

TAKING BLOGGING TO THE NEXT LEVEL WITH KATE MCKIBBIN

Hello and welcome back to another episode of She Means Business! In this episode, I was joined by the lovely Kate McKibbin. She's the founder of the Secret Bloggers' Business. In this episode, she talks all about how she built her first blog to have over half-a-million monthly readers and her tips about how anyone can build a successful blog. Enjoy this episode and listen right to the end to find out how you can be in with a chance of winning Kate's course called Start Your Blog with a Bang.

Kate, it's so good to have you here. Welcome to the She Means Business podcast!

Oh, thank you so much for having me. I'm very, very excited to be here.

I am so excited to talk to you, all about your business and how you've grown it. You've had so much success with creating a blog. Obviously, with Drop Dead Gorgeous Daily, with has half-a-million monthly readers. It's amazing!

It's hard to put that number and think about them being real people.

It's really cool and I'm really excited to hear all about your journey from having a blog to creating the Secret Bloggers' Business and teaching other people how to do it. I'm sure everyone else is like "Ooh, I want to learn!" This podcast is more about your journey and how you've made it happen. Typically, in these episodes, I like to play a game and pretend that there is a movie is coming out and the movie is called She Means Business. Obviously, this time, the star of the movie is you, Kate McKibbin. This movie is all about your entrepreneurial journey, how you turned your dream into reality. I always get the people to set the scenes first so the viewers know what to expect. What kind of movie would this be? What would the vibe be?

Oh gosh, I think it would Bridget Jones for business.

I love that. That sounds good to me. I love Bridget Jones' Diary for sure.

Comedy of errors, it all turns out well in the end.

I love it. When the movie begins, it's the first scene. This is you right back at the beginning of your entrepreneurial journey. What was it that set you off on this pathway? What was the story behind why you decided to become an entrepreneur?

My dad owned his own business and I think I always had it in the back of my own mind that I would do my own thing at some point as well. I was waiting for whatever that idea or that thing is going to be. In the meantime, I was keeping myself busy with keeping a roof over my head. I ended up working in publishing. I worked in fashion magazines in London for a little bit and actually here in Australia as well for a few years. As these things do, I ended up being the online editor of one of the women's fashion magazines here in Australia. It was right when online shopping was finally hitting Australia.

We're a few years behind on all these things. Back in 2007, I came up with this idea around if our magazine was all about shopping, maybe our website should be all about online shopping. I did a little research and pitched it to my boss. They weren't super keen. They didn't think people were quite ready for that yet. The Australian consumers were still a little hesitant with their online shopping. But I really loved the idea and I really had fallen in love with it. I said to them, "Would you mind if I did it? I would start this thing on the side." I didn't even realise it was a blog. Blogging wasn't what normal people did. Blogging was like Susie Bubble with her crazy outfits and stuff like that. I didn't think it was a blog. To me, it was a website. Anyway, I got their blessing. I started it. Within the first year, I had 20000 people on my email list. I had advertisers knocking down my door and all of these things. Luckily, as fate would have it, right about the time that I was pretty much got to the point earning the same amount from my blog as from my full-time job, which isn't hard when you work in publishing because it's not particularly well-paid anyway, I got a new boss. We didn't really get along very well. I was like no better time to do this, really. I got nothing to lose. I didn't have any big expenses or anything I need to be paying so I'm going to do it now. I jumped. Seven years later, Drop Dead Gorgeous Daily had half-a-million visitors and a staff of 5. It's a massive thing that was not really what I ever intended it to be, but it was very exciting getting it to that point.

That's really cool. I feel now, the world of business has changed so much. For so many of us, it's all about building a community of like-minded people who are interested in what it is that we have to offer, share a message and that kind of thing. That exactly what you were doing with your blog. You were creating that following of people with who just loved what you were putting out there. Can you take us inside of it all, behind the scenes more? What were the steps you were taking, especially when you first got started? You obviously had this idea to do it, but then did you know what you were doing? Did you know how to get started? How did you figure it all out?

My number one reason for doing it in the first place had been as a way of making extra money. Working in the publishing industry, I said the wages were horrible. I actually worked in a pet shop part-time when I worked in magazines because Sydney is a very expensive city to live in. I said, "This is a great thing and maybe it will make me an extra \$500 a month or something like that." I went in it with definitely a business mindset from the start. I pursued advertisers and things like that pretty much after a couple of months of getting started. Because I had that inside look at how magazines worked, I was in charge of growing this email list and I knew what worked there, I was able to apply that quickly to my own stuff as well. That worked really well. For me, the main thing was I did focus on basically getting money through the door so that I could get people to help me, start outsourcing stuff, start paying SEO and all those other things which I knew were not in my zone of genius. That was what really helped me grow quickly at the start. With a lot of bloggers, grow the audience first and I'll figure out the money side later. And then it can be quite difficult if you haven't had that growth process at the start. Sadly, even if you have an audience of a million people who love reading about what you ate for breakfast, it doesn't necessarily translate into a business. Being able to have that steady income from the start was great and it helped me grow quickly. The flipside of that was I ended up being an ad salesperson, which is not something that I ever wanted to do. It was good at the start, yup, this is how I'm going to make money. I didn't also have that conversation with myself in that OK, is

this a way you actually enjoy making money? That's why 7 years later, I ended up closing it down because for it to grow, I ended up having to do stuff that I wasn't loving doing, I suppose.

Yeah, I know the feeling. With my first business, I wanted to make money. And then I realised "What am I doing with my life?" It was phone unlocking so it was completely random. It's funny, isn't it? We all want to chase money, but then if we're not actually doing the things we enjoy to generate that money, it's actually kind of empty.

Yeah, it is. You learn about lessons and it's great. Obviously, you can apply those lessons to the next thing. We can come from a heart-centred place. What do I enjoy? How can I help people? How can I be useful and not just how can I buy some nice shoes?

When you were getting started with the build, how did you get people to buy into your blog and want to pay money to advertise in the early stages?

Because I've seen how much the advertisers were paying for stuff in magazines, I had this crazy false confidence. "If they got 10000 people, I can get 10000 email subscribers — no worries." I put together a media kit. I've seen the advertiser's media kit at work, so I put together a media kit. I knew the people that I had to contact. You want to go find the marketing managers, you want to find the PR representatives. I stalked Googled and I figured out what their names were and what their email addresses were. I basically just hustled. I sent them emails. I called them. I did so many follow-ups. It was a numbers game. I was a real salesperson, which is very akin to my normal nature. I had targets of number of people I had to contact and things like that. That's how I got it out there. The thing is, once I started getting advertisers in, we were getting really good results. They were telling other people in the industry as well. I started having people actually coming to me, which was fantastic. I think I was lucky back then. In 2007, there weren't many people who were doing what I was doing, particularly not ones who the same background: worked in publishing and had seen how it worked from that side of things. They knew about reporting and they knew about all the boring stuff that goes with doing ad sales, which meant I could give them that more professional approach as well.

Obviously, you built up your blog. You kept the readership up. You had a lot of subscribers? You were doing some pretty cool stuff as well. What was that life like? What was it like to be creating incredible partnerships? Didn't you have a nail varnish that you created with Revlon?

Yes.

That's pretty awesome.

It's so crazy now because it feels like a completely different life. I'm now so much in the online marketing entrepreneurial space. I had a nail polish! It's just amazing. That's one thing I love about the combination of blogging and marketing. Obviously, Revlon wanted to partner with bloggers as a great collaboration. It was good for them, they got exposure and we talked about them a lot. We got to create some amazing content around these polishes. I could do these nail tutorials and stuff like that. On the flipside, we got to do the really cool thing, which is creating a nail polish collection where we had to basically select from 3 colours that would go on a pack and we can use for different nail

patents and things like that. It was really crazy. One day, we nearly set the smoke alarm off in the office because we were trying to make s'mores in the boardroom for a photo. The next day, everyone would be sitting with face masks on so we could do a review. We were all so frantically trying to do proper serious work at the same time. It's just mixed in with a lot of fun stuff. It was really great.

That's really cool. How did the journey then unfold into you transitioning into running a business teaching other people how to build successful blogging businesses? What was like the behind-the-scenes of that?

A lot of people had asked me about it. I had a lot of blogging friends, particularly in Australia. It's a really small, tight-knit industry and we all catch up, have coffee and talk about our blogs, as most small business people do. The one thing I noticed is these are people who had been blogging for as long as I had. Some of them had bigger audiences than I did, but they were still really struggling with the monetisation side of things. They were ad salespeople and they didn't want to be ad salespeople. They couldn't figure it out. They were relying on things like Google AdSense and the occasional thing coming into them. They were going blogger agents and those agents wouldn't hustle enough for them because they didn't have skin in the game on their behalf. I was getting a lot of people asking me about it. I was also getting to the point where I was looking to add extra revenue streams. Particularly for blogging, all your eggs in one basket. Most of our eggs are in one basket and that was me being the ad salesperson. What if I got sick? What if I want to go on a holiday? I had those crazy questions. I was looking into other things. I had resisted doing any kind of online course for ages because I had this stupid story in the back of my head that to do that would be a failure in some way. "Those that can't do, teach." I'm never going to do that. We'll figure some other things out. We had an online store. We had some bits and pieces. People just kept coming to me to help them. I didn't want to do consulting because I didn't have a time. I'll put it into a course and see if anyone is interested. I came up with the name Secret Bloggers Business, which was just the name of the course urgently. I wrote a blog post and an email. I popped a PayPal button. The PayPal wasn't even connected to anything. It just took the payments and I had to go into PayPal to get their details. It was very, very low-tech. I sent it out. "If anyone is interested, I might do a course. Let me know." I had about 100 people sign up pretty much straightaway. People want to know this stuff. There was a lot of talk around blog monetisation, but no one was really talking about it. I noticed it was quite airy fairy kind of stuff, like go in and master SEO, master affiliates and become this crazy internet marketer, which doesn't work so well with people who have lots of blogs, blogging about their kids or blogging about how they've overcome something or whatever it is that bloggers do. I kind of put together a framework around it, created the course and sent that to the world and people liked it. That was what got me hooked. The same people applying the stuff that you've taught them and watching them start making money and growing their blog was awesome. It was really exciting. I became a bit of course junkie after that. OK, what else? Now, I've got nearly 8 of them, which is too many.

It's so cool though. It's amazing to see. One of the things I love about the entrepreneurial journey is you start in one place and you just never know where you're going to end up. You just don't know how the path is going to unfold. I think

that's what makes being an entrepreneur one of the most exciting things you can do in life.

Definitely. First of all, I'll be like "What's blogging?" I love it. Literally, today, I was talking to one of my students and they've had a similar thing. They were trying to force down one path, which didn't feel quite right to them. This opportunity popped up, they took it and all of a sudden, it's a snowball effect. The momentum is just taking off. I love it when that happens.

What would your biggest piece of advice be for people who want to use blogging in their business in terms of how to grow your audience and how to actually make a success?

Number one, especially these days, it's quality over quantity — thank God! It used to be quantity. We used to blog 3 times a day, which is a lot of content. Now, it is knowing your audience really, really well. Knowing how you can help them or serve them or give them value or entertain them or whatever it is that they come to you for. Knowing who they are and what it is they get out of your blog and how it improves their day, basically. Making your content really focused around that, having that at the front of your mind when you're coming up with post studies or when you've written your post. I used to have Post-It note on my computer that said "How does this help my readers to kick ass?" It's having that at the front of your mind. Blogging, when it started, it was actually quite a weirdly selfish thing. I don't mean that in a bad way, but it was very much "I like this thing. Look at me doing this thing." It was quite voyeuristic. Nowadays, to cut through and get people sharing your content, engaging with your content and engaging with you, which is the main point of content marketing, you have to be giving something of value. Also, you can't be scared to put yourself into it and to share a little bit of your own story and your own background in life. Everyone will have a different line of what they're happy to do. I don't ever encourage they don't feel comfortable with. The Internet is a big, scary place and putting too much of your personal life on the Internet is not necessarily a good thing, but just sharing snippets, those sprinkles of your own personality, your own story help to create stronger connections with people reading your content. They only got so much content to choose from these days. It's like making friends. Not everyone is going to want to be your best friend. But the people who want to be your friend, they will be your friend for life because their quirks and your quirks mesh nicely together. It's the same when you're trying to find your audience with your blog.

Yeah, I agree with that so much. Often, it gets overlooked by people -- that trying to inject your personality and behind-the-scenes into things a bit more. Last year, I started to do a blog. It had such a huge impact. People feel like they know me more because they get to see behind the scenes of a lot of stuff that I've been doing. It's just been insane with the reaction, the response that it gets. It's so powerful. People really want to be able to connect with us. That's how the business world has changed so much. It wasn't like that a few years ago, that's for sure.

No. It used to be "Have a nice, shiny website and hide behind it" kind of thing.

Yeah, exactly.

It's coming full circle. Four or five years ago, it was get as much rubbish content out as quickly as you can. That's how you got SEO and how you got Facebook traffic and everything. Now, less is more. They want to pick a couple of people that they follow and engage with them more. The great thing about that is you don't need to have half-a-million followers to have a successful business. My Secret Bloggers Business is knowing me that got traffic. It is far more profitable because I've got much more of a connection with the people that I have in my audience. Trying to please half-a-million people is just not very easy to do.

You've obviously created so much success over the years. What would you say the biggest lessons you've learned are or what's really helped you get to this point?

There's a lot. I think outsourcing early. It was something that I resisted, particularly in the first couple of years. "I shouldn't really be spending that money." I didn't think I could spend money on things that weren't making money. I didn't realise that getting people to free up my time is also a fabulous way of also making money. Outsource, outsource, outsource, but don't necessarily go for the cheapest person. That was another mistake I made. The first person I tried to outsource to was a \$5 VA. There wasn't anything wrong with that, but they obviously didn't have ownership or real investment in what they were doing. You do get what you're paying for. The other thing is taking the time to get to know yourself a bit, what it is you want out of your business and what success in your business actually looks like for you. I had this thing in my head that I had to have a big, shiny office with all-white furniture. I thought that that's what success looked like and that's what you have to be doing. Now, I work from home and I love it. I realise I don't want to be tied to an office or having to be in a certain place at a certain time for staff and all that kind of stuff. The work that I do in my business is completely different to what I used to do and I'm so much happier now that I figured out that I hate being a salesperson. I don't ever want to do that ever again. Really knowing yourself and being OK with what your business looks like. The success of your business just has to look good to you -- it doesn't have to look good to anyone else. That's the lesson I learned and I'm so much better for.

It's such a big lesson, isn't it? Otherwise, it's so easy to go down the rabbit hole of looking at other people's success and thinking that's what you want for yourself. When, in fact, it's really not what you want for yourself and it would make you feel miserable. But you want it because someone else got it. It's so funny, isn't it?

Also, don't believe what other people are necessarily posting on Instagram. They're probably wearing pyjama pants underneath that glamorous top half, just like you.

So true. We live in such a strange time with social media and what we see with other people. We think "Oh my gosh, they've got it all figured out. They know what they're doing. Their life is perfect." But really, the truth is, it's probably all rubbish.

We're all just figuring it out as we go.

Exactly. That's the point, isn't it? Through doing these interviews on these podcasts made me realise that literally, success is created by people who just take action to figure it out. No one has all the answers. Everyone starts off thinking, "What the hell

am I doing? Is this even going to work out?” There are so many I interviewed who started a business and a few years into it, completely U-turned moving into doing something else or a new path has opened up to transition into something else. You don’t know all that stuff in the beginning. You don’t know how it’s going to transform and how the path is going to unfold. That’s the fun part of being an entrepreneur, isn’t it?

Yeah. I love that fact that I don’t know what I’m going to do next necessarily. I’ve got a vague idea. You never know what’s going to happen and that’s way more interesting. I remember when I worked in magazines and I sat down, you can see the path completely mapped out in front of me. It didn’t excite me. Being an entrepreneur is much, much better.

Kate, it’s been so amazing talking to you. I loved hearing your story. It’s so cool to see what you’ve created. It reinforces what’s possible for all of us. Thank you so much for coming to share it all with us.

Thank you so much for having me. It’s been awesome talking to you.

I hope you enjoyed it lots, too. We are doing a really exciting giveaway as well. If you head over to the website, leave a comment on this podcast episode and let us know what your biggest take-away has been, you can be in with a chance of winning Kate’s course Start Your Blog with a Bang. Kate, can you tell us a little bit about what that is?

I created this course. It’s actually my most recent course. I created it about 6 months ago. It’s a launch plan for a blog. It also applies to pretty much any online business stuff we go through, but it is designed specifically for bloggers. It’s for people who know that they want their blog to be a business. It’s not a hobby blog — it’s “I’m coming in and I’m coming in hard. I’m trying to make this happen.” It’s a plan to actually launch so that the very first blog post you send out, you already have an audience. You already have hundreds, if not thousands, of readers. You got people on your list. You know how to create the kind of content that gets shared. You also have a plan in place for how you’re going to start monetising as well. It’s a launch plan for bloggers. I’ve seen people get some crazy results from it, so I’m really excited to give that away to someone.

It’s amazing. Thank you so much for giving it away -- very exciting. If you want to be in with a chance of winning, head over to femaleentrepreneursassociation.com. Find this podcast episode. I would give you a short link but I don’t have one right now. It will be on there. If you leave a comment, you will be in with a chance of winning. I really hope you’ve enjoyed this episode as much as I have and I will see you next week for another episode of She Means Business.