



My Interview with Michael Hyatt Part 1

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Al Getler: Hi, my name is Al Getler. I'm your host of "Lead or be Led: Web TV for Leaders." I'm so glad you're with us. We have just a great string of guests that we've had here on our show. We couldn't be more pleased with the quality of the guests and the accomplishments of our guests, and how much information we're sharing with you. We want to make sure you're sharing the information, please share the links to our show, please comment on our website, comment on our facebook page, comment wherever you can and tell folks about "Leader be Led: Web TV for Leaders."

We are very very excited today to have a guest. I know I probably say that about every guest, but this guest I couldn't be happier to have on. He's actually the reason why I'm sitting here talking to you today because he has inspired me in so many ways. It started with his book, "Platform," I going to that up on the screen a bit later on, "Getting noticed in a noisy world."

He is, probably has one of the most viewed websites on the web today for people who are interested in communicating and blogging and getting their message out there. He is the most research source person I have come across who is willing to share so much. I would like to welcome him to the show today, my guest, Michael Hyatt.

Michael Hyatt: Hey Al, thanks for having me. It's good to be with you.

Al: It's a thrill to have you here Michael. You have done so much for me, but so much for a lot of people. One of the things I want to express is you're such an open book. I want to hit on that right away, Michael, what is it in the chemistry that you've discovered that just makes you such an open book to the people that follow you?

Michael: Well, I don't know where I learned this Al. It certainly isn't contrived or something that I've really, frankly, thought a lot about. It's just the kind of who I am as a person. I have noticed that when people are open and when they give disclosure of who they are as a person and tell the good, the bad, the ugly, that it does build trust and it does create connection. In the online world, when you're trying to do business, or if you're just trying to influence people, if you're trying to lead them, that's a huge plus in doing so.

Al: Yes, that's incredible. I watched the video the other night and I couldn't believe I was actually watching it, watching you unpack your suitcase on a trip. [laughter]

Al: The thing that I loved about it is I thought, you know, I do that, too. I unpack my suitcase, I put stuff in the drawer and he's right, it gets you more settled in and ready for business. I thought, "Well you know, there are a lot of people that maybe don't think that way." It was pretty incredible.

Michael: Well, you know, it's a funny thing with things like that because what I find is that there are so many, I hate to use this word because I sound like my dad talking, young people today who never were mentored or nobody really showed them the ropes. I was privileged, when I was coming up through the ranks in the book publishing world, I had a great mentor and he would tell me that kind of stuff. Not just the simple stuff in your career that you need, but the stuff like how do you manage life on the road which, as it turns out for me, is a lot of my life.

Al: I certainly have seen that first hand. Let's do go back a little bit here, Mike, for some of the folks who might not be familiar with you and what you have done. Let's go back in your career. You were in the book publishing industry. Can you give us just a little bit of the history of Michael Hyatt?

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. I was at Baylor University in my senior year when I got engaged. My father-in-law asked me a question that had a big impact on me and that is, "How are you going to support my daughter?" At the time, I didn't have a job and I kind of had to scramble. I was likem "Oh, my gosh." So, I got a job working part-time at this local book publishing company, Word Incorporated was the name of the company. It doesn't exist anymore, but I was selling on the phone, their books to churches actually. After I graduated I ended up going to work there full time as a marketing director and then transitioned into editorial. Long story short, I spent about 30 years in the book publishing world and most recently as the CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers which is the nation's 7th largest book publisher.

I loved the world of books, ideas, and that really got me on my leadership journey about the importance of influencing people and books are just one way to do that.

Al: Certainly, Thomas Nelson has put a lot of influential titles out and a lot of great authors that have come through Thomas Nelson. You're leaving Thomas Nelson and most CEOs at your level would probably figure out a few very philanthropic things to do and fade off into the shadows. Not Michael Hyatt. How did you get to where you are today with this huge audience that you have on your website?

Michael: The funny thing was in 2004, and I'd been on the web before, I broke my ankle and I decided now is the time to learn blogging. And so I set up a blog because I couldn't do anything for a week, I had to have surgery and I was laid up, so I started blogging. Mostly, Al, I did it was a repository for my best thinking because I found myself repeating myself to my colleagues and people that worked for me on procedures and that kind of thing. So, I thought I'm just going to set up a blog where people can get it on demand. That began my blogging journey.

It took me four years to get over a thousand readers. I started just like anybody else. It was my family, my friends, me refreshing the screen to see what kind of comments I was getting. That was basically it. Then it grew from there. I had a big inflection point in 2008 when I had some big websites, Lifehacker, the Huffington Post linked to me. Then the traffic grew exponentially. Right now, this year, I'm averaging about 360,000 unique visitors a month.

It's grown every year. It's pretty crazy. Once you reach that inflection point, it's pretty amazing what happens. It takes a life of its own.

Al: In 2004, too, you were frontiersman certainly in a lot of respects. Certainly, you've taught me that the longer the presence and the more the content, the more growth you're going to have. I think one of the things that people don't realize about a blog especially, is the level of commitment it requires. Can you talk a bit about that habit-building and that discipline it comes into everything you've done since 2004, and where you are today?

Michael: Yes, sure. It's tough finding the time. That's the number one objection I get to people who are trying to build a platform, so that they can get their message heard. They just don't have a time. "I've got a busy job, I've got a busy family." Here's the deal for me. I was at that time, the COO of Thomas Nelson. I was very, very busy. I have five daughters. They were in their teen years, and managing all that was challenging. On top of that...

Al: No drama there at all, right?

Michael: No, no drama there.

Al: [laughs]

Michael: I did what everybody does. That is I had to find time in the margins of my life to write. For me, that was usually either early in the morning, and I experimented with this, late at night, or on Saturday mornings. I made a commitment just to see if I could do it when I was first starting to see if I could write everyday for 90 days. I did it. Then I pretty much kept up that whole pattern as the CEO. Even if I would get into my room, my hotel room, late at night, I would find some time just to write, because it helped me process what was going on. Al, you'll appreciate this is a blogger. I tell people that blogging's a little bit like photography. When you get a camera, and you're branding a photography, everything is a potential shot. You are looking at the light. You want to capture it.

Same thing with a blogger. Every conversation, every incident, every bad experience is a potential for a blog post. That is just how I lived my life for years and years and years.

Al: Yes, it's incredible. Again, with your giving a notion of the approach that you have. You sat down with me, I think it was last year, at blogroll for five minutes. You're heading out to the airport. That was the point that you made then, that focus on what you see now as a blogger. It's so true. Everything is an opportunity to write about. Everything is an opportunity to observe and an opportunity to improve yourself. That's one of the things that you've also shared on your website. You have mentioned a lot of ways that you have found, technical tools, techniques, time managements, little tricks, unpacking your suitcase, those kinds of things. Just from the standpoint of finding a time, and finding how this all fits in. How do you do it, Mike? You cover a lot on your website?

Michael: It's a discipline for starters. I like what my friend Andy Andrews says that, "Can you make yourself do something you don't want to do to get a result you really want to get?" That's the essence of discipline. For me, there's a result that I want. I want to connect with people. I want to influence with people. I want to help them leverage their influence. That's really what

I'm about. Here's the second thing that I do. It's not only making a discipline, but second of all, schedule it. What gets scheduled, gets done. If you don't get it on your calendar and respect it as a commitment, it's not going to get done. When I have it on the calendar and somebody says, "Hey, what are you doing Saturday morning?"

I don't write on Saturday morning anymore, because now I've got the luxury of being able to write during the week. But in those days, I did. Somebody would say, "Hey, how about golf on Saturday morning?" I was able to say, "Gosh, I've got another commitment." I meant it. Didn't have to go into detail, but it was a commitment that was important to me. I kept it.

Al: It sounds like you don't have any fun. I know that you do have fun, because you've got grandchildren. You just took a month off to do the things that you need to do. How do you work fun into all that?

Michael: Oh, my gosh. First of all, I'm loving what I do. I absolutely love it. I'm living the dream. When I was the CEO, you have to understand that a lot of those years were during the recession, which frankly even on its best days, wasn't a lot of fun. I was trying to manage a company of 600 people. At the time I took over, we were on the New York Stock Exchange, so I had the pressure of shareholders and then later of private equities. None of that was easy. But writing was the place where my soul was renewed, where I really got in touch with my creative self. It was hugely helpful. It enabled me to really weather the storm and give myself to those other things that were non-writing things that still had to be done. So I think for everybody, you've got to find something that restores your soul and enables you to keep going in the other parts of your life.

Al: Let's talk about this month that you just took. Again, you're very open about it. You took a month away. You did some writing, I'm sure, but you probably did some relaxing. What was that like to take that month and put it aside and do things that you want to do?

Michael: It was awesome. It's the second time I've done this. I've been away from Thomas Nelson. I left my post as the CEO two-and-a-half years ago. The first year I did it, last year, I did a shortened version. Then I did a full month this year. Here's what it looked like. I stopped blogging during that time. I stopped my podcast during that time. I actually ran reruns at my podcast. I called them "Encore Episodes." I wanted to focus on something different. For me, it was writing a new book called the "Life Plan Manifesto" that will be out in the spring of 2014. Here's how everyday looked. I would get up in the morning and go through my normal quiet time routine. Then Gail and I, my wife of 35 years, we would go on a hike up the mountain. We were already at 9,000 feet, so we would go up to about 9,600 feet. It was about an hour round trip.

We'd come back. Then I would park myself in front of my computer, and I would write for three hours. Then we'd take a break for lunch. Then I would take a nap. Then I would write for another three hours. Then we'd take a break for dinner. By that time, after six hours of writing, I was done for the day.

Then, we might go fishing. We have an incredible trout pond about 500 feet behind the cabin, and it was amazing. We got hooked on this TV show. We never watch any TV. We don't even like football, but we got hooked on "Friday Night Lights." We would watch two or three

episodes of that every night. We had a blast. It's great for our marriage and was just great for our spirits to be away and be quiet for a month.

Al: Yeah, it sounds like heaven. It's not a luxury that everybody can be afforded. But you worked very hard to get there. I think that's what people need to keep in mind. You're a very focused guy. Your career has been focused, and what you've done has had such a focus to it. Really, we've all benefited from that, the folks that are on your site. I want to come back around to the term that you used before and the title of your first book, "Platform." Let's define that a little bit for folks on what a platform is and why a platform is necessary and why a guy like Michael Hyatt, takes the time to help people understand the importance of a platform.

Michael: Let's start at the beginning with a definition. A platform is that thing that you stand on to be seen and heard. We need that today because there's such a blizzard of noise out there. So many blogs, so many social media networks, conventional television, YouTube, all this stuff that's out there that's competing for people's time and attention. If you're going to get heard, if you've got a product, service, a cause, a brand that you're trying to get noticed, you've got to build a platform. This really began for me as a quest when I was still the CEO at Thomas Nelson. I noticed that authors would come to us with very well articulated ideas, even well written manuscripts, but we were turning them away in droves because they didn't have a platform. They didn't have a way to reach their audience.

When I talked about a platform today, it's kind of a metaphor, but it really talks about a connection that you have with people. It could be your friends. It could be your followers, your fans, your prospects, your customers. Any of those make up your platform. It gives you a way to connect with people, and this is the important thing, who share your passion, whatever it is. They share your passion, and you give them content in a way of communicating with one another.

Al: And a platform can be really something that more than an author can use. I've heard you used the definition for speakers, comedians. Lots of different people can have a platform. Platforms just help you, as you mentioned in the book, get noticed, and from there, you do your thing, right?

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. I mean it's small business people, I speak in a lot of corporations, to mortgage brokers and real estate people and all kinds of sales people, anybody who's trying to reach an audience. Traditional advertising, as you well know, just doesn't work like it used to. It still works on some but not with the same effectiveness that it does today. So you got to have another way of connecting to people, and you got to go where the people are. Where people are today, they're on Facebook. They're on LinkedIn. They are in all these social spaces, and if you're not there, you can't network. As we all know, networking is the secret to getting more sales and building your business.

Al: It all comes down to something, too, called SEO. Am I correct on that Mike?

Michael: Yeah, sort of. I actually just talked about this at Platform University, which is the online membership site that I host and created for people who want to build a platform. There's a lot of emphasis, if you're in a blog world or if you're in a website world, of getting search engine optimization. Making your website or your blog easy to discover particularly by Google but the other search engines as well. There are some tips and techniques. But let me tell you, Al, I think

that that's frankly overrated. I think people spend a lot of money on SEO when they would be better served to give their time and attention to creating great content that people find when they go on Google and want to talk about with their friends.

Nothing builds traffic like that like word-of-mouth. That's why I say in my book, "Platform," you've got to start with "Wow." That's the number one setting. Create something that's truly awesome, so people want to talk about it.

Al: I watched the discussion that you and your partner, Andrew, had on this. I chuckled because Andrew kind of choked on his words for a couple of sentences or two because you went back and forth on what's more important, SEO or content, content or SEO. I think you both finally agreed that without great content, you might get them once with decent SEO, you're not going to get them back without great content. You have said something, and you've said it many times. I've heard you say it. Why don't you go ahead. I might get it wrong, so I'm going to have you say it.

Michael: I say content is king and platform is queen, and it takes both of those to build an empire. I don't care if it's a small empire, if you got a small business that you're trying to get noticed, a restaurant, a retail store, whatever, or if you're just trying to get more contacts, so you can sell them stuff, or you're just trying to have influence because you believe in your cause or believe in your organization, you got to have a platform. Otherwise, basically, you're going to be sequestered to a closet talking to yourself. Nobody's going to hear you.

Al: Well Mike, there are so much to talk about on that point alone, content and platform. You've mentioned Platform University which is just an awesome resource for anybody that's interested in this subject of platform, in this subject of blogging, and in the subject of just having a website or hosting your own website, which I know you're a big proponent of, and doing the things that you need to do to succeed. We're at a point where I think, if you wouldn't mind, I want to cut our conversation short. We're going to call this part one. I'm going to have you come back, and let's talk about content and platform. Will that be OK?

Michael: Great. Awesome.

Al: So we're going to let you go, and you're going to come back next time. We're going to talk a bit about content and platform. Great. Thanks, Mike.

Michael: You're welcome.

Al: With that, folks, we're going to let you go and come back, please, again for the second part of my conversation with Michael Hyatt. Again, his book is "Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World." If you haven't purchased a copy, if you haven't read a copy of it, please go to Amazon, buy a copy. You're going to really be gifted with some great advice on what this whole subject of content and platform and the subject of "Wow" is. Tune in next time for my second conversation with Michael Hyatt and check out his website, michaelhyatt.com. Until then, this is "Lead or Be Led," and I'm your host, Al Getler. Thanks for joining us.

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Transcription by CastingWords

