

Megan Auman: Hi everyone this is Megan Auman from The Creative Empire. Today I'm here with Meredith Keller and we're going to be talking about target demographics, online metrics and all kinds of good stuff that Meredith knows a lot about. Meredith is the co-owner of the Ex-Boyfriend which is a t-shirt design clothing company that produces stuff with really fun graphics. Then she's also the editor of Smaller Box which is a great blog helping out Indie businesses with a lot of their kind of technical and business issues. Meredith, thanks for joining us today.

Meredith Kercher: Sure.

Megan: Alright. Let's get started. Meredith, why is it important to have a good understanding of like the metrics and the target demographics and everything for your business' website?

Meredith: The important thing about target demographics is that everyone has them and a lot of us start out we don't realize that we have them. They just think that everyone is our customer. Really, no business has everyone as their customer. It actually ends up being a specific audience. People have different products. They have different interests. They have different tastes. So you really have to understand who is your potential audience who is going to be interested in the specific products, your aesthetic and afford your price points. Until you understand this you can't really market your business because you don't know who you're marketing to.

Oh, and then as far as understanding, you know, the metrics of your site that's really what you're going to depend on to figure out whether or not you're marketing efforts are successful or not. So they're pretty important to look at pretty regularly. We look at ours pretty much every day for a brief glance. You kind of dig into them more probably on a bi-weekly basis.

Megan: Okay. So let's start by talking a little bit more about the target demographic. You mentioned that it's critical, that you know who yours is because everyone has one and I could not agree more. For me in my own business, a lot of my target demographic research has come from in person observing people at craft shows, at trade shows and things like that. I know that a lot of yours has developed through your online research. So what tools and strategies have you used online to help you figure out who your target demographic is?

Meredith: I think in person is really good. Going to markets even if you're not exhibiting just to watch people. Even the mall you can go to and kind of look around the stores that have products similar to observe those people. But there are also a lot you can do online. If you really don't know where to start I think search engines are really good starting point because you can just put in like some descriptive words to describe what you sell and see that the buzz is about what you're selling. If you're selling like vintage pendants start searching for that and see what kinds of sites you're talking about it and try to get a sense of who these people are and what they're interests are.

Are there are lot of mom message boards that are interested in these? Are there are a lot of fashionistas that are interested in this? That's the kind of thing you want to start digging into. Then competitor sites are also a really good place to look especially if they have press pages. You can see what kind of publications they've given in press. That can give you sort of the sense from looking at those publications, who you should be targeting for your PR effort, what kind of people read this publication because that can give you an idea of who your potential customers are. Those are a couple of things I do that I'm trying to figure out the target market for a business.

There are a couple articles on Smaller Box that have more detail on how to do this. But those are two good places to start online search engines and competitors.

Megan: Awesome. So when you're looking at your competitor's websites do you ever use any tools to actually look at what sorts of people are visiting that site?

Meredith: There are a couple of tools out there. There is something called Similar Web that you can use and it looks how you think they are alike under the same site. That can give you more of an idea of – If you go to this site, this site and this site you can start to kind of build a profile.

There is also a site called Quantcast that gives you some information about sites, but it tends to be bigger sites. So if you saw a competitor got placement on Gizmodo like which is a major site, you can put that into Quantcast. Quantcast will give you estimates like average household income, education, gender and things like that about that site. So those are a couple free online tools that are easy to use to start digging up some information.

Megan: Awesome. So when people are researching target demographics I often hear people tell me they come in with a really, really broad range of people. Like they might say it's women from 20 to 60 because they're seeing that whole range possibly buy their products. How do you really start to narrow down on who the kind of core demographic is for your products?

Meredith: Women 20 to 60 is a huge range. For most people it's probably not going to be that large of a range on average. Looking at some of the tools I mentioned like your competitor sites or doing some search engine research, looking at blogs and things like that, you could probably get something a little more narrow. The other thing you can do is if you find some blogs that are getting pressed to your competitors you can ask them for their media kit. Often times those media kits have more specific information about who their readers are and then you can use that for your target demographic.

So if I saw that a lot of my competitors were getting press on a blog. I email them and they give me their press kit it might include, "Our average reader is 20 to 35 and has children or something." That might give me a little bit more specific than just women aged 20 to 60. Now I know I'm dealing specifically with moms and they're not actually in their 60's. They're in their 20's and 30's. So that kind of information can help you out a little bit.

Megan: Once you start to build this picture of your target demographic what do you do with that information once you have it?

Meredith: Once you have a specific idea of who your target demographic is then you can actually start marketing to them. You can use that information to find good media outlets that you can do outreach with and try and get publicity. You can find ad venues you want to advertise on. You can basically figure out how to start reaching out to those people. Until you know who you want to reach out to you can't really do any marketing at all.

Megan: So the other kind of piece of the puzzle is looking at all the different metrics for your site. So when you're looking at those metrics what numbers do you think are important and what numbers do you ignore or do you pay attention to all of them?

Meredith: For the most part, I mean, if you're talking about a tool like Google Analytics, which is what I recommend that I use. I use two different tools actually. I use one called SlimStat which is what I use for more day to day and Google Analytics which I use for different information. Google Analytics is more detailed. But they're two different tools. They have different information.

Basically, I realize I'm not looking at everything. There is something that you probably don't need every day like you don't need to know what browser people use every day. But if you're getting your site redesigned you're going to care about that to make sure your site looks good for those browsers. For the most part there is a lot of useful information. There is probably go to stuff that I look at first, but I recommend looking at everything. For us we look at the e-commerce report through Google Analytics first, but we do look at everything because all of them have different purposes.

Your keyword reporting information is useful because you can use that to help your SEO campaign or your search engine marketing. Your referring information is useful because you can see how your ad campaigns are doing. If you start analyzing a site or if you got media placements you can see if those are successful. Really, every little piece has some clue that you kind of need to figure out what to do next and what not to do if something didn't go well.

Megan: Speaking of keywords, I know that a lot of your products Ex-Boyfriend have really clear subject matter. You might be a dinosaur or something like that. But for a lot of makers your product seems a lot more vague. So if you don't have really those kinds of clear keywords that jump out at you what are some suggestions for maybe developing those?

Meredith: I think keyword research is extremely important for your search engine optimization because a lot of your traffic and your conversion are going to come from people using search engines to find products inside your site. So you definitely want to use the language that potential customers would use to describe what it is you sell. This is something I saw in an article about called, "Make Your Products Googleable." It's the name of that article in Smaller

Box that talks about different steps you can take to make your products Googleable. But it's actually what you've got to do.

You can ask friends what they would use to describe your product that you're trying to sell. You can see the competitors and what they try and describe the product. You can't just use words that are kind of vague or specific to your brand. I wouldn't call a necklace a clear necklace because no one is going to know what that is. You'd want to call it a gold necklace with a dolphin pendant or whatever it is, but something very descriptive. The same goes for your product descriptions. You want to be descriptive as possible, but using words the customer would use to describe those products.

Megan: Great. A lot of business owners fixate on what a good number is for page views, time on site, a conversation rate, which I know people ask me for really hard numbers all the time. They do this instead of finding numbers that work for them. Do you have a philosophy for analyzing your base line numbers that doesn't lead to an obsession to what's good and what's bad? How do you figure out what good numbers are for your site?

Meredith: I would say there are a couple of things. One thing is you can kind of use yourself as a benchmark. If you know that your conversion rate is like .2% maybe you're going right now just to get it to like .4% because that would be doubling your conversion rate even though others might be getting 1% like you're not even close to that. So you don't want to compare yourself to those sites. Also different industries have different conversion rates because it's really tough to compare.

So one, this is just using yourself as a benchmark. If you know you're getting 100 visitors a day strive for 150 or something like that. Then another thing is Google Analytics has a tool in it called Benchmarking. It actually lets you see how your site is performing compared to other sites like it. So always kind of take that with a little bit of grain of salt. It can still be interesting to see like how you're doing compared to other sites like yours and give you kind of a guideline as to where you are versus your competitor sites are. So those are two things to think about.

Megan: So you mentioned conversion percentages a couple of times now. For those people listening who maybe have never done that calculation before what do you mean when you say conversion? Why is that important?

Meredith: So conversions are a little tricky. It can mean different things for different websites and different industries. Generally, a conversion occurs whenever a visitor to your site takes the action you want them to take. Most often when people talk about conversions and eCommerce sites are talking about people buying stuff so it's like a main conversion metric that people are interested in. There are other conversions. I call them secondary conversions, things like people signing up for your mailing list or clicking on your Facebook like button or maybe taking a download. Those kinds of things are also conversions. They're probably less important

conversions, but you still want to track them because those are indicators that those people are buying something in the long run.

Megan: So in your experience how often do people convert to a sale on their first stop to your site?

Meredith: For our site, I don't know off the top of my head. It's low. It's around 30%. For our e-commerce site more visitors at least over the course of several days before they make a purchase. Other sites are different. Some sites probably have a low price point, a super low price point you might be converting lots of people on their first visit. I think generally the higher your price point especially if it's a big ticket item takes longer to convert people. They might come and visit 10 times or 20 times over the course of a year if it's a major purchase.

So I think price point plays into it a little bit and how competitive it is. If no one else is selling what you sell people might convert faster because they can't get what you sell and equally so. If you have competitors it might take them a little longer to get to your site and buy from you. So those are some things that can play into it, but in my personal experience, my own e-commerce site typically isn't a first visit thing.

Megan: Alright. So when you're trying to make changes to your metrics it's really easy to get caught up in like big goals. Usually little changes are all it takes to make a big difference. So what's your strategy for executing those incremental changes to yield big results?

Meredith: The answer I have, which a lot of people aren't going to like, is the best way to make these incremental changes is with tools like Google Website Optimizer. It allows you to do A-B Split testing. I know a lot of people don't like that answer because it sounds a little technical and intimidating. Google's tool makes it pretty easy to do, but you do have to have a little bit of comfort with technology to do it. But it's a nice tool because it basically lets you run two different versions of a page and you can see which one performs better and you can use that to decide what you ultimately have your site be. So that's like the best tool I would use.

If people are too intimidated to try A-B Split testing, which is the nicest way to go about it, it's like an option to make incremental changes and then just compare how your performance is with the changes versus how it was before. Then you don't have the comparison of two versions of the site running at the same time. But then there's two different options that are problems.

Megan: I know you do a lot of different things to bring traffic to Ex-Boyfriend. You run ads,. You work on your SEO and your keywords. So if someone is kind of just starting to get traffic into their site and they feel like they can't focus on a lot of things at once what's the first thing you would recommend that they do to increase traffic to their site?

Meredith: I don't work on Ex-Boyfriend full time. I also do consulting work. My partner works on Ex-Boyfriend the whole time. So we have a lot of time to dedicate to it. It's tough to compare

that versus part time. If you work part time and you had limited time, I would say the best bang for your buck I would say the number one thing you would do is probably through outreach. Then a close second, and again, it depends on your industry for SERP which depends on your company. SEO would be a close second for us. It might be first for other people.

You can look at your Google Analytics and see where your conversions are coming from and kind of use that information to decide what you want to focus on. If you see you're getting a lot of conversions from search you might want to focus on SEO. If you're seeing a lot of conversions from refer URL's you want to focus on PR. There are other things out there, but those are probably the top two best. Beyond that you can get into social media. You can get into advertising. There is other stuff and it's all good. We do all of it. Those are like the first two things I would do if I had really limited time.

Megan: As far as SEO goes do you have any other tips for people to improve their SEO.

Meredith: I have a lot of them. I wrote a lot of articles at Smaller Box and I've linked a lot of articles on Smaller Box. SEO isn't one of those things, unfortunately, that you can just kind of explain to somebody in five minutes. It's something people do as a full time job. They're professionals. It's pretty complicated, but there are parts of it that people who aren't experts can get. I mean, the main components of SEO are link building and keyword optimization. In a nutshell that's what it involves and you kind of have to get good at both. But there is really no shortcut answer. I recommend checking out some of the articles I've written on SEO and some articles that I've linked on SEO because I put a lot of guides. It's not a question I can answer quickly unfortunately.

Megan: Okay. In your experience what do you think is kind of like the biggest mistakes that any business owners are making when it comes to using and understanding the metrics for their websites?

Meredith: I think one of the biggest mistakes out there is people don't really understand what they mean and how to apply them to their business. I think people get stuck with like, "Oh, I have this many visits. I don't know what that means or whether this is good or bad." It's kind of bringing all those pieces together and understanding what they mean for you. I think a lot of people don't understand.

One thing I see people toss around a lot is page rank. They don't quite understand what it is or what it means. Essentially it's not very important if people are interested in it. That's one of those things that like – People fixate on those technical buzz words that they hear, but then try to actually make sense of the information that you have so that you can use it to grow your own business instead of getting stuck in these buzz words out there and not really understanding them.

Megan: Awesome. I think you've talked a lot in the TCE forums about the importance of having your own site versus being on a site like Etsy. So maybe you can talk a little bit more about that and why especially for things like metrics and SEO and things like that why it's so critical to have your own eCommerce site versus being on something like Etsy?

Meredith: Sue. I feel like I've written a novel at this point on why you want a site versus why you want to be seen on Etsy. It's not that I don't like Etsy. I think it's a great site, but it's very limited. If you're serious about actually growing a profitable business there are limitations that you can't stick with long term. Just the inability to get customers to the secondary conversions like newsletter sign ups and Facebook likes it's just the technology isn't there on Etsy. So you're very limited in that way. You don't really control the brand because the big Etsy logo is up top instead of your logo up top. Your logo is secondary to Etsy.

It's too easy for people to just click that search box and search around and find your competitors on the Etsy website versus them being on your own website. They're just looking at your brand and seeing your logo. So you have a little bit more of the conversation, user experience. There are just too many limiting factors I think with Etsy to put all your eggs in that basket. I think it's okay to have an Etsy shop and your own shop. I just wouldn't recommend having only an Etsy shop. It's interesting because you need it, but in the long run it's too limiting.

Megan: So earlier you had mentioned people getting really wrapped up in maybe some metrics that aren't important and you had mentioned page rank. I feel like that might be one of the disservices that Etsy does because the kind of the big stats on Etsy that you see are number of sales and number of hearts, people who like your shop which are probably not the most important demographics that people who sell on Etsy should be looking at. So could you talk a little bit about that?

Meredith: Sure. Sales are obviously important, but you need to know more than the number of sales. You need to know where the sales are coming from. You need to know how long it takes to get those sales. I mentioned earlier for my e-commerce site I know it takes several visits and several days to get people to buy stuff on my site. So we do a lot of what we call re-marketing which we can do because we have our own site. People come to our site and the technology puts a cookie on their computer so in the future they'll be served ads for our site as kind of a reminder that, "Hey, you came to the site. You liked this stuff. We're still here in case you want to come back and buy something."

It's not invasive. It's ads for your brand versus other brands so that if they see the ad again and click they're more likely to learn your brand name and come buy stuff. So understanding that that is part of your conversion cycle is important. Knowing where those conversions come from is super important. Otherwise you don't know what part of your marketing is working and what part isn't. Google Analytics can give you that, but only if you have your own site. The hearts, again, it's not money in your pocket. A lot of those just might be other designers. It's nice to have their encouragement for them to like you, but it doesn't make you more money.

One of the things that I kind of harp on in Smaller Box is marketing to your customers versus your peers. I think it's fine to have your peers on your Twitter or Facebook or something, but they're probably not going to give you a lot of money. You want to focus on the consumers then like your fellow makers. I think it's really geared to doing like creating a community of makers which is nice and all, but it doesn't get you outside of that community of makers into like the big world of potential customers.

Megan: I think that's a really great point. It's something that I see over and over again. People whether it's in their blogs or in their product descriptions they're talking about stuff in a way that other makers can understand and appreciate, but that might be a real turn off to customers. If you are someone who has thus far been doing marketing stuff that mostly has been bringing in other makers what key swaps can people do to become more customer focused in their marketing?

Meredith: I talked about earlier in the call like doing your research, search engines. Some of your established competitors who do have their own websites take a look at what they're doing. They probably aren't marketing to other makers. If you sell handbags go look and see what's going on with a major handbag designer and like where are they getting press and where do you see ads for them. That kind of information can give you clues as to where out in the big world you should be fishing for your customers.

Megan: Awesome. So you mentioned re-marketing. I know you wrote a really great post on Smaller Box about kind of what re-marketing is and how it works. Part of re-marketing is that it's something that you do through your advertising. What sites and what services do you recommend people using if they're looking to run some advertising?

Meredith: If you want to specifically do re-marketing I love Ad Rule. I've been using that for a few months. I think it's a really good service. It's really good technical for people there that are easy to work with. It's pretty easy to understand how their system works. One thing that I like what they do is they give you a lot of conversion data and not just click and convert because a lot of conversions happen because of branding. It's hard to attribute those conversions anything specific.

The nice thing about Ad Rule is it will tell you that customers saw the ad and they made purchases. So even if you didn't click you know that you're putting your brand in front of their face probably had some influence on getting them to come back to your site a week or a month later and buy your stuff. That's another really nice feature. There are many other marketing services out there that have although I haven't seen those other marketing services. Ad Rule is very small business friendly so I like that. That's one that I would recommend for getting into re-marketing.

If you're just going to advertise it's a tough answer to that question because it totally depends on your business. I mean, if selling products for like moms you want to advertise on mom blogs. If

you're selling products for men you want to advertise on publications that men read. I do have co-op advertising through Smaller Box. If you kind have that sort of artsy, crafty kind of products that you can just get 35 year olds like interesting, edgy, cute stuff like jewelry, bags and clothing and stuff like that. But it's not going to be for everybody. For some people that won't be their audience. Google AdWords is good.

Megan: Do you use Google AdWords a lot as just a way to kind of test out keywords and SEO or do you use it as kind of an advertising program in its own right?

Meredith: I use AdWords for a few different things. I like AdWords. AdWords is good. Everybody can use AdWords no matter who your customer is because you will have such a huge reach. There are two different ways to use AdWords. The AdWords that most people are familiar with are those little text ads that you see in search results. The idea behind those is somebody is searching for blue earrings and you sell blue earrings. You want to get your ad in front of them when they search for blue earrings so hopefully they will come and buy them from you. So that's the most common need lead type of adverts out there. I recommend that if you have the kind of product that's searched out to buy.

If you have something that's like impulse purchase and people don't search out as much. AdWords has another thing call targeted ads. The way that works is just like what you're used to when you find ads on a blog or something. Instead of buying it directly from the website you buy it through AdWords and they place your ads on those sites. The only thing about it is you just set your budget for the day. You pick a site that you want to advertise on and then AdWords will run your ads on those sites.

Megan: How do you feel about advertising on Facebook? Is that something you guys do? Is that something you would recommend?

Meredith: We tried it and it's not successful for us. I heard from a lot of people that it isn't great. I mean, I'm sure there are some people that it works for, but other e-commerce owners like us I haven't heard great things. I think it's mostly geared to getting other people to like your Facebook page. So if you know you're converting very well on Facebook and your goal is to get more likes on your page it might be good for that. Otherwise I haven't heard anything great about it and my own experience it wasn't worth while. We don't advertise on Facebook. We have a Facebook page, but we don't advertise on there.

Megan: Do you have any other maybe like thoughts or suggestions that you would leave people with as far as kind of what we've been talking about today?

Meredith: The one thing I would say, like I mentioned earlier, is that the secondary conversions I think people really underestimate their value. People just don't kind of think about the profits of getting people to buy their stuff. It's not as simple as they click an ad, they see your stuff and they buy it and they're done. It's not usually the pattern that people follow. Some people do and

you will have some of that. But for our business it's not a majority the people that follow that pattern. It's a small percentage compared to how many people do different things. You kind of want to think about it in terms of forming a relationship. If you can get them to click your Facebook like button, that's a victory. If you can get them to sign up for your mailing list, that's good. If you're doing re-marketing and you put a cookie on their machine you can get them to see your ads more times.

Those are all things that you want to happen because they're all just these steps in the process. Don't assume just because, you know, you run an ad for a month and you only got two sales. You can directly attribute it to that ad if that ad wasn't good because you got a bunch of people that come back with your monthly to buy something or you got somebody that came directly to your URL about something and what you don't realize is they saw your ad. You have to think about as sort of this cumulative process whenever you're doing marketing for your business. It's not as simple – I optimize my site for search and people they buy stuff. That always doesn't work out that way.

Megan: So how long do you feel like people should expect to see between their initial marketing efforts until like things really start to roll for their business? How long and how consistently do you need to be working on this kind of stuff?

Meredith: For our business, we have to market pretty consistently. Every little piece kind of adds on to this figuring it, the snowball effect you get with marketing. I don't think that you can just set it and forget it. I don't think you can like run ads for one month and expect that that's going to carry you for a year or anything like that. It's kind of an ongoing process that you always are going to have to be spending time on and investing some money in which is another thing to keep in mind. Advertising and marketing can't always be free.

People think about it as being free and if it costs your time it's not free. You're still investing your labor. You kind of whenever you're considering a marketing exercise you want to take your labor into account. That's something I talk about in the marketing eBook is the value of labor. It will take time. For us it took probably like our sales in the first year and second year and all that work that we did our first year we saw a lot of payoff in the second year. We saw a lot of conversions on our brand page and people going directly to our URL. It just takes a while to kind of get out there, get seen and get remembered by customers.

Megan: I know you have two eBooks that you put out recently. Do you maybe want to tell everyone kind of what those are about and what they can find in them?

Meredith: Sure. There are two eBooks out there recently. They're kind of companion reads. I don't know. If I didn't know either of these things I would probably want to read both of them because they go hand in hand. One of them is just about Google Analytics and it's written for people who are just creative business owners who aren't technical. It really gets into the nuts and bolts of all the technical stuff that's in there, but it explains it in like plain English, a language

that everybody can understand and in a way that you can relate back to how this information can make you more money. It can make you more profitable and attract more customers. It's written from that perspective.

It's got screenshots in it. It's got step by step instructions so it's very easy to understand and start running your Google Analytics and making it more profitable for you even if you've never used Google Analytics or you have, but you don't understand what have the tabs are. It explains all that to you. It even gets into some of the mapping like figuring out your return in investment and things like that.

The other book that I wrote is about creating marketing plans. That book also is designed for people who aren't technical. They aren't marketers. They are business people that are just creative people that want to start marketing their business. It takes you from basically having no direction and no plan at all to putting a print down on paper and doing cost projections and doing turn in investment projections. Things that sound very NDAish and technical and scary and it makes those things easy and understandable and in a format that anybody can grasp even if it isn't like stuff that comes naturally to them.

It talks about how to do target demographics research. It talks about how to plan your projects so that you can put them in manageable chunks. It talks about tools you can use to manage your project. It pretty much covers everything you need to get started with marketing your business. It even has some trouble shooting areas for how many marketing tools people use and if you start using them and you get stuck like what you can do to get unstuck. It's pretty comprehensive.

Megan: What I'll say to everyone is that along with this seminar we'll definitely have links to Meredith's eBooks that you guys can check out. I also encourage anyone who has questions about what we've talked about in the seminar today to head into the forums. If you haven't noticed Meredith is a very active participant in our forums. I'm sure she'd be happy to answer some more specific questions if you've got them. I just want to say thanks to Meredith for joining us today. I will see everyone around in The Creative Empire forums. Thanks, Meredith.

Meredith: Thanks, Megan.