

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

Hosted by Shawn Collins & Lisa Picarille

<http://www.theaffiliatething.com>

Lisa Picarille: Hey, Sam, is that you?

Sam Harrelson: Yeah, that is me. Can you hear me?

Lisa: We can.

Shawn Collins: Sam!

Sam: Excellent. Good.

Shawn: All right! Yeah, sorry for some hiccups there.

Sam: Yeah, no, that's you know the nature of the beast with these sorts of technologies.

Lisa: I think beast being the keyword.

Sam: [laughter] Right. Well, you know, I mean all of these platforms have issues with that sort of thing every now and then. Isn't BlogTalkRadio still in beta?

Shawn: Yeah it is. Just at the site right now. But we've got the alpha for this show, I think.

Lisa: So we're happy to have Sam here and why don't, I guess, Shawn, do you have a big introduction plan or are we going to let Sam talk all about himself and talk, and tell us a little bit about who he is.

Shawn: Yeah, I guess I've known Sam for a number of years and currently he's running Cost Per News something which is very vibrant community of slave marketers and I've been there every day, often times come and think about stuff in agreeing or in stark contrast to some of the madcap ideas he has.

Sam: [laughter]

Shawn: And a he's dynamic guy, he could probably describe what he's been up to better than I could. But, one of the most important things about him is that he's my fraternity brother, even though we went to a different school.

Sam: Right, right. That's what I always put on my resume is Shawn Collins' fraternity brother.

Lisa: So now Sam, you found it cost per news it's only been a couple of months now. It's only back in October of 2006 and I know that I go there every day and everybody I've run into always ask me: "Do you read Cost Per News?" And it seems like early on, people were like "No, I'm not sure what that is" and now, everybody's "Oh yeah, of course I read that every day." So tell us a little bit about what you're doing at Cost Per News and how things are going over there.

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Sam: Well yeah, thanks for the kindly intro. Yeah well, it really went live on November first. We did some things in October, but it was sort of testing the waters. But, you know, I love revenues and I don't do Cost Per News as sort of a competitor of that. But I always thought that there was a sort of a space. You know, and the discussion that wasn't being filled. Not forward thinking, that kind of cliché, you know, but the sort of stuff that didn't fit just the practical area. Sort of a sandbox for thinking about things and trying to clear issues up that we all had on our minds but not necessarily a place to come together to discuss it. And we have forums and that kind of thing, and that great. But, it would be nice to have sort of a public avenues of discussion for some of these issues.

And, you know, Call for new has a bit of breaking news involved and sort of coverage of hot topics and that sort of thing, but it's more about creating and fostering permanent discussions of issues that put trends in times. I've been trying to think of a way to eliminate base from the blog, but I really don't like the idea of a blog like Cost Per News, not necessarily being by base and that kind of thing. So tried out something to see which way to go, and that doesn't take so well with the redesign. So, I don't know, moving forward it's a fun space to be in. You know, everybody's got an opinion on this thing going out and there and it really is a fascinating conversation.

I've said more than once, it's the comments that are more valuable or more interesting than posts in those times. I've even thought of trying to get some sort of template where the comments show up as some sort of the main part of the page and the actual post itself is sort of off on the side. But, I don't know, it's an experiment but it's going well and it's being taken advantage of by of four conversations and that's originally what I wanted.

Lisa: And one of the things that you seem to talk about a lot is Web 2.0 and that seems to generate a lot of discussion and I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about why you think that seems to generate so much, so many comments.

Sam: Right. People are interested in it. You know, it all over the blogosphere, which is a naughty word to say. It's being talked about at the Affiliate Summit with the infamous panel and, you know, people are constantly trying to figure out; Okay, it sounds good in theory but how are we going to apply it. It's like a political theory that looks good on paper but how do you make it a reality? And, you know, it's got sort of all the basic stuff there that makes fans. So I think it's out of interest and out of curiosity for how it can be made practical, and that's always been my biggest sort of interest in Web 2.0 and all my marketing, especially the affiliate marketing. It's how to transcend that leap from idealism to actually putting it into practice, which is not easy but that's been the sort of behind all of the discussions on this side.

Shawn: So Sam, did you have any particular widgets that are, sort of, derived from Web 2.0 that you think are good applications that can be applied to affiliate marketing?

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

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Sam: Well, you know, things like Biznet are very interesting platforms. We're just beginning now to get things like Jaxur, which is kind of a Voice Over IP protocol but kids are picking it and putting it on MySpace and that kind of thing.

So there are all these different platforms that are being created, and opening up inventory for advertising which hadn't existed. I mean, we have been able to monetize communication between two 18 year olds on MySpace over voice before. We tried it with email and different ways. It's interesting that those sorts of inventories are opening up. That's the beauty of Web 2.0, that it allows for the monetization and the, if you will, making conversation a commodity, which we talked about this week on Cost Per News.

But opening up these source of areas that hadn't existed before, and that's what affiliate marketing can do for all of these big companies trying to figure out how to use Web 2.0. Because affiliate marketing, by its nature about relationships, so I think it's a very fertile region for that.

Lisa: So if you're an affiliate marketer and you want to get more into what's going on with Web 2.0. Where can you go other than following these continuous discussions, where can you go to find out where you can get the latest widgets that you may be able to add to your site?

Sam: That's a great question. Basically, I always point people to blogs and podcasts, as generic as that sounds. That's really where a lot of the information is going on, and really drill down into the comments or hire someone to do that for you. It's really fascinating to see what's going on. Even at the major blogs like Tech Times, which are by their nature are sort of niche blogs, I mean, Tech Crunch is about Web 2.0, but it's one of the top 30 most visited blogs on the web.

The comments there are fascinating. When Mike brings up a particular widget or whatever, you get 100 responses to that. Do a typical blog search or go to some of these widget blogs and really see what's out there. There's literally thousands of not just widgets but social applications that allow for the opening up of inventories that hadn't existed. The conversations are happening, whether it's voice or blog comments, having the means to find them. Google does a very good job of indexing that in their blog space. That would be my main suggestion.

Shawn: One thing that I saw just in the last day, it's not really a monetization of a widget but some sort of leveraging it, there's a guy that I met at the Affiliate Summit last week, Fraser Edwards who has a blog out in the UK, and he was doing something where he is collecting people's sort of recaps of the conference by Skype. You could just Skype him, and leave a voicemail which I didn't realize you could do on Skype. So I did that today. I think it's sort of a neat thing. He also gives you the option to call him on the phone. I probably wouldn't bother to do the phone, but it was just so easy to click and just leave a message really quick on Skype, and anybody that wants to do that should just take a look

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

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<http://www.theaffiliatething.com>

at what he's doing there. His site is affiliateblog.co.uk. I think it's sort of a neat way to collect information and he's going to weave all of these opinions into a podcast.

Sam: Yeah, and Fraser's doing some great work with the blog besides that, he's a fantastic podcaster and blogger. If you're interested in international, I would definitely go check that out. I got to meet him at the summit as well, and he's a super guy, even though he's blowing thousands of dollars at four AM at the roulette wheel (that's sort of a little inside joke). And that whole Skype voicemail thing really did start in the niche blogs.

I'm a super geek and I love Star Wars and I listen to three different Star Wars fan podcasts. And I remember about six months ago, no it was about a year ago I guess, and one of those podcasts started saying hey, you can call into our Skype and leave a voicemail there, and I thought oh, that's cool. And now it's really starting to take off around the podcasting world. I'm not sure where it started, but it's a fantastic idea for content.

I've seen two small businesses doing that, where they have a Skype line dedicated for calling and voicemail, and you can call in to the merchant or to the business and leave a voicemail for feedback. Because sometimes people say things that come across much clearer than when they write things. We live in a very oral culture, again, which is odd for me, studying the ancient world, but we're so fast paced and we have our cell phones but we're not always at our laptops or our computers, but sometimes it's easier to leave feedback via voicemail with him.

It's sort of re-using old technology in an innovative or creative way. Some people say that that's what Web 2.0 is. I think that the whole use of that instance is really interesting.

Shawn: Hey Sam, would you be interested in doing a little word association for us?

Sam: Sure, I feel like I'm in the Daily Show with the geek here, all right, go for it.

Shawn: Alright - start out easy here: Web 2.0.

Sam: Tech Crunch.

Shawn: Widgets.

Sam: Twitter, that's not right, but Twitter has the widgets. I don't know.

Shawn: False Idols.

Sam: False Idols... ShoeMoney.

Shawn: Pinko Marketing.

Sam: Tara Hunt.

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

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<http://www.theaffiliatething.com>

Shawn: CPA Networks.

Sam: Performance.

Shawn: FTC Regulations.

Sam: Silly.

Shawn: Anything to add there, Lisa?

Lisa: No, I didn't know we were playing this little game. I'm sorry. I'm asleep at the wheel.

Shawn: Just sort of occurred to me it'd be enjoyable.

Sam: Yeah, it was a great idea.

Shawn: Thanks. One thing I'd love to hear about, in a recap if you wanted to give it, on your camping, or lack thereof, experiences in Vegas.

Sam: We had to go mobile, basically, because of the intense cold of the Las Vegas winter. The weather forecast sufficed us, but it ended up being much, much colder than we thought it would be. We did make it out to a deserted area in the middle of the desert, technically, so it was a gonzo experience as Wayne would say, but yeah, it generated a lot of buzz and chat and that was interesting. Maybe in Miami we'll camp out on the beach or something.

Lisa: Well, I've got a question for you Sam, is why not plan something separately from another event. Is it just because everybody's there? They just seem sort of counter to each other. Usually when people are at these events, they want to be at the hotels, participate in what's going on right there, usually in a bar or whatever, and the whole camping experience seems like it'd be a great thing if it was separate.

Sam: There's talk of that, and I'm talking actually with Tara and with some of the BarCamp people, about setting up an affiliate camp, where we all get together and basically camp out, but have Wi-Fi and a marquee, ways. But at the same time everybody has to participate if you go, you have to do a presentation. You know, we have a little white board, and we stream it all up again.

Shawn: You just bring a big white board up to the campground?

Sam: Yeah, barcamp.org is the website for the BarCamp movement. You know, it's fascinating, these things are happening worldwide. It's really spurring some interesting conversations about me. Start up, in the Silicon Valley there's a lot of buzz around me, but I think it'd be interesting to bring that to affiliate marketing, and actually Beth Kirschen and I have talked about setting one up for later in the summer around Yosemite, and we might make that a reality. We're still trying to figure things out, so thank you for that. I

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

Hosted by Shawn Collins & Lisa Picarille

<http://www.theaffiliatething.com>

keep promising affiliate camp for the real thing, maybe paying, but it wouldn't be something that we charge for, it wouldn't be sort of a conference. It was just sort of a get together, where we share ideas, and play guitar.

Lisa: Some sort of Burning Man for affiliates?

Sam: Right, exactly. I mean, no video cameras, no PowerPoint, and clothes are optional. We'll see.

Shawn: One thing that'd make that a lot more appealing to me is if it was maybe Affiliate Lodge where it felt like a Real World thing, with like 10-20 people jammed into a house for a weekend to brainstorm and talk about stuff, but to have the outdoors part of it.

Sam: Yeah, that's a great idea. It's just something where we all have our separate viewpoints, we all have really good ideas, and I don't want to start another 1337 retreat, or whatever that is. You guys can probably guess my feelings about that, I think there's a lot of room for being face to face, and taking advantage of those conversations.

Shawn: Yeah, I'd love to get in touch with the environment, I have this thing I like about hot showers and indoor plumbing and refrigerators and stuff.

Sam: Well, that's the thing - if we were to do that, the facilities would be nearby, and optional for people to use. We wouldn't just throw you out in the middle of El Capitan and say, "Have fun for the week and here's some rope." So have Wi-Fi and showers and coffee and our daily needs.

Shawn: Maybe I could just roll up in a Winnebago and park next to you and your pup tent.

Sam: If I can use your shower, sure.

Shawn: Yeah, sure thing.

Lisa: Well, you can count me in on that because I love camping, and so I think that would be a very fun thing. I think there's a lot of room in the industry for those kinds of discussions to go on, and I love the small face-to-face discussions that take place as well as the really big events like Shawn's Affiliate Summit, which was great.

Sam: Oh man, yeah, I was and I am blown away by how well the summit went. I called into Frasier's voicemail thing and left that. It was the first time I've been to where it wasn't and like an East Coast or West Coast flavored summit. I mean everyone was there and I think Jeannine Raxon of Rextopia said it best - there was a tangible buzz wherever you went, whether you were on the floor or in the lunchroom or over in one of the panels, you were so excited about it again, and that was really nice.

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

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Shawn: Yeah, I think maybe the industry was a little bit easier to ignore for some people for many years from like 2000 through 2003 or so, even our first Affiliate Summit, you never had an event that had more than 200 people at it, outside of maybe the CJU or the LinkShare Symposium, when they had their own events there, but the industry-wide. They were always small, and marginalized, being on cruise ships and stuff, and now all of a sudden the final tally ended up being 2,079 people. So, ten times greater than it was a few years ago.

Sam: Yeah, that's tremendous. I mean, who knows what the future of all this is? It's really been a fun thing to watch, that has grown and matured. We've had conferences since '98, I guess, I'm not sure what Molander says, but we've had these things forever, and finally they're taking off, and that's great, and you and Missy have done a tremendous job in putting this together.

Shawn: Back then at the... I guess it was touched on by Todd Crawford at the embarrassing roast that I had in Vegas, he was just mentioning that back in I guess '98, James Marciano, who started up refer-it.com. He had the first conference. I think it might have been in June of '98 or '99, in New York City, and then his conference was called Affiliate Solutions and it ran up until 2002, I think, if I'm remembering correctly, and that was overlapped by the Affiliate Force Conference from 2000 to 2003. And IIR did a couple of them in the 2000s, and then so we've been doing it since 2003 now, so it has been a decade pretty much of steady conferences, but they're getting bigger and bigger.

Lisa: Now, everybody that I talk to feels that Affiliate Summit - there's other shows they go to throughout the year, but that's the big must show, where they know they're going to see everybody that they need to see or that they want to see.

Sam: Yeah, I mean I love that ad:tech, and I love eComXpo, and SES, and those sorts of forms, but they're too big, and you kind of get lost. Affiliate Summit - it doesn't matter how many people come, because it's about a certain topic, and I think these niche conferences like CJU or the LinkShare Symposium, those kinds of things really are the future of conferencing, things like CES, you know, the Consumer Electronics Show, which was in Vegas before us, that was way too big, and it loses its meaning if you get too spread out there. It's great because it has a focus.

Shawn: Yeah, I think several years ago, back when Internet World was the big thing I remember that just going into the Javits Center in New York, it was so vast and I just felt lost there, and I personally, not too objective I guess, I like to have a relatively small show where you can actually find people and just have a manageable thing there. I had a hard time even at ad:tech in New York when there were three floors of exhibits to hit. It was just sort of overwhelming because I was only there for one day.

Lisa: So, Shawn, while we're talking about the Affiliate Summit and we don't have that much time left, why don't we let people know who won the first ever Pinnacle Awards.

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

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<http://www.theaffiliatething.com>

And those were given out on Monday night at a party at Tryst, and why don't you let people know who won in which categories?

Shawn: Yeah, absolutely. We had six awards there, and it was the first time we did that, as Lisa mentioned. In the past, two shows before that, we gave out an Affiliate Marketing Legend Award, and the first one had gone to Wayne Porter, a couple of shows ago and after that it was sort of Christened the Wayne Porter Affiliate Marketing Legend Award.

And so that one this time around went to Todd Crawford, who I'd imagine most anybody in the industry knows, he's been around for a good decade or so, starting out with CJ, and now with Digital River. And then as the Best Blogger we had Jim Kukral, of ReveNews, he also has a show here on BlogTalkRadio. And the Affiliate Marketing Advocate Award went to Brian Littleton, who runs Shareasale. And the Exceptional Merchant was Amazon.com. The Affiliate Manager of the Year was Angel - and I hope I don't mangle his last name even though he taught it to me - Djambazov, and he's from Onlineshoes.com. And then finally the Affiliate of the Year was Scott Hazard

And so it was really exciting for us to think about those awards, and it was an occasion for me to actually put on a tux instead of dressing like a scumbag, so it was sort of nice.

Lisa: Well, it was a great event and there was a great group of nominees, and it was nice to see the folks who won, and we've had Scott on this program before. And some of those winners - Scott and Todd was on with us last week - and Brian has agreed to come on in the future.

Shawn: Yeah, I guess we sort of indirectly had Amazon on here too, because we had Gene Kavner, but it was after he left Amazon, but we talked about Amazon a lot. So I guess we have to just get Angel and Jim and Brian on here and round it all out.

Lisa: So we should thank Sam for joining us, and spending his precious time, it was great to have you, and then Shawn, we should let everyone know what we're going to talk about next week.

Shawn: Yeah, for next week, right now I'm working on an interview that's not totally solid yet so I don't want to announce it in case it doesn't happen, but it's a very good interview, and I think that it'll be very interesting, and then just have some other news we'll be touching on - there's the Affiliate Census that just came out in the UK, as well as a lot of data from my AffStat report.

Lisa: OK, and in addition we gave away a chance at the Affiliate Summit for somebody to be interviewed by us, at the Revenue Booth, and the winner of that was Lisa Johnson, and she works at Brookstone, and she's their Marketing Director. And she's going to be coming on a future episode so maybe if Shawn doesn't... if his interview doesn't work out next week we'll have Lisa.

Affiliate Thing Interview: Sam Harrelson

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<http://www.theaffiliatething.com>

Shawn: Yeah, sorry I forgot about that. The one I had to sign up today didn't happen, so I didn't email you yet, so I guess Lisa, we can hopefully do that next week then, then this mystery guest, we can get on the next week after that.

Lisa: Oh yeah, another mystery guest, how fun.

Shawn: Yeah, my dog.

Lisa: OK, well thanks for listening and thanks to Sam Harrelson, and we'll see everybody next week.

Shawn: Yeah, thanks a lot, Sam.

Sam: Thank you, thank you for having me, I appreciate it.

Shawn: All right, have a great day.

Sam: All right, you guys too.