grand on a ring for my grandmother when he wanted to. He was sort of the inspiration for that.



I grew up on a citrus farm and my mother had a fruit stand there and so, I squeezed orange juice and sold fresh-squeezed orange juice.

YARO: How old were you?

CLAY: That was my first venture.

YARO: How old and where was this?

CLAY: I was eight years old and this was in a rural Southern California.

YARO: Okay, so you had a lot of contact with your grandmother and grandfather. So, you were living with them or were they close by?

CLAY: I did. I grew up on their citrus nursery. They had a bunch of houses there and just as family wanted to or needed to, they were always allowed to stay rent-free in one of those homes.

My family lived in one of the homes that was that citrus nursery and my great aunt lived there and my grandparents lived there. It was like this family commune. They were all pretty conservative people. So, there were men who like hippy elements. But, it was like an intentional community and I was surrounded by a bunch of weird agricultural entrepreneurs, I guess.

YARO: The Collins family.

CLAY: Yes. I mean, it was the Young family. It was my mom's side of the family. Yes, but that's where I grew up and I was... an interesting story about me, if, I mean you told me you want to hear about the journey but, an interesting story about me was I, just sort of the value of doing things your own way, when I was in school, I remember there was this one incident that just kind of caused my mom to make a major change in my education and that was I won the school spelling bee but, I was failing spelling tests. The teachers were saying that it was because it was intentional or I was lazy.

It was really because I was dysgraphic. Orally, I could do these stuff, right? But, on paper, I couldn't pass the spelling test. My mom said this was total BS! I don't know if you can curse on this show but, she said it was like total



BS. You probably don't want the explicit ratings on iTunes but, like it was total BS.

And, she said, "I'm just going to homeschool you." I think that was another genesis for what happened. I find that people who are educated at home tend to want to work at home later in life, right? We're not used to living our own environment to go out and do something in this unfamiliar context. It's artificially generated to get more productivity out of us.

So, I was homeschooled and it's probably no wonder that I work from home now.

YARO: How old were you when you were taken out of school?

CLAY: Man, I was in and out of schools for a while because it just didn't work for me. I think the last homeschooling moment came, I believe it was fourth grade or so.

YARO: Wow, so you were very young.

CLAY: Yes, pretty young when I started homeschooling.

YARO: Did that affect you socially though? Did you miss out on friends and that sort of thing?

CLAY: Yes, everyone says that. Like in Marketing world, we always do split testing, right? So, like we know what the alternative looks like. And, I think when it comes to schooling, everyone assumes that if you're homeschooled, you're going to end up as this socially awkward dude who can't connect with other people.

I didn't find that to be the case at all. Maybe other people will say that I am socially awkward or something but, I still played competitive sports. I still was involved with boy scouts... So, there were still lots of other venues for meeting people but, I think the positive side for that, for me was that, I had an inner generational community.



So, when you're in school, you're always packed around a group of people who are in the same age group who are being shuttled from class to class. To me, that's the awkward social environment. When else in life are you all the time immediately surrounded by people whose age is probably within twelve months, or their birthdays are within twelve months of yours on either side being told exactly what to do from class to class. I mean, that's probably a prescription for creating a group of people who are meant to work in factories or do what their corporate masters tell them to do.

YARO: Right, hence the entrepreneur does not like that. Great, you had an advantage. Your mom pulled you out and you no doubt felt different as well from an early age.

CLAY: I did feel different and I was kind of the weird one because I wasn't in school and I think, becoming comfortable with that was one of the most empowering things in the world because I was used to doing things that other people didn't do.

At first, it was weird and after a while, it became empowering. Like when I dropped out of high school, I did return to high school because I wanted to be around girls but, I dropped out of high school to start a software company when I was 15.

The reason I did that or the reason why I had the courage to do that is because I was used to being weird like I had done this before. And, later when I dropped out of graduate school for the second time, like it just wasn't a big deal. It still freaked me out a little bit but, in the scheme of my life, this was not that unusual for me to do.

YARO: Clay, I've got the headline for your podcast right now – Serial Dropout [*laughs*].

CLAY: Totally.

YARO: So, you got pulled out of school, in primary school, and you go back to high school of the girls and then, you drop out to do software.



Can we just jump into these things? So, was the software company your first independent venture separate from your family? Outside of citrus, I mean.

CLAY: Yes. It was the first venture... If you're out of high school, so I'm 32 now. I'm in my thirties, my early thirties. But, throughout of high school like the worldwide web, it happened and I discovered that people were willing to pay a lot of money to have a website created.

So, my bestfriend at the time, Shawn, we started building websites for people and we'd make a few grand over the course of the weekend which wasn't bad when you are in high school.

YARO: Self-taught?

CLAY: What's that?

YARO: Were you self-taught with website development like HTML and so forth?

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: So, you have a brain that was able to learn that quite easily?

CLAY: I mean, yes. I don't know. I've never really had my I.Q. test. I don't know if I'm above average or below average or whatever. But, I will say that another thing that being homeschooled taught me or rather didn't teach me was that there's this artificial line between the learning environment and the home environment, right?

A lot of times you go to school and they're like this is the context on which I learn and then, they go home and they're like this is the context in which I play or goof around or eat breakfast or whatever. So, there's this separate context. I think that artificial boundary didn't exist for me.

So, yes I learned how to teach myself. I really didn't have a [*unclear*] when I was homeschooled. So, I was really self-directed. And, yes. I taught myself HTML. It wasn't that hard to do. But, yes, I was self-taught.



YARO: All right. So, you're building websites. What happened next?

CLAY: So, after that, I created, I mean, this is the nerdy-est story ever but, I noticed that our school needed computer lab management software. I thought that was a really cool opportunity to create some software and another kid in our school district was writing software and getting all these accolades from the administration. I was like, "I'm smarter than this dude who speaks Klingon." And, I wanted to build something cool.

I got a copy of Visual Basic from the school. I think when they weren't looking I just copied their disc. So, I had this bootleg version of Visual Basic and I wrote software that eventually my high school used to operate their lab. So, it kept kids from going to porn sites and from starting applications that they shouldn't start and it allowed the teacher to shut down everyone's computer like if there's chaos in the classroom, she could shut it down. And, it didn't make me very popular but, I mean, no one really cared. It wasn't like, "Oh, Clay wrote that. Now, we don't like him." It wasn't like the most popular software. Let's just say that.

YARO: Well, you're writing software too. That's not exactly an athlete. You're not going to be the popular kid in school because you can code, are you?

CLAY: That's true. But, they did notice that even at that age, girls appreciated confident guys who were extroverted and willing to put themselves out there. And so, that's probably the reason why I left high school. It was like I had the girlfriend I wanted and I was like, "All right, I'm just going to go now." So, I kept the girlfriend and dropped high school.

YARO: [*Laughs*] Oh, well. You're so determined. It sounds like everything just went really well. You found what you want, did it and then, out, -- I'm not referring to the girlfriend when I say that. [*Laughs*]

CLAY: [*Laughs*]

YARO: But, I mean, with everything, you know like, "I don't like this. I'm out. I'm doing software."



All right, well. Let's keep going. So, software for your computer lab leads to Microsoft, right?

CLAY: Yes, yes. So eventually, I met the person who sold all the computers to our school district and was probably selling more computers to California School Districts than anyone else. His name was Andy Hong. He was like, “Wow, you're doing some cool stuff. I've been wanting to start a software company,” and so...

YARO: You were like 16, right? Like 15?

CLAY: I'm 15. I'm 15.

YARO: 15, right.

CLAY: Yes. And, he was like, “I bet I could raise about six figures in venture capital.” This is like in the middle of the whole dot com thing where everyone's business mind was like, “We'll create some site and it will be so popular and we'll charge for advertising,” because CPMs were like \$15 or something ridiculous back then.

So, we did. We raised about \$120,000 in venture capital and at about 30% of that company I believe, I had like 49%, and the person, my business partner had like 51%.

YARO: What about venture capitals?

CLAY: What did you say?

YARO: What about the venture capitals? What did they get?

CLAY: Oh yes. Shoot! Well, okay so, of the part that was remaining, I had 49% right? So, obviously, that got diluted, the shares that we had got diluted. So, the venture capitals got a certain percentage of the company or it was an angel investor. So, it wasn't really easy money.

YARO: Well, your favorite thing, right?



CLAY: Yes.

YARO: Well, you're probably like it bad, right?

CLAY: No, no. It was like a business associate.

So, we did that and we created like the software called [iDialog](#), we created like these adaptive surveys so, you could create like survey trees and you could be like well, if someone answers something like this then, we'll show them these set of questions. It was like branching logic and stuff for surveys.

We were running out of money at some point and the whole thing failed. It failed miserably. We were so close to having a partnership with JD Power and Associates but, like it just didn't work out before our funding ran out. It was just the worst, the worst situation and so, at some point, I was like, "Well, screw this. I'm going to go to college."

YARO: Okay, so while you were doing that, were you taking a salary and still living at home? How did a 15-year-old and a school dropout working on a startup live?

CLAY: Yes, I was making about three grand a month which isn't a ton but, yes, actually, it's not actually bad for...

YARO: For a 15-year-old, that's pretty good [*chuckles*].

CLAY: Yes, right. So, it's not bad for a 15-year-old to have free room and board.

YARO: Yes, and it's not bad for anyone to be honest. So, you got no rent. You can live now on three grand a month if you are not going to rent. It's good for anyone.

CLAY: Yes, totally.

YARO: Stop complaining.



CLAY: So, I lived with my co-founder in Orange County California. And so, I just like, he had a spare room and I stayed in that. My best friend from high school ended up joining us, too. So, we all lived together.

YARO: Okay, so software company doesn't quite have the result you want and you go to college. Now, what were you thinking? Is that when you thought, "Well I better be traditional now," or is it, "I just want to party because..." it wouldn't surprise me if that was what you were thinking but--

CLAY: Yes. I was raised – I'm not Mormon now, but I was raised Mormon. I really didn't even know how to party and how to call it at that point, really. Which was unfortunate --

YARO: Well, you knew how to get a girlfriend.

CLAY: Man, why didn't someone tell me about how good excellent beer is that early on. It's such a tragedy that the first beer most people have in college is something like some crappy, crappy beer. Anyway, it was really unfortunate.

But, no. I didn't party. What I did was I kind of "nerded out." So, I got to be honest. I didn't do well in school and I felt like I could do a lot better and I think that probably because I have ADD and I never really cared much. I had this chip on my shoulder.

I was like, "Well, this is my shot. I want to prove to myself that I'm smart." So, I studied way too much in college. In fact, literally the only regret of my life is starting too hard in college. My only regret was that I studied too hard and I didn't goof around enough.

YARO: So, how did you get in to college because you didn't have a high school degree, didn't you?

CLAY: No. I actually got into the number one Liberal Arts College in the United States. I don't know if most people heard of it. It's called Amherst College. It's fairly well known. The average SAT score is really high. But, I



got in there. It was probably marketing back then like I had written some academic papers that had gotten published through a job that I had.

Like any other story, there's all these twist and turns but, like in between my freshman and sophomore year of college, I got a job working for an academic research center that was doing a lot of geographic information systems research like GIS and I was their database programmer.

Just by virtue of the data I had access to, I was able to team up with some academics and write some papers and so, like I had these papers. I had this entrepreneurial background. I had crappy high school grades but, I had papers published, I had done well in my first year of college, I had good test scores and I had an interesting entrepreneurial background. Not everyone has left high school to start a software company and had papers published and stuff like that.

YARO: And, what course did you choose?

CLAY: So, in college I took--

YARO: It was a degree, right? So what--

CLAY: Yes, I have a degree in Psychology. That was really fun. Although, I have learned like a billion times more about Psychology from Marketing than I have from academic classes, at least about Social Psychology...

YARO: I think everyone would agree with that. That's pretty standard procedure. Okay, so you made it through all of college for three years?

CLAY: That was four years.

YARO: Four years and you just studied your butt off. That's what it's like. There wasn't any business projects going that was significant or anything like that?

CLAY: Not during college, no.



YARO: Okay, so. You almost did the one time when most people start a business, you actually studied! That's once again, unusual, Clay.

CLAY: Yes, I mean I would say that I was burned. I didn't realize this until I started a software company last May. What I realized was that at 15, I had this dream of starting a software company and I loved it. Man, I loved it!

It didn't work out and it didn't work out because we didn't understand product-market fit, we didn't understand direct sales marketing, we didn't understand conversion design, we didn't understand analytics, we didn't understand what gets people to buy, we didn't understand like Lean Startup methodologies, we didn't understand any marketing, anything, copywriting, and so, I think it's kind of interesting that at some point during graduate school, I started blogging and then, I'd started pointing myself heavily into marketing and I think partially that was a reaction to the failure of the very first company that I cared about deeply and trying to figure out the thing that had hurt us the most, the thing I'd cared about when I was 15.

Fifteen years after, I started that company when I was fifteen so around, actually about like 27 or so, I started just pouring myself into marketing. And, that went fine.

YARO: Let's get to that point.

CLAY: Okay.

YARO: So, you finished college, and I'm assuming while you were in college, you were just taking a few odd jobs to keep paying the bills and so forth, right? Or, living off something else?

CLAY: Yes, I really didn't... Other than that full-time gig I had doing software development, that only lasted a year because I quit but, other than that, I really didn't have any jobs in college. It was paid for.

YARO: Okay. And then, you graduate and you got a Psychology degree. What were you thinking is next?



CLAY: Yes, so, I went directly. I got a full ride into a PhD program. It was the number one program for, if I can, it's only academic thing I really have to brag about but, I applied to the number one program for Developmental NeuroPsychology in the United States at that time. It was at the University of Minnesota. I started a PhD program there.

I wanted to study learning disabilities because I'm pretty sure that I have them. That whole period of my life was all about compensating. I wrote these computer programs to help me increase my short-term memory. I wanted to get good grades to just prove to myself that I wasn't stupid and I wanted to study developmental neuropsychology because I wanted to study learning disabilities so that, I could help people create cognitive exercise routines to help them overcome their limitations.

And, I really, [*unclear*] was always 20-20 but what I really believed now is that people should basically ignore their weaknesses and just focus on their strengths. I think that's where things really turned around for me was when I just stopped trying to fight who I was and stopped trying to compensate and just decide to go for what I was actually good at instead of fighting against what I was bad at which was a horrible way to live. It just sucks.

YARO: Yes, there's a book somewhere out there. And we're reading about that, focus on your strengths not your weaknesses. We have a society that forces people to focus on their weaknesses especially during school -- You're not good in Math but, you're forced to do it.

Okay, so does this PhD gets complete?

CLAY: No, no. Basically, I dropped out almost the first semester. So, I dropped out of graduate school twice. That was round number one and that first semester, I took a class at a law school just because you got one discretion in your class you could take outside your graduate program. So, I took a class in International Human Right Law. It was being taught by the former Chairman of the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission. I wrote a paper for that class on the human rights of people with no citizenships. They are called, "stateless persons."



He took that paper that I'd written and he included it as a chapter in a book he was writing. I was like, "This is total BS." I am in here and supposedly at a great school for Developmental Neuropsychology and yet, I just wrote this paper in this International Law Class and now, I'm published for International Law even though I'm in this other program.

So, shortly after that, that professor who hired me, or who I wrote that paper for hired me to be his ghostwriter. I ended up, I got a fellowship to study human rights or housing rights in Ghana, so I moved to Ghana for a little bit more than a summer and did that and then, he ended up hiring me full-time to write a book for him. That book is actually published by Oxford University Press. You can look it up. It's called *The Human Rights of Stateless Persons*.

YARO: And, this is the kid who couldn't spell in paper.

CLAY: Yes and couldn't write. I was told in high school that I couldn't write but, I just wasn't obsessed enough about it. But, I wrote that. Granted he took some pieces from like other materials he had written but, 75% of that book, I wrote every word. I'm first in the acknowledgements because I freakin' wrote the acknowledgements of the book.

YARO: [Laughs]

CLAY: And so, that was a high school dropout number one and the next time I decided I wanted to go to, I wanted to do a dual program in Information Studies and in Human Rights or in Law because I wanted to study how to access to information affects people's demands for Human Rights. It was something like really obscuring academic like that...

YARO: This is amazing. For an entrepreneur, you have quite a lot of academic background. I can see that part about wanting to prove to yourself that you are smart academically, really took a few years from you here. You weren't doing any businesses at all.

CLAY: Yes.



YARO: So, can we date this? Where are we at? Are we in early 2000 by now or...?

CLAY: I'm so bad with time.

YARO: I think it must be because you were still talking in your early 20s here when you were doing all these, right?

CLAY: Yes. So, I graduated from college in like 2003 and so, 22, 23... so, this is like 2005.

YARO: Yes, you and I are very similar because I'm 33 and I graduated in '03 as well I think or '02. So, right.

CLAY: Cool.

YARO: Now, let's forward a bit. We've dropped out of your post-graduate studies twice. So, you switch from Neurostudies to Law and now, you're switching from law to Information Systems plus Law. That sounds about right?

CLAY: Yes. This is so convoluted because I actually dropped out of college once I transferred from one college to the next and then, worked for a year in between them. So, there's lots of fits and starts.

Until I found entrepreneurship, I'd never done the same thing for any length of time. My business I've done from the second I started, is all I've done for the last, when did I start like 2007. So, this is all I've done since 2007.

YARO: Right.

CLAY: But, yes, during this period there's lots of fits and starts.

YARO: If anything, Clay, you are a foster child for any parent that's listening to this who's worried about their dyslexic learning disability student and coming all over the place, you can eventually find what works, eventually, which we haven't even talked about yet, to be honest.



So, let's get through this, you obviously decide at some point academia is not your path. So, how did that transition happen?

CLAY: That transition happened, I was in this program and I got, both it was my second graduate school program and I got that one fully funded as well plus I was making good money, interesting story, I hope my employee never finds out. I don't know what the statute of limitations is on this thing but, I had this job working for a digital library that was funded by the government doing cataloguing. I was cataloguing digital assets on the Internet and I actually outsourced that to India.

So, I hired someone with a library degree like a Masters to do my job. I was making like \$40,000 a year or something ridiculous in getting my school paid and my insurance and I wasn't working hard [*laughs*].

YARO: [*Laughs*] You might be going to jail with that. I'm sure they can't get you now.

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: So, what were you doing with your time then and your money?

CLAY: Yes, so that's when I started blogging because again, I was probably still so burnt out on real business and software but...

YARO: Wow, it's a long time to be to be burnt out. That happened to you when you were 16, 17?

CLAY: Yes, I'm so glad I didn't do it. So, I started blogging. I had a personal development blog called [The Growing Life](#) because everyone thinks they can write about personal development when they start blogging and that's fine. I don't want to discourage anyone from doing that but, at my age, I was a complete screw out, and I thought I had something to say about personal development and productivity, and ...

YARO: Well, you have something. You were hiring Indians to do your full-time job. That's pretty productive.



CLAY: That's true.

YARO: Life happens.

CLAY: Exactly. So, I started blogging and I started hitting the front page of Digg because I learned that you could gain that. To some extent, there was a formula, and if you wrote that kind of article, and you got enough Digg influencers on your side, you can hit the front page on Digg and that was when Digg could drive massive amounts of traffic.

And then, I realize that there were people who were Digg influencers that you could actually pay to “promote for you.” So, I started paying these Digg influencers to get on my track, and I was like, “Well, if this is worth something to me, I better be worth something to corporation.”

I got clients, I probably shouldn't reveal a few of their names. A few of them are pretty successful companies now but, I can name ones that I don't really have relationships anymore but, like Fox Television studios was one of my clients. I was like the middle man. So, they'd give me like a few thousand and then, I'd give a few hundred to a Digg influencer to get them on the first page of Digg [*laughs*].

YARO: I don't like that evil laugh there [*laughs*].

CLAY: That was my black hat days.

YARO: Yes.

CLAY: I don't do that stuff anymore.

YARO: How did you get a large company like Fox?

CLAY: I'm a firm believer that you need to know the dark art. You shouldn't practice them necessarily but, like I really think you should know them like even if you're a martial artist, you should know all the moves that people might do to kill someone but, you should never do them.



YARO: I don't know if you heard me actually because I was curious how you landed such large clients like Fox Studios especially because what? You're just this guy who has a website?

CLAY: Yes, so as a blogger, I started just speaking with other bloggers and I started speaking with just other companies about what I did because I'll call up anyone. I don't really care.

One of my clients at the time was this company called [Brazen Careerist](#) and they've got like a blog network. They got me to speak at this event in L.A. for Hollywood Executives.

YARO: Speaking about what?

CLAY: About New Media and Social Media and what was going on.

YARO: Okay, so when was this? Are we talking '07? '08?

CLAY: It was like...

YARO: Because we were talking Digg's hay day. That would probably be around that time.

CLAY: This was like 2006 to 2007.

YARO: When did you start your blog? '05?

CLAY: No, I think it was 2007. So, yes, it must have been 2007 because it was like right around that time.

YARO: Right, so your blog is '06.

CLAY: No, I think my blog was early '07 and this was late '07.

YARO: Okay.

CLAY: Yes.



YARO: Okay, so '07. So, we're talking only five or six years ago.

CLAY: Yes, and so I did that. And so, the next logical jump in my entrepreneurial journey was that I realized, well, if they're willing to pay for this then, there must be some actual value to this and I should this be using the for me rather than other people.

So, I started getting into niche marketing and I started selling like stuff in the green niche like compost pails and cordless lawn mowers and chicken coop plans, and things like that. I start selling stuff like that.

YARO: So, were you following someone's system with this or were you just from blogging to niche marketing, it's a bit of a switch, right? Because you're not going to sit there and write about all these subjects long-term, are you?

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: So, how did you learn that?

CLAY: You know what? I was giving everyone money at that time. I was buying like you hear about the buyer, the person who is in that buying mode and about everything. I even, I was in [StomperNet](#) for five months. It was like \$800 a month continuity program and I was in, man, I was giving everyone money like I was buying everyone's e-book.

So, you know, there was no specific system I was following per se, but there was a bunch of them and I was just kludging together my own system for doing this and talk to a lot of people at the same time.

YARO: That was the hay day of launches. So, you're talking traffic secrets and [Butterfly Marketing](#) and [Product Launch Formula](#) and StomperNet and Rich Schefren with the [Internet Business Manifesto](#) and all those things were out around that time.

CLAY: Yes, yes, totally.

YARO: And, you bought it all [*laughs*].



CLAY: Yes, I bought it all. After a while I've realized that if you go to these conferences, you can connect with other people who have access to everything and there was this hard drive being passed around and I got access to that hard drive that had everyone's thing on, everyone's stuff on it...

YARO: [*Laughs*] Black hat did it again.

CLAY: Yes, or I'd get together with [*inaudible*] ...

YARO: We lost you again.

CLAY: What's that?

YARO: You just dropped out for a second again. You said you got together with people and...?

CLAY: I'd get three people together and we'd buy someone's \$2000 info product where the affiliate was making half of that but, we'd buy that. So, that was one way that I did it.

YARO: Okay, so all these gives you the tools to niche websites.

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: And, did it work?

CLAY: It did work, yes. I was living that lifestyle business. I had a lifestyle business which is not where I am at now. But, I was making four to five grand a month and not working incredibly hard for it and I liked that.

And so, one of the things about consuming so many information products and watching so many launches is everyone inevitably, maybe it's a short-term thing or maybe it's a long-term thing but, you get very used to when you start understanding how people sell the information products about how to make money. I was like, "Well, I'm making money."



And, I paid my dues and so, I'll start showing other people how to do it. So, I guess I became an Internet Marketing guru for a little bit.

YARO: Okay, before you taught that though, where people struggle here is usually first setting up all these niche websites and making money.

Was that easy or hard? Did you have a lot of failures a long the way? Or, was it like fairly like, all right, I did my keyword research, built a niche website with articles in it. Google traffic came and I saw an affiliate product. Was it like that?

CLAY: Yes, it was an affiliate product to, some of them was Amazon. Some of them was Clickbank. Yes, it was a pain and from the beginning, I had to subsidize it with selling SEO consulting and all kinds of other things.

It was nowhere near as easy as other people had made it out to be. It still was pretty wide open in terms of the keywords like there weren't so many people competing. Google hadn't come out like Panda and stuff and I think probably the trick that helped me out the most was the whole exact match domain thing.

I realized that if I owned a dot com, dot net, or dot org with the exact phrase, in the right order with no dashes that I could rank pretty quickly. One of my sites was compostpails.net. That's where I sold compost pails. That was where I got the bulk of my traffic was from Google and it was primarily through just buying up a ton of exact match domain names.

I remember at one point, I found like the top ten biggest markets for attorneys and it was like New York, San Francisco, Houston, whatever the ten cities were. I realized that the way people searched was they searched for the name of the city first, and then, attorney and lawyer.

So, I bought like "Bankruptcy Attorney Los Angeles," or "Divorce Attorney Los Angeles." Every single variation, I bought 300 of those. It was ridiculous. That was another way I made money with selling domains like exact match domains. I'd get them to rank and then I'd sell them. And, to this day, I still sell like one of those every once in a while.



Like the other day, I sold LosAngelesRealEstateAttorney.com or something like that and that was for \$500. So, this was not like, “Hey, it’s a straightforward.” It wasn’t an easy story about how I made income then. It was just a bunch of crap all put together. Most of it was not service-based. It was these little packs. It really wasn’t a real business in the sense that it was, everything was based on a loop hole that I found. It was short term, and... I don’t know. It wasn’t really the best time.

YARO: [*Laughs*] “Jenky,” I think is the phrase...

CLAY: It was jenky, totally jenky!

YARO: Okay, so that led you doing the natural thing and making money or teach people how to make money and did you have some success with that, too?

CLAY: I did, yes! I had a lot of success with that.

YARO: As in that became your main business?

CLAY: Yes, it did. I still, I always, throughout that time, I still was doing the stuff that I taught. So, for a while, like I had this domain called BusinessIdeas.net and for a while, that ranked number three for the term, “business ideas,” anywhere between position one and position three for the term, “business ideas.”

That was a really cool domain name because it had so many keywords built into it. It’s probably the best, in terms of niche marketing, it’s probably the best domain that I have ever owned. You’ve got business ideas, so that’s the top tier key phrase. And then, embedded within that, you have second tier domain names. You’ve got home business ideas and niche-business ideas and sports business ideas. All these second tier ones and then, based on that, you got all these other long-tail things like, “Hookah bar business ideas.”

Seriously, Hookah bar, there was this product like how to start your very own Hookah bar. That was one of our best-selling Clickbank products.



YARO: Wow.

And then, we had a product for, that was our own product. It was an affiliate thing. It was our own product on how to become a medical transcriptionist.

And so, we sold that one, too.

YARO: You're basically doing the traditional niche marketing and flipping which a lot of people still do today, really don't they?

How did that lead to software though because that's a fairly big transition. Was there some steps in between that or did you just getting a lot of [unclear] information publishing? We haven't really talked about your method for pre-launching either. Did that start developing at this stage?

CLAY: Yes, my method for pre-selling started out when I did my very first big launch. Blogging is probably the best education I've ever had for how to do copywriting. I think it's virtually impossible to create a large audience and not know how to write copy and to not have a sense of how to serve them.

So, I went back and forth with them. It was kind of like a tennis match like I wouldn't do anything until they did something. So, I'd be like, "Hey, I'm thinking about making this product. I'm wondering if anyone would be interested in me making a product."

They'd come back and say like, "Yes, I'm interested."

I was like, "Okay cool. Well, before I release that, just to demonstrate what would come of this, I'll make a free product for you. If you could have me make any kind of product, what would you be interested in?" And, they'd tell me what they'd be interested in.

And then, I'd go back to them and say, "All right, I think I know what you're interested in in terms of the free product. Here's what I think it is... Is that right?"



And, they'd say, "Yes or no," and they'd help me refine it. And, then, I'd go back to them and be like, "All right. It's going to come out on this day. Is there anything else you're looking for? They'd tell me and then, I'd release it and then I'd get testimonials for my free product and I'd say, "All right, based on your feedback from the free thing, here's what I could charge you for. Would you be interested in that?"

They'd say, "Yes." And, I'd be like, "All right."

It is long and it would take a while but it worked incredibly well. The first launch I did, we had a 25% conversion rate from our launch list which was remarkable, not from my entire list but, from the people who said they were interested in the launch. And, it was because I had this interactive launch. I had people really involved in the story about how the product came to be.

If people think that your product was their idea in the first place, because it really is then, they're much more likely to buy. If they feel like they're part of the story about how the product came to be then, they will buy.

YARO: A sense of ownership. So, I'm assuming this is all a spin off from building your audience through the blog and you obviously had an email list from that, as well, especially as you became a teacher of how to make money online.

CLAY: Right.

YARO: What was that blogging again? What was the URL?

CLAY: It was a bunch.

YARO: Well, what was Clay Collins known for? Was there like.. I'm Entrepreneur's Journey. Was there a specific site where you got the people who you would sell these products to?

CLAY: Yes, it was called, there were so many versions of this, it was called *Project Mojave*.

YARO: Oh, interesting.



CLAY: Yes, like the Mojave Desert.

YARO: Underground, huh?

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: Okay, so that was the first time you tested your system of really working with the people you're going to sell to before you create the product, right?

CLAY: Correct.

YARO: Okay, so take us forward then. You must be getting close to the present , the last few years, right?

CLAY: Yes. That was more like, it feels like now everything just becomes, it feels like it's been forever because I've sort of settled down and the huge shifts aren't happening as much. But, at that point, I really just started getting more into Marketing at that point. So, I'm telling niche-stuff.

But then, at some point, I'm like I'm done with I call them, "*The Lost Boys of Lifestyle Design*." There's a whole generation of people that read Tim Ferriss's book. They don't know what they want out of life. They haven't really figured out their relationship with women or with work and they just want to get away from it all and they see, they read the [Four-Hour Work Week](#) and it seems like clever and interesting and they want to like do all of these hacks in their life.

My clients then were like dudes going through existential crises who had no sense of direction in their life and it lost their way. There is something wrong with that.

I have been that person. So, I'm not like criticizing that. But, at some point, like I started to get a sense of my own identity and what I was good at and what I wasn't. And, I realized that clients with existential crises are the hardest people to serve because they don't really know what they want in



the first place and manifesto marketing, that's all about the “rah-rah” and quit your job and all that stuff.

I started evolving as a human being and I'm not interested in [unclear] anymore or doing revolution marketing. It's all redirect-based. And so, I create my first product that's really just a marketing product.

YARO: For who? Is it like for individuals?

CLAY: Yes, for information marketers. It's called the *Interactive Offer*. It's all based on case studies. Basically, I had a bunch of private clients that I did this process with, the pre-selling process. One of the first was a woman called Kim West. She's at sleep lady.com and she's sold over 100,000 books on how to get your child asleep at night.

We did a pre-sell with her and it did incredibly well and we started collecting more case studies. I did my first, I became friends with Jeff Walker and he thought it was a good idea for a product and so, I launched that product and it did pretty well.

YARO: That's an obvious connection with his thing, is it? It's almost like a sub-niche of launches.

CLAY: It is, yes.

YARO: Okay.

CLAY: I mean, yes, so I remember Jeff saying, “I can teach people a launch but, I think a lot of people are having trouble figuring out what their offer should be.” And so, that's what my product was in part focused on how to figure out what your offer should be and then, how to launch it.

YARO: Did you make millions?

CLAY: We made seven figures. I don't know that we made eight but, we did okay.



YARO: Right. You're thinking, well, I've made tons of money now. I can retire, right?

CLAY: No. I started getting really unsatisfied with a lot of things about. It sounds like I'm a total flake until this point but...

YARO: [*Laughs*] Really, it does. I feel exhausted, Clay and we've just gone through your life really and wow, there are so many changes. It's almost like you don't fall through with anything but, there's a few things you're just gifted at that make it work, or you find ways to really cleverly get a solution and it works but, nothing really fits right. It's like you're playing around with different things.

Is that a fair assessment?

CLAY: Yes, I'm worried of getting into subtle details. It's the first time that I've really told this full story and I'm worried that I'm going to come off as a flake but, I think most stories, like I could have told you the marketing version of the story, but I think, yes, this is my life.

And so, I think everyone's life has a bunch of these fits and starts.

YARO: I think because you're homeschooling as well. It's unusual, so you are used to change in that regard and not having the standard pattern. So, it's probably influenced too, throughout your life.

Now, you've been saying and you can get the thread even throughout this interview that now, for the first time in your life, doing something that you want to do and stick with and you've been doing it for a while. You feel "set hold," I think that was the phrase you used before. Can we talk about transition to that?

CLAY: Yes, so even with what I'm doing right now, with software, I still feel like, this doesn't feel like, there's all these things that we can highlight as being shifts. But, to me, this is very logical.

I still have the same blog that I've had for a few years running at now. It's at MarketingShow.com. I'm still creating software that rather than teaching



marketing has marketing principles inside of it, right? With LeadPages™, I could create a course on how to create landing pages or I could just create a landing page platform where the templates have best practices built into it.

YARO: Actually, before you talk about that, can you tell us what LeadPlayer™ and LeadPages™ are? Why did you go after those market?

CLAY: Yes. So, LeadPlayer™ is a video player that helps people, bloggers, collect leads with videos and generate more sales. It basically allows people to put an opt in box anywhere within a video but, it's got, I think it's has a great deal of sophistication. It remembers who has opted in to which list.

So, if you have ten different lists, it remembers which of your visitors opted in to which list and so, they don't get asked twice unless, the videos aren't obviously on.

It also allows you to globally set calls to actions. You can make it to that, let's say, you're doing a webinar on a given day. Someone goes and watches a video that you put up a few years ago. Someone, at the end of that video, they can see a call to action for a webinar that you're doing that day. So, you can create global calls to action across all the videos on your website.

YARO: Why did you come up with this?

CLAY: I came up with it because I had bought a video player and I wanted to do this. It was one of the selling points of this competing video player that you could create a call to action easily and create opt in boxes.

I got it. It was like, well, just kidding. You got to supply your own HTML for the opt in box. You have to custom code that and it needs to fit inside like you couldn't just be like, "All right, here's the text for the opt in box, boom!" And then, it would be up.

YARO: So, it didn't work very well.



CLAY: It just didn't work and I wanted something with incredible YouTube integration because I wanted to both be where the traffic was which is YouTube and I wanted people to simultaneously increase their YouTube view count for everyone who watches a video, which helps you out inside of YouTube because it's something like YouTube will send you more traffic if you have more views because it perceives the video being a popular video.

So, I wanted to increase my view count and I still wanted the people to get all the benefits of being able to collect leads and get opt ins on their videos and have these calls to action.

YARO: Okay.

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: Were you thinking brand new business? Were you thinking, "Drop everything else. I'm going into software." Is that how this happened or was it more gradual roll over?

CLAY: I wasn't--

YARO: It's all you do now, right, predominantly?

CLAY: Yes, we don't sell information products anymore. I was thinking that this is another product that is going to serve my existing audience with the needs that they have from us which was they had marketing needs. And so, I think people watching externally might think, "Oh, God, Clay shifted directions," when we're not.

It's the same audience. It's the same blog. We're selling a product that helps them accomplish the same thing but, the venue for doing that is a software product as opposed to an information product.

YARO: So, it's potentially much stable and you can build a business around that. So, it's almost like you're just going deep into something that worked.



CLAY: Right. I really feel like we didn't shift directions. I feel like we're just going deeper. We're just doing the same thing we did. We're just doing it better.

YARO: And that led to LeadPages™ as well?

CLAY: Yes [*laughs*].

YARO: Why are you laughing [*laughs*]?

CLAY: Because honestly, like in questioning in this interview whether I'm doing the right thing in the sense that at some point, there's so much data that I wonder if it just annoys people.

And so, I'm wondering if I'm annoying people with how circuitous this path is. But, if I would have just said something that's simpler and that how the few key points and feel good takeaways, I wonder if that would serve people better as opposed to the sort of very complex circuitous path that people might not be able to wrap their head around.

I just don't know.

YARO: We'll find out. We can ask everyone listening into this, let's get some comments and if you've listened this far then, obviously, you've paid attention and you're enjoying the story like I certainly am and, I love knowing that especially the part about homeschooling because that's dictated a lot of the rest of your life and probably almost why you're successful because you're non-conformist and you wouldn't be doing this otherwise.

So, I think that it also allowed you to leverage your dyslexia and learning disabilities to succeed where in the past, you would have been forced to adapt to it somehow and probably be doing a job you hate right now, otherwise.

CLAY: Yes.



YARO: So, I think it's important because people certainly listening in might be thinking, "Well, I haven't figured this out yet and I've been dropping out of everything I do and nothing fits right," and then, it's sort of great to hear that you can find something that does fit and you can leverage whatever it makes you unique.

An entrepreneur is perfect at this. There's a style of living a life that suits misfits. It's entrepreneurship.

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: I hope you're happy to wear the misfit tab. I am. But yes.

Well, let's wrap it up.

CLAY: Okay.

YARO: We reached the current business. I would love to spend an entire hour about how you have been growing this. But, maybe we don't need that much because like you said, it's just an extension of your existing business. So, you already had an email list, a blog, an audience, you set up this great tool for your videos to help you capture leads. Did you sort of presell that as well or was it just...?

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: Yes.

CLAY: We sold both LeadPlayer™ and LeadPages™. So, a lot of people questioned whether or not you could actually do this preselling thing.

I remember I was interviewed on Mixergy about preselling. A lot of people in that audience were interested in SAS products and they were like, "Yes, but can you do this with software?"

I was like, "Of course, you can do this with software." That to me was a no-brainer. The next thing you know, I'm doing this with a SAS business [laughs].



YARO: [*Laughs*] So, that was before you were doing it with the software.

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: Interesting.

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: And, did it work from day one? Did you get customers and profitable?

CLAY: Yes.

YARO: And, you've just been growing since then.

CLAY: Yes, I think you said we have 12 people on our team. It's only 7 people.

YARO: Sorry.

CLAY: But, we have 7 full-time in-house people. I guess, some of them aren't technically employees. They're contractors but, they're full-time for us and they don't work for anyone else. And, all this is supported by our software.

I think that one thing that people might be thinking about when they're hearing this is that kind of information product space or the bootstrap space, kind of all these pivots, I guess people call them pivots now because that's trendy, but all these pivots I've gone through seem really unusual, right?

But, if you look at the software space, very normal, like it's very, very normal for someone who does startup, someone in the startup world to have six or seven or eight businesses before they do that thing that sort of defines them or like becomes their big company.



So, in my space, there's plenty of people who have like this is their fifth company and like that's the one that took off, sort of the venture back software space. That's very traditional because what happens is, you raise anywhere from one to five million and the investors interested in the business is just going to sustain lifestyle.

They want it to either blow up or die. They don't want it to flat line. They want to see how it works. And so, someone will get one to five million in venture capital and that business will either trait hyper-growth or it will flat line or die.

For every business that flat lines or dies, both of those eventually die and that entrepreneur is on to the next thing which he hopes will create hyper-growth.

And, even though I didn't know about the asset class that is venture capital, and I didn't understand how to raise it initially, that's always been my emphasis which is why I pivoted. I'm only interested in hyper-growth. I want to have a business that can eventually be a billion-dollar business or a business that's worth, that creates multiple hundreds of millions per year in revenue.

And so, underlying all my pivot is this desire to create hyper-growth. So, when it becomes obvious to me that that isn't the track that I'm on, it becomes necessary to adjust in a way that is going to make them more likely.

And so, I think that's been underlying some of the change you've heard about.

YARO: Right. And, I'm assuming that's the plan forward with what you're currently doing. Is that the vision for the future?

CLAY: Yes, absolutely.

YARO: Venture capital growing the revenue and so on.

CLAY: Yes, absolutely.



YARO: Okay, well I hope you don't feel that you've given too, like a disjointed story here, Clay because maybe you should listen to some of the other podcasts because a lot of people have a lot of things in there. Their story that can seem like they're all over the place but, it's not. I think especially having lived it, you no doubt see that one thing logically led to another and it's the "entrepreneur's journey," that's what it is, right?

CLAY: Totally.

YARO: Like I say, as entrepreneurs, you have to be a lover of ambiguity of not knowing what's going to happen next so, you can't be that kind of employee mindset where you need the sense of stability because you're not going to get it as an entrepreneur.

CLAY: Yes, I heard Steve Blank once say, that in his experience, I was listening to this [Steve Blank](#) talk to this guy Mark Suster who's just an amazing venture capitalist and Steve Blank who was the mentor for Eric Ries who wrote the book [The Lean Startup](#), but Steve Blank is actually a pretty famous dude in the startup world in himself. This is at lecture at Stanford University School of Entrepreneurship and stuff but, Steve Blank was saying that in his own experience and in his experience as a venture capitalist and investor, almost without fail, entrepreneurs tend to come from very unstable homes.

The reason they're drawn to entrepreneurship is they thrive in an environment of instability. When they're not in that place of instability, they often try and create it because it's what they are comfortable with. And, some entrepreneurs end up adjusting as their businesses grow. If they create billion dollar businesses, they either need to evolve so that, they're no longer creating that instability when they get into the growth phase of their company.

So, they either need to evolve and not create that instability or they need to hire a professional CEO to come in to create organizations because otherwise they can completely screw it up trying to re-create their childhood instability so that, they can...



YARO: Again, the drugs.

CLAY: Yes, exactly.

YARO: Because with all that money, you can buy the drugs.

CLAY: Exactly.

YARO: All right, Clay. I think that's a great point to wrap up, I think.

CLAY: Who knows?

YARO: Who knows? You've been here for an hour so, it's...

CLAY: Speaking of chaos, yes.

YARO: Yes. For people listening in, we've mentioned your site or your software and your service several times but, just to be sure, the best website to go to find out all about LeadPlayer™ and LeadPages™ and everything like that?

CLAY: I'd say LeadBrite.com.

YARO: That's in particular for anyone who is using video, wants to capture leads or looking for landing pages to capture leads. You're all about capturing leads.

CLAY: I am.

YARO: So, pretty important role online for anyone doing business.

CLAY: Totally.

YARO: Awesome. Thank you, Clay for being so open and honest with the whole story. It would be interesting if we can get some feedback. Anyone who is listening in to leave some comments on whether you enjoyed the story or anything you want to say. It would be great.



So, thanks Clay!

CLAY: Cool. Thank you so much, Yaro. I appreciate it.

YARO: And, everyone who is listening in, you know where to go. If you want to get more podcast interviews like this, you can go to entrepreneurs-journey.com or Google my name which is Yaro and you'll find my site that way.

Thanks for listening and I'll talk to you soon. Bye-bye.

CLAY: Bye.

Relevant Links Mentioned in this Interview

- [LeadBrite](#)
- [LeadPlayer™](#)
- [LeadPages™](#)
- [iDialog](#)
- [Brazen Careerist](#)
- [StomperNet](#)
- [Butterfly Marketing](#)
- [Product Launch Formula](#)
- [Internet Business Manifesto](#)
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