EE Podcast #64 Selling EE

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Lea Alcantara: You are listening to the ExpressionEngine Podcast Episode #64, Selling EE with special returning guests, Marcus Neto and Brad Parscale. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host, Emily Lewis. This episode is sponsored by Mijingo. You've all built several sites using ExpressionEngine. You have all the basics down, but sometimes the available ExpressionEngine tags don't do what you needed. Embrace the power and flexibility of ExpressionEngine by creating custom MySQL queries right in your templates. MySQL and ExpressionEngine by Mijingo is a 58-minute video that will walk you through all of the MySQL tools available in ExpressionEngine like SQL manager, Query module and the CodeIgniter active record class. Get the video now at mijingo.com/mysql.

Emily Lewis: The ExpressionEngine Podcast would also like to thank Pixel & Tonic for being our major sponsor of the year. [Music ends] Hi Lea, how are you doing?

Lea Alcantara: Pretty excited because of our topic and guests today. Sales is something I think that gets mixed reactions from a lot of people. I think it's mostly because it's misunderstood, but most likely also abused, but I like making money.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

 Lea Alcantara: So what is your experience with selling your services with EE specifically?

Emily Lewis: Honestly, selling is one part of being a freelancer that I'm most uncomfortable with. I spent my pre-freelance career in the corporate world mostly working in marketing departments, which meant we dealt with sales quite often. And unfortunately, a lot of the sales tactic that I saw were kind of a sleazy end of things.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: So it tends to make me really uncomfortable. I'm really excited to hear what our guests have to share because I suspect I have a lot to learn. So let's just dive in to it. Today we are joined by two guys with deep experience selling ExpressionEngine and web services. We have Marcus Neto, director of services for EllisLab *(Edit: We incorrectly mentioned him as Director of Services, which is Kevin Smith. Marcus is Director of Sales and Evangelism)* . Marcus joined us last year, Episode 56, and discussed that he's been focusing quite a bit on evangelizing ExpressionEngine these days. But prior to joining EllisLab, Marcus also runs his own design studio. We are also joined by Brad Parscale who runs Parscale Media, an agency providing web marketing and development services, but is also responsible for DevDemon, home of some fantastic Expression add-ons. Welcome back to the show, gentlemen.

Marcus Neto: Good morning.

Brad Parscale: Good morning.

Lea Alcantara: So let's just dive right into it. Brad, why don't you tell us how you got started with web design? How long have you been dealing with selling websites and then selling ExpressionEngine websites?

Brad Parscale: Well, selling started in 2005.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: I was working years before that.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Brad Parscale: However, I ran into ExpressionEngine on accident back in 2005 or 2006.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: I've been working with CodeIgniter, and so that brought me an opportunity to finally see this thing and say, "Holy crap, I can walk in and sell this as a single solution and it gives me an avenue to work with the customer and to create something that could help them make money," which is the essence of my company which is help them make money.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Brad Parscale: And so ExpressionEngine gave me an opportunity early on to create something that could rapidly deliver while customizing for them, which then leads them to making money faster on the internet.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Brad Parscale: So it made it an easy system.

Lea Alcantara: So in terms of that, I'd like to hear a little bit of some statistics with you studio. So since 2005, how many ExpressionEngine sites have you sold, created, et cetera?

Brad Parscale: Well, if you look at it, the company has actually gone through three transitions.

Lea Alcantara: Sure, okay.

Brad Parscale: So we just merged again with another design studio. We are now actually called Giles Parscale, which has happened a few month ago.

Lea Alcantara: Cool.

Brad Parscale: Now, the story back originally, I think overall we've worked and sold, closing on with about almost 400 ExpressionEngine websites.

Lea Alcantara: Wow! Four hundred, wow!

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: that's incredible.

Brad Parscale: Now…

Marcus Neto: I just like to say that's ridiculous.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: So it's come from multiple avenues. One is selling them ourselves, which we try to only do for non-profits with the customers or when the customer has already bought them. The nice thing is that we are working with some universities and we really got some licenses really fast like the University of Texas here with 20 to 30 licenses go really fast, so that 400 number can blow up real fast.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Brad Parscale: We work here at Trinity University. We work with kind of a larger organizations that do lots of licenses and lots of websites and things like that.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And so that's a big help also.

Lea Alcantara: Sure, sure. Do you do any non-ExpressionEngine sites?

Brad Parscale: Oh, we did some MojoMotor stuff. We've done a couple.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Brad Parscale: We actually won a CA Award for MojoMotor site a couple of months ago for one here for a little bar in downtown on the Riverwalk.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: However, since we have upgraded it to ExpressionEngine because they started wanting more and more and more, so that wasn't an easy process for MojoMotor. Previously, we did do a lot of CodeIgniter sites at the very first back when ExpressionEngine maybe couldn't do things. I think it was even called pMachine at the time. It was like right at that transition, and I think that there were some difficulties so we were using them, but now it's literally everything we sell is ExpressionEngine. We are the Southwest Airlines of EE, of the web world, I call it.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: Which is really we fly one plane, that means they have one support and all that good stuff.

Lea Alcantara: Perfect. So do you think by specializing in ExpressionEngine, and generally, EllisLab products, do you think that has helped your company in terms of just selling your services in general?

Brad Parscale: It's been the thing that has catalyzed everything. I mean, one is I can have support agents who support only one thing, so I have easy training I can provide. On all of our ExpressionEngine installs, we actually provide live chat to all of our customers and clients so that they can get real time help in ExpressionEngine. It allows us to rapid delivery things. It allows us to create DevDemon so we can make our own modules and deliver modules customized for our

customer needs, and all of that can be done at a lower price because I don't have to have such a knowledge and expansion of things. I don't need to understand all these WordPress and fix this and this and that.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Brad Parscale: I can deliver one thing strong and I can do it at a price point that is hard for my competitors, 35 here in Austin, to fight with.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Emily Lewis: So what does that mean? Do you get any inquiries that are non-ExpressionEngine, and how do you handle those?

Brad Parscale: Well, we do get a lot, I mean, every day, because the beauty of DevDemon and some of the other things that bring our name out, we get inquiries. I would say on average day, three to four, maybe five inquiries of people saying, "Can you work with me?" Number one probably is, "Hey, I'm in WordPress right now and I want to know if I can move to ExpressionEngine." And that's really a process of seeing we know what our core competency is and then figuring out if this person fit and all the features he want in this site, can we do it all that in EE with the modules or abilities of ExpressionEngine? And then can we deliver that our price and make it a better experience for him?

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: I think that's the number one thing is to try not to, and I think the biggest lesson learned in seven or eight years now of selling this every day is to not sell something I can't do and have to take a crazy amount of time to learn.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: You don't do baby steps in expansions.

Emily Lewis: If you do get an inquiry that maybe not isn't WordPress to ExpressionEngine, but someone who, for whatever reason, they've made in their mind some other project but they are coming to you, do you find yourself in this situation where you can convince them to move to ExpressionEngine? Or do you not spend time with those kinds of inquiries?

Brad Parscale: Oh, I mean, honestly that's the majority of the time. I mean, I was just talking to Marcus about a big client up in Dallas that we are going to see and one of the things is they brought in three agencies and us, and what we have to do is we have to sell. The first thing we do before we sell ourselves is to really sell ExpressionEngine because what their marketing team is going to be using is this CMS. Can it deliver all the things they need to do as a corporation for that expansion? And so the first thing I do is spend almost an hour of just presenting why ExpressionEngine is a good choice for the marketing team, the IT team, and for the management staff who have to manage those people, and I think that ExpressionEngine itself with its structural is a great element for those marketing teams and the IT teams to bring all that together as long as they are not in any crazy special needs that take them off in a world where they really need a web application instead of a website.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting. I find that statement where you said that you primarily sell EE first almost before you sell your own company. Do you find that became more true as you expanded and became a bigger company with more sites because at least me as a freelancer, it's only me. It's me that I'm selling first, generally speaking. Since I work with smaller clients, whatever I tell them to use, they generally agree with.

Brad Parscale: Yeah, I can agree with that. I mean, the smaller clients, when they come to us, your goal of selling yourself is stronger because they want to have that relationship with you.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And ExpressionEngine becomes something that you are just a tool that you are using.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Brad Parscale: For the larger corporations, they want to know what the divorce policy is on the day they meet you.

Lea Alcantara: Aha! Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: And so ExpressionEngine and the community and the way it's set up and structured allows for an easy divorce process. So that safety comes from they already called us, but most likely they know we are a big enough company to support them, so at that point of selling EE. So it depends, as soon as you walk into a company, if it's a Fortune 500 company, they are not going to call you unless you are somebody.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Brad Parscale: Now, if their company is a small business, then you are selling that relationship and so that's where online chat tools come in and all the things that say, "Hey, I'm not going to leave you. I'm going to be here with you, and ExpressionEngine is the right tool and here is why."

Lea Alcantara: For the majority of my clients, I've never really had to sell EE per se. There has been a couple who have heard of WordPress, for example, or something, and then it doesn't take that much convincing to get them to switch because they really just want to work with me primarily. And in the end if whatever I tell them to use does whatever they need to get done for their website, they just say, "It sounds good."

Brad Parscale: Yeah. I can see that. I mean, I think the big thing is whether or not the company you work for has a marketing department.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And as soon as they classify that they have a marketing department, the relationship to the actual software grows exponentially, so I think that they need to understand that this is a software that can help them make money and help them grow their business, and I think all the tie-ins, with all the stuff that goes to campaign monitor and Twitter and all these different things and all these great add-ons since the community has created all the things that are part of that, helps sell EE compared to all these other softwares. The channel system, the templating, all of this leads to

something that eventually makes them happy, and I think that's a considerable difference probably of all my years as now for the last couple of years is we've really grown into a larger company and then we have 30-some full time employees now or some range out there, I think 20 or something right now, and eight full time designers. So we have to sell larger and bigger sites. I mean, when I started my first days at Starbucks, all I was doing was selling myself and that I wouldn't leave. I mean, that was the first few sentences is, "I'm not going anywhere. Trust me."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. Now, I would have to say that's a conversation I do have even with small clients because they want to make sure that if anything happen, and it's not necessarily because I'm unreliable, it's more, "What if you were sick? Or what if you decide to go on vacation, what happens?" Right?

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Which are all realities.

Brad Parscale: I think even more than that, it's because the reputation web designers have and a whole of being flaky.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] Yeah.

Brad Parscale: On a small customer, the first thing you sell is that you are not them.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah.

Brad Parscale: Do you know what I…

Lea Alcantara: Absolutely.

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: I would have to say that is definitely true as a freelancer.

Brad Parscale: And I think in the ExpressionEngine community, we do have a good reputation of being people who stick with the CMS.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And I think overall that most everyone I've met in the community, especially through DevDemon, are really good people and that appears to mean the website engines that have the more of the "I can buy a theme and change it" did a lot more people that are come and go.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And this question sort of, and maybe you guys can address it. Lea, you were saying that you focus on selling yourself, they want to work with you, and so they kind of go with whatever tool you have. As someone who is still relatively new to freelancing, I feel like I encounter a lot more situations where, and these are not huge companies, they are smaller business, but they've been told by someone or they've heard somewhere that XYZ product is what they should go with. And I don't always know how to change that conversation from what they've decided before coming to me to what I want to work with what I think will work best for their business.

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: How do you shift that conversation to change the mindset?

Brad Parscale: I don't know if that's for me, but I think the most important thing to sit down with the customer is that most likely if they are buying a website from you, they want to make money.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And so the first thing that I always do is I deliver a direct impact of saying, "This is the solution for you to help your business make money. That's what I'm going to help you do and these are the pieces of this, and this software are more difficult for you to get to there, and these are the reasons why and that expansion and those capabilities and the customization." And I think I always lead it back into, "Let me help you make money."

Lea Alcantara: Perfect, perfect.

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: I think that's a really great statement. Marcus, what?

Marcus Neto: Hi, yeah, can I jump in here just real quick. Actually, back when I was just getting started in my career in technology, even before I went into consulting with the Federal government, I was actually in sales and one of the benefits of the very first job that I had, I went to this sales training institute that they had there on Washington, DC. One of the things that they tried to ingrain in us is that you are not necessarily selling somebody on something, but you are there to listen to them and hear what their problems are and understand that you are trying to provide them with a solution that fits those problems, and if you listen closely, your customers or your prospects will almost always reveal those to you. It may require you asking questions. So I typically tell people when they are in a situation like that, you never really want to just go out and say, "Oh, you know, XYZ Systems sucks."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: Because immediately the prospect is going to throw up all kinds of walls and you are not going to have a conversation at that point. You are going to be talking at them instead of with them.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: And there is a very darn big difference if you just kind of listen to them and say, "Well, you know, that's great. You know, but hearing that you want this, this and this, and really this system over here is going to provide you that in an easier way that allows you to manage that content versus having to pay for additional updates or something like that." It's more of an education event is what I'm hearing from Brad and also from my own experience in selling those solutions. It's not the used car salesman mentality of, "If you just sign now, you know, this is going to be the best website ever, and we are going to make so much money you are going to want to fly me to Honolulu."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Marcus Neto: It's not that kind of sale. Just listen to them and make sure you are not literally repeating back to them, but just make sure that you are having that conversation with them and never to say, "You know, XYZ Systems sucks." Because all systems have something that's very good about them.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Marcus Neto: Otherwise, they wouldn't stick around.

Lea Alcantara: So I want to talk directly about sales strategy. How do you get people to even contact you first, or do you contact prospects yourself? And this is to Brad.

Brad Parscale: Well, I mean, you and I have talked early years or later?

Emily Lewis: I think both because I know the early years are probably more relevant to me as a new person in this field.

Brad Parscale: I mean, early years. I mean, I have the blessing of being in 2005 in San Antonio where there was only like a couple of companies. I think there was only one big web design company in San Antonio when I came here from California, so that's a perk, I mean. So the first thing I did, and obvious, was you've got to be good on SEO and search engine marketing and all these kinds of things. So the first thing I did was I put up AdWords and then I created a very simple website. My website is still the Parscale.com website today. It's still the exact same website I have up in 2006.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Brad Parscale: I haven't changed it. I still believe that a super simple site that shows you pictures, give a couple of messages and a contact form. Now, there are some texts I really need to rewrite in there, but I've had enough business since then that the web marketing portion is to get up a nice, simple website. I think too many people put too much stuff up there and they make it an illustrative process of who they are instead of just saying, "Here, I'm going to offer a guarantee of this. I'm going to take care of all that customer's risks right there." Or you are going to guarantee it or this is going to do this, this is going to do this.

The first part of sales in my opinion is to remove their fears, so put those simple things up, "keep it simple, stupid" – KISS – and get yourself a couple of hundred dollar budget, buy the AdWords on your major city keywords like San Antonio Web Design, San Antonio Web Designer. Pull those leads in and then I never give a price. I try to avoid giving a price over email. I never put the price on the website and just try to get a call with them or a sit down and then start talking to them like Marcus said and build that relationship and then start telling them why your stuff is great. I never put down those, and like Marcus, never say the other stuff is crap. Work them into a relationship where they feel like if they make a mistake, we are leaving.

Marcus Neto: One of the things that you also want to do as you are going through that process of personal branding is figure out who you are looking to provide solutions for. So for instance, if you are looking to provide solutions for local businesses, then your website and your marketing is going to be vastly different, and oftentimes, we forget that in the web design industry.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Marcus Neto: It's because we want so badly to impress our peers, and one of the things that we have to remember and be cognizant of is that we are not selling to our peers necessarily unless you are actually going after new startups or something along those lines.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: I really couldn't care less whether XYZ web developer thinks that I'm the cat's meow, because I'm not selling to him. I'm actually selling to local businesses or I'm selling to national Fortune 100 businesses or whomever and you have to kind of keep that mind as you are going through that process.

Lea Alcantara: For sure, and just to backtrack a little bit, Brad said something about never put a price through email or online, et cetera. Get them on a phone call or a meeting. So that does that tell me that most of your clients are local, they are not remote?

Brad Parscale: Well, no. I mean, I would say in 2005, yes.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Brad Parscale: I mean, today, like I'm flying to Vegas in an hour here to do a sales call.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Brad Parscale: So I mean, now we are all over the country and international, but at the beginning, the most of them are local, but still even then, I still don't give a price to anyone anywhere until a point I at least have a phone call with him. Now, if they are international, that doesn't work, but I still pick up the phone and call him in Dallas, in Vegas, in New York. I mean, we do a lot of sites in New York. I've never been to New York, but once in my life.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Brad Parscale: And that's the part two of this is once you've made these websites, put your name on the bottom of them and push them out to everything you can in those communities, and then other people start to call you from them.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And I want to tell you one other thing, the biggest catalyst for me actually beginning in 2005 or 2006 was I just hired a little phone call service, and what I did was I said, "Here is a script. Here is a paragraph and a five features or things I want you to say and all I want you to do is schedule an appointment for me. I don't want you to sell it to them. I don't want you to do anything. I just want you to give me an appointment so I can have lunch with them, sit down with them for an hour." And I started making to have them make about 500 calls a month.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Brad Parscale: It cost me $750 a month at first, which was a big expense, but compared to a salesperson, it was nothing, and I started making all those phone calls. That started giving me about 20 to 25 meetings a month and I just start sitting down and talking and just talk. If you take your base kind of batting percentage on that, you will start selling websites.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting, interesting.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I never thought of something like that. That's a good idea.

Lea Alcantara: I think what this just underscores too is that email is a starting point, not the end point. That if you can get someone in person or over the phone because there is a different type of communication and deeper level of understanding, I think, when that happens.

Brad Parscale: Yeah, I can never undervalue feet on the ground.

Lea Alcantara: [Agreed]

Brad Parscale: I have a card that's unique, it's something that sticks out when they grab it out of their pile. When you sit with them, leave something from memory. When you are talking to them in a meeting, try to find something that you can relate with them, whether that's where you were born or raised, something you are interested in. It's something that puts you on a personal connection to him, and then once you have that connection, then these are small customers now, then you've built that relationships, then you say, "Well, these are the tools I have in my secret box over here that are going to make things right for you."

Lea Alcantara: Perfect. And now, let's talk about your big clients.

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Now, they've contacted you. Now, you are in a pitch session, what do you say? How does that really shift now? Because at the beginning when you are just small and you have small clients, you are having those like lunches or dinners or whatever. In a bigger setting with Fortune 500 or Fortune 100, it's completely different.

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: How does that shift?

Brad Parscale: Well, I mean, a perfect example, I was just up doing one last week and like tomorrow kind of thing, and it becomes less focused on me and our company. It really honestly becomes ExpressionEngine. I just talked to Marcus about this sometimes and it comes down to the marketing of ExpressionEngine and marketing the websites.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: So the things like customizing the design and matching whatever matches their brand. It's very important compared to a lot of these other designers who use themes and other kinds of things as their base structure elements.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: We can customize it completely with a great templating system of ExpressionEngine and make it look exactly how you want it to look. It can tie in to email marketing to campaign monitor and MailChimp and these other solutions to deliver things through add-ons, if you want to buy them or these kinds of deals. You can customize it. At any point, we can turn on PHP and do these other things. The whole point is right at the get-go, I find the three people that's usually in the room, marketing, IT, and management, they are almost always the three groups that are in the sales

presentation and you go to the marketing people and say, "I can make your life easier without having to talk to these bums on your right."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: "These IT guys who don't want you to call them. On IT guys, I can make it so they can work on the site without you worrying about it. And Mr. Management over here, I can make it so that you can log in and see what everyone is doing and then what the progress is through these reports through these APIs we can connect to. Now, a lot of these other solutions have that, but I think ExpressionEngine's customization like the control panel and the stuff that we can do through DevDemon and having the add-ons can make us deliver an experience that makes each one of these department's life easier." When all is said and done, they just want to go home at night.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So now, my question is to Marcus, how is EllisLab helping companies like Brad's in these pitch meetings, or are there any resources that you guys are building to help make these conversations easier?

Marcus Neto: Sure. Well, then there has been a number of different ways that we've helped, and I don't know that I've directly helped Brad per se other than just promoting him through some of the venues that we have.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Marcus Neto: But there have been other folks that I've jumped on and had phone conversations with prospects that may have questions about EllisLab and the products that we've created. The other way is just by helping design studios become more familiar with ExpressionEngine, so we see a whole slew of emails come in for dev copies of ExpressionEngine so that people can evaluate that, and oftentimes, that's a losing battle because, I mean, we all know the learning curve that there is with ExpressionEngine.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: And so if they are not willing to sit down for two days at whatever, $50 to $150 an hour, and dedicate that time to learning ExpressionEngine, then they will more than likely not succeed and so what we've been doing is taking an approach where we not only offer them a dev copy but we also offer to do a demo for them as well so that they can come up to speed faster and understand why it is that they would benefit from using ExpressionEngine. We've got some plans in the works for other mechanisms to help design studios and freelancers alike and make it an easier sell. Part of that is just getting word out.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Marcus Neto: So this year I'm referring to myself internally as the traveling evangelist.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Marcus Neto: Because I'm going to all kinds of conferences and not being too flashy about it or anything, but just being part of the conversation in the web design community.

Lea Alcantara: [Agree]

Marcus Neto: There is so much to be gotten by just going and attending conferences versus having to speak or presenting or sponsoring a conference. Just sitting at a lunch table and having the discussion with somebody can be very valuable. I mean, I was just at Less Conference in Atlanta like a week and a half ago and I made a lot of friends and I just had a great time. I think that was beneficial because I think we just need to kind of enter into the conversation as a company and that's not something EllisLab has really done in the past.

Lea Alcantara: A quick question to Brad and Marcus, you could both answer this. Is price an issue? Is the licensing of ExpressionEngine an issue whenever you are in a sales meeting for a small client or a big client?

Marcus Neto: Well, now I was just going to say, I can go back to my design studio days and tell you that I can make more money on a $2,000 or $2,500 sale than oftentimes can be made on a $15,000 or $20,000 sale.   It's sort of like that.

Emily Lewis: So that's just because you have developed efficiencies built in.   Is that why that was easier?

Marcus Neto: Yeah, one of the things that I learned early on from my days in Joomla and WordPress…

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Marcus Neto: [Laughs]… is that there are some benefit to having some boilerplate-type sites that you can put up for local clients because oftentimes they don't care whether they have all these customizations. Well, the benefit of having those things in place is that if they do want customization, we all know that in ExpressionEngine, if I have a boilerplate that has, let's say, for instance, an About Us section and it has a home page with the rotator and maybe a blog or a new section and a Contact page, that's going to fit the majority of needs for a lot of small businesses. If I go ahead and develop their site in that and then they come to me next week, and let's say it's a builder and he wants to showcase some of his projects so I need to create a quasi-photo gallery if you will with fancy box integration and stuff like that, you and I know as ExpressionEngine developers, I can throw that together in a couple of hours and I've just provided him additional benefit because it's not going to cost him an arm and a leg to integrate some other module to do that.   So that's why I say I can make as much or more money on those smaller sites because the processes that I've got in place allow me to do a site like that fairly quickly and then I can move on to the next one, so it's more of a turn where you are just doing many sites versus working on a big behemoth.

Brad Parscale: And Marcus is a shameless plug. You should use Channel Images to make that gallery for that.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Marcus Neto: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: But I completely agree with him. I usually say in two seconds, "If you pick any of these free ones honestly, I'll spend more workable hours fixing it to do what you want ExpressionEngine to do. So with $300, it saves you a $1,000 in my cost."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And that's usually enough then to kind of make their head going and go, "What if that's true?" Now, maybe that's not as true as much in 2012 or whatever year we are in now, but I've been saying that for years and it is. It does have a lot of truth to it. So I don't think the 299 or 149 for the things ever scares them. The other thing is I always have my clients kind of go and buy that themselves and do you think if they are not paying it on my bill and it seems to have less impact.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Brad Parscale: The non-profits can never figure it out. Well, I'll go and buy a few licenses from ExpressionEngine and then I'll give those to them, but it seems to be easier when I let them go and buy it themselves because then it's like on a different credit card.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. That was actually one of my questions about whether it was more common to have the client purchase the license directly, or if you purchase and then pass and roll that cost into your bottom line at the end of the project.

Brad Parscale: On our system, I have a couple of differences. One is to having DevDemon add-ons. Mostly the add-ons we use are ours we sell or two, ones that I don't choose to sell because another competitor is really taking the market and I like their product, but we will write our own or do something just so we have our own version and some other special things. So we don't spend a lot of money on add-ons because we can really write all of our own.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Brad Parscale: We have full time devs for that. Now, the ExpressionEngine itself, what I like to do in the selling of that, in essence, I just want to make that their purchase so the divorce is easy and all that kind of stuff if they choose to leave.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And I don't like getting in the mix of buying that. There are Texas sales tax laws. There are all these things like I don't want to get in the middle of it.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: Because in legal, I have to pay a sales tax. If I sell them that item and I'm the reseller of it, and I think a lot of devs don't do that legally in their states.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, well, I'm Canadian, so I don't know necessarily if our laws apply too, but I never even considered that at all.

Brad Parscale: Yeah, well, if you buy a license in Texas, and I sell that license, I have to charge that person a sales tax. Now, because EllisLab did not charge me Texas sales tax for selling that, so I am in legal business as a business, I should have to even pay sales tax when I bought it from him as a business. Now, that's kind of one of those weird things that laws are gray. But then if I sell that again, I have to charge a sales tax. Do I want to get in that? No. And in most states, I don't think that devs do that. I've never even met a guy who said they've actually charged sales tax on them.

Marcus Neto: Can I interject, and I also. Because there has been a conversation on Twitter for the last couple of days, just to cover some administrative semantics. If you do as developer purchase those licenses in your account, I do still suggest that at the end of the process when you launch that you actually either create or have your client create an account at ExpressionEngine.com and then all it takes is a quick email to sales@expressionengine.com and all you have to give us is the username for your account, the license number that you want transferred and the username for your client's account and we will usually take care of that for you in less than 24 hours. So it's a very easy process, but Brad is correct, there are a lot of reasons for or against. I mean, if you purchase them as part of your account, you do take advantage of volume pricing, but there are maybe some legalities that you want to check into in your particular states.

Brad Parscale: Now, I can tell you from experience with DevDemon, we've sold what, 4,000 or 5,000 things now, I don't know what it is...

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Brad Parscale: And I've only received three transfer requests ever, I think, for a license, maybe four. So that tells you that they are not transferring those licenses of the add-ons to the customers mostly. So I think that there are some things there, I think the devs are just doing out of convenience, but then they don't really think about the long term of that.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And I think if you are getting your larger customers, you can't do it that way. They are not going to be happy.

Marcus Neto: I was just going to say we do get a lot of inquiries, not necessarily many per day, but many per week where our clients are kind of have been out of shape because XYZ design company has gone AWOL and that company was holding all of their licenses and now they have no recourse. We can't transfer them to their account because we need permission from the purchaser.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Marcus Neto: And so that's again just to illustrate that. Please, if you are a developer, if you purchase them as part of your account, that's great. But when you are done, make sure to transfer them to your clients.

Lea Alcantara: And I just wanted to ask Brad, since launching DevDemon, did the amount of EE sites sold increase? Was launching DevDemon a strategy to get more clients?

Brad Parscale: I think the initial strategy was two-part. One that was it was a validation to larger customers that I knew EE.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: I think that was a significant impact. The second part was I had, and this is a little bit more just me on the ExpressionEngine geek side.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: I just didn't feel that all the client companies out there were really providing tools that were ready for the end users. I felt like they were too geared towards the developer user.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And I think if you will notice with DevDemon, most of our modules are really pushed so when you deliver ExpressionEngine to your customer and you wipe your hands clean and you go "Call me if you need me" kind of thing, that all the pieces are there for them to kind of run things themselves if you want to deliver that kind of site, and I just didn't feel like the modules at that time were there. So it was double edged, I mean, one, I could make these things like it will sell sites easier. Two, there are actually three, two, I look more valid and then the third part was I really felt that there was a huge lack in there and we are continuing to deliver these kind of modules that make the person actually administering the contents life's easier.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So is selling add-ons way different, easier, harder than selling sites?

Brad Parscale: Well, the personality as the supporter is definitely much tougher.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Brad Parscale: A client is very happy to talk to you.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: And they can go, "You are so great." I mean, I get this silly email where the guy is pissed off and he's writing me and saying, "This crap doesn't work." And then he never looked at the docs or he didn't look at a single tag and I just have to email back going, "Well, you know, you have to put the entry ID in the loop."

Marcus Neto: Hey dude.

Brad Parscale: And 90%...

Marcus Neto: I apologized for that. I am sorry, man.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I mean, I didn't have a support from a lot of people that are big in the community also, I guess, there. But I would say 90% of our issues are just people that just don't have an underlying understanding of how - and this is more technical now - but how ExpressionEngine works, the whole templating system the way embedding has to work, and a variable prefixes, variable collisions. All these things, 90% of the issues are bad installs. I still believe when the last holy grail of ExpressionEngine is an easier updating system.   I think updates or people updated ExpressionEngine like yesterday and they didn't update all the folders in ExpressionEngine and then they are like, "Well, none of my plug-ins work." Well, duh.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: I've done that.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I hate to say it, but I have. [Laughs]

Marcus Neto: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: Yeah, and I think a better updating system, a control system for ExpressionEngine would be a huge boost in that kind of thing. I know we are talking about sales topics now.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Brad Parscale: But I think that the customer support is there, but I love DevDemon. That's more of a passion. I definitely make more money off selling one website than I do all with DevDemon, but I think that DevDemon helps sell sites.   It's better for the community now, and the ExpressionEngine does, the more I win.

Lea Alcantara: So speaking of that, I mean, it's kind of like helping the community and raise the profile of ExpressionEngine. Brad and Marcus, how do you think as a community or individually we can help raise the profile and brand of ExpressionEngine?

Marcus Neto: Well, I think just like I mentioned before, taking part in the actual conversation, and not necessarily getting involved in these trolling type arguments that we will find in the comments on any given day. But really just taking the time to have the conversations or to write the blog post or to have lunch with somebody that is a WordPress fanatic or a Drupal fanatic, or maybe even training up new people. Over the course of my, I don't know, six or seven years actually in web design, there has been a couple of people that I've brought from very basic knowledge of HTML and CSS or even less through to building websites Expression Engine. And so there is some benefit there. But yeah, I think just taking part in the overall web design conversation, I mean, at least from EllisLab's perspective, that's what we are trying to do this year is just kind of elevate our game and get out there and meet some folks and just show them that we don't put our hands on with both legs. We put them on one leg at a time just like they do and that we want to help.

Brad Parscale: Yeah, I mean, I think that there are a lot of clever things that could be done from a brand exposure point. I still wish there was, and now Marcus would not probably agree with this and EllisLab, but I still think there should be a free version that forces you to have some kind of JavaScripting that puts the logo and information on like corner of the website or something and have a free version and do things like that. Now, that might not be the best business and income thing for them.

Marcus Neto: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: But I think the brand exposure gets hurt from being an item that's charged for compared to the free ones. So it takes a lot to battle that. I mean, the more money you make, the more money you have to spend comparably. So if you are free, you don't have to spend as much to be as big. So I definitely think that that's a choice the ExpressionEngine or EllisLab has to make to be more successful. The second is I think also that reviews are poorly written on ExpressionEngine. I think every once in a while you will see a well written one, but I think they are written from the starting developer's standpoint too much and not from an agency or someone who is using it on the client's side. I think those two things right there really hurt ExpressionEngine because people think it's too difficult and they don't know what it is.

Emily Lewis: And I know there are sites out there and I don't believe these are officially affiliated with ExpressionEngine, but like Show-EE, or even directory that have showcases of sites or showcases of developers. Are those things that someone like me or even an agency should be submitting sites to? Does that make a difference?

Brad Parscale: For us, it does. I mean, I like those sites. I've submitted things to them and do stuff. I mean, for me, the only place to gain new customers is to expand across at that level of a connection with a customer or connecting to other people, and usually that's at their website level or their marketing, and once they are already searching for ExpressionEngine things, that's not the customer base I think ExpressionEngine needs for their growth. I think they need the people who don't know ExpressionEngine exist yet.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And the problem is to get into those sites, you have to be at the places in which the marketing people or the IT people are looking at the introduction level, and I think that that's part of the process of me just making, "Well, I've sold a lot of ExpressionEngine website." I mean, I think it goes back to that making phone calls and just setting up appointments. I could do that in my own little level. Now, think if I was an agency in every city in the United States doing that and calling hundreds of people every month, that would eventually expand this ExpressionEngine knowledge. I think that to get more developers, you have to give away stuff. You have to get things to get them using it, and I think it's at that root level. We have to find them at the symptom level and not after they are already looking for solutions.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: Yeah, just to touch on that. We do actually provide just about everybody that asks with a free copy of ExpressionEngine. It's a limited copy in that you only have it for 30 days, but we've just created basically a barrier because what we found was that when we were able to take part in a conversation with those people that are interested, that they actually have more success. I mean, let's look at EllisLab. Our main goal is to get as many developers as we

possibly can to use our product because ultimately it's not the end users that are typically coming and requesting ExpressionEngine unless they've had personal experience with it at some other company or something along those lines. But typically it's the web design studio that's looking for ways to speed up their time to live or that they are looking for some way to increase their productivity so that they are able to make more money, and so we are trying to provide that but we need to make sure that there are some level of, and I don't want to say like a barrier to entry but I mean it is at least a minimal like send me an email. Just send an email to sales@expressionengine.com and say, "Hey, Marcus said I could have a free copy." We may ask you a few questions and we may gauge your interest based on those questions and how you respond, but more than likely, let's say, 90% of the time we are going to go ahead and give you that dev copy because we want you to adopt ExpressionEngine as your CMS of choice.

Brad Parscale: I've got to throw in one thing. I talked to Leslie a lot, and with Marcus lately. I think that they are doing what the things we are not discussing or they are not discussing. I think they are doing a bunch of things that are going to help. I mean, I really think ExpressionEngine is going in the right direction. I mean, a few years ago, I was a little more worried and looking around, and I would say right now in my business and how much we needed to do, I feel completely comfortable with choosing ExpressionEngine for the next several years as the thing that my business is going to grow on. So I don't think it's a light statement coming from this size of the business and everything, so I feel really good and I was worried not that a while back and Leslie got in the phone with me, and I mean, just the fact to see he calling me and said, "I want to talk to you about this," I think was just a strong point in itself and I think the things they are doing now and the things I've heard and I think they are all guns firing and moving forward to help businesses like myself and other people get out there. I think it's separating what they are going after. It's just such a big market, they can't help everybody.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Marcus Neto: The check is in the mail, Brad.

Brad Parscale: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I think that's a great point, Brad. I'm curious, do you think knowing what you know now, but putting yourself in your position when you first started in being much smaller, do you think it's the same? Do you think that the future of ExpressionEngine/EllisLab products is going to be as bright for all sizes, like the small freelancer, the small studio, all the way up to a larger agency?

Brad Parscale: Well, it's hard for me to look back or look now at the small agency. I know for the big sized, what they are doing I think is going to be the winner. I think with the direction they are going for my company and for other companies in the same, I'd say five employees or more kind of range or anybody that has more than a few websites sold a year, I think they are going in a hugely positive way.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: It's hard for me to say in the agency. I think the small guys, I think were hurt a little bit by the change from EE 1 to EE 2 with the loss of that kind of free version kind of thing and all these different things and to be a little more WordPressy. But I don't know if that's the future of websites. I even think the small clients, the small agencies eventually, websites are going to become so comprehensive in the entire way your business operates. That's going to be a really big relationship and no more you are just going to spit off little websites. I mean, if I were going to give any recommendations to a small person starting off right now, it's build that relationship and become their web marketing person and not just their web designer.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: Because that's the future of the internet. The future of the internet is not just making these little websites and popping them out. It's what are you going to do with it.

Lea Alcantara: So I think that's all the time we have for today. Before we wrap up, Brad, do you have any final pieces of advice for our listeners in trying to sell EE or their services.

Brad Parscale: Well, I guess I was going to say something funny, but I won't.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: As I say, push DevDemon add-ons while you do that.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: But we won't go there, it will help you sell. No, I mean, I think that the thing is I really believe become the most knowledgeable and become the best at what you can be the best at and sell it with all the confidence you can and you will make money. I just really believe that anyone can make money if they just really believe in what they are doing.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Brad Parscale: And I believe in EE. I believe in what I sell and I believe that what I sell works, and I think if you do that, you can sell anything.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] Marcus, any final thoughts?

Marcus Neto: Yeah. I just like to echo what Brad said, and that's that if you approach it from a standpoint of confidence and recognize that sales isn't a sleazy thing.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: It's something that we all need to learn. It's probably even something that has helped me most in life actually, and so just come from the standpoint of regardless of how you feel about it, it's a necessity and it's something that

if you can get yourself to a point where you feel comfortable in having just conversations with people, then you will be much better off, and like Brad said, when you are doubly selling and meeting with people and stuff, the money will come.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: So I did want to hit on a couple of things, and just to hit on, there was a system, not a system, that's bad, a kit, if you will that I bought from SitePoint a number of years ago called the Web Design Business Kit.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: And I get absolutely nothing for this, I just found that it was a really good resource for me in understanding how I wanted to run my business. It made me take a nice, cold, hard look at how things were going and where I wanted to be and then actually help me get there, and the other parts to that were it also has all the other things that go into the sales process, whether it would be the proposals and the format that they need to be in and the contracts and specifics about that and maintenance contracts and non-disclosure agreements, and all that other stuff. So it was really very helpful and for the money it was a really good bank for the buck. But that's it.

Brad Parscale: Marcus, one last thing, when you just said that, always every web designer in the world have an indemnity clause in your contract.

Lea Alcantara: Which is?

Brad Parscale: Everyone.

Lea Alcantara: What?

Brad Parscale: Which indemnifies yourself in case you ever destroy that site or hurt their business. Otherwise, you could be liable for everything they lose from that website.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Marcus Neto: And everybody should be at least an LLC. Do not run your business as a sole proprietorship.

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Marcus Neto: And create as much distance from your personal assets to your business assets as you possibly can.

Brad Parscale: If anybody wants that indemnity clause, they can just email me at info@devdemon.com or brad@parscale.com and I will be more than happy to send it. It's three sentences and it indemnifies yourself from any future losses or any losses from negligence or anything that could happen from that site, and you should always have that, at least one clause in every contract.

Lea Alcantara: It sounds great. I'm going to be emailing you. [Laughs]

Brad Parscale: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: All right. So thanks Brad and Marcus for joining us today.

Marcus Neto: Thank you for having us.

Brad Parscale: Yeah, thank you.

Emily Lewis: In case our listeners want to follow up with you, Brad, where they can find you online?

Brad Parscale: Well, you can go to DevDemon.com or Parscale.com, either one. I mean, with DevDemon, I live on that site so that's why it's the easiest place to find me.

Emily Lewis: And how about you, Marcus, where can listeners find you online?

Marcus Neto: I'm on Twitter @marcusneto and they can also get me at my EllisLab email address, which is marcus.neto@ellislab.com.

Brad Parscale: Let me throw in that, mine at Twitter @parscale also.

Emily Lewis: Great.

[Music]

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Emily Lewis: We would also like to thank our partners, EllisLab, EngineHosting and Devot:ee.

Lea Alcantara: And thanks to our listeners for tuning in. If you want to know more about the podcast, make sure you follow us on Twitter @eepodcast or visit our website, ee-podcast.com.

Emily Lewis: And don't forget to tune in to our next episode when we will be talking about time saving tricks for creating, updating and working with ExpressionEngine. Be sure to check out our schedule on our site at ee-podcast.com/schedule for more upcoming topics.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara.

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis.

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for the ExpressionEngine Podcast. See you next time.

Emily Lewis: Cheers.

[Music stops]