



Speed Skills: Do You Recognize Your Marketing Mountain?

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If you ever wondered whether those marketing ideas you read about online actually work, this interview is for you. I created the opportunity to read, then speak with Alex Carroll. He is the author of two books, "Beat the Cops: The Guide to Fighting Your Traffic Tickets And Winning" and "The Radio Publicity Manual." These (and soon a third book) have created a spiral of money and career from adversity for their author-promoter. I think what interested me the most is that he is as serious about this as any business person I've spoken with. He is engulfed in information and belief in what he does. On another level, we've all heard about rags to riches before. It's an event. In this case, it's an unended story that he shares so you can make money, as he makes more money and then... Well, you get the picture. Meet Alex Carroll.

RB: How did you get started?

AC: My job in college was as a courier driver. The way our system was set up they allowed us one ticket on our records, and after that we got canned. Needless to say I had kind of a high exposure to tickets being a courier driver. I ended up accumulating a total of ten of them over my four years of driving. And so I ended up in traffic court a lot and I ended up winning a lot. When that was all said and done I decided I would write a book about all the traffic court tricks that I had learned. And, I found out that there were 100,000 traffic tickets a day. So I started writing.

When the book first came out I went to a guy named Dan Pointer who is the author of a self-publishing manual and a number of other books. He was kind of my mentor in the beginning. His suggestion to me--after I mortgaged all my credit cards and spent all my money and was in debt getting the book out--was the best way to market it was probably to be doing radio interviews. His suggestion was to put an ad in radio-television interview report. So I did that. Back then it was only about \$350 bucks. And, I got a total of 50 interviews out of the deal, over a period of about two months. And when it was all said and done those 50 interviews ended up generating about \$5,000 in sales. It was a good return.

But, I looked at the numbers. I found that 47 of those interviews had generated three orders or less and there were three of them that generated over 150 orders each or more. So, me being an Einstein I scratched my head and wondered. Hmm, are those big stations and all those others places like Fargo, North Dakota that I am getting up at 5 in the morning to do, a waste of my time?

So I went to work trying to figure out, okay where do I just get these big stations from? And I first, obviously, called people at radio-television interview reports and said hey can I just have your data base so I can select the big stations, so I can call them up and pitch them myself. They said sure.

So , I bought that. Then I found out that the only delineators of station size that they have of market rankings and wattage. And, I quickly found out that wattage is meaningless because very often you have a hundred-thousand watt stations out in the middle of nowhere, because they need that wattage just to pull in a few listeners.

Whereas, the really big stations that return very big markets have really low wattage because the FCC doesn't give them much wattage because the competition is do stiff.

The other thing I found out was that market rankings don't tell you a whole lot either because it means that every single station in New York—the number one market--has a number one market ranking. Even though it may be New York's polka station and it has only 10,000 listeners versus WABC which has 3 million.

So I went back to work and asked who actually rates these and know how many listeners each one of these stations really have. That company is called Arbitron. A dozen phone calls and a week later I managed to get the Vice President of the company on the phone. After begging pleading he sent me a old copy of the radio ratings book. And I went through and picked the big stations and put a press kit together on myself and I started pitching them and did really well.

RB: Is important to be a detective?

AC: The aspect of one's mode of operation is relentlessness. To be predicated to that kind of detective work is absolutely necessary. You've got to be persistent. You will not succeed in this business if you just make a few phone calls and wait for these guys to call you back.

RB: Did Dan Pointer give you some ideas, were you sort of inspired being around him?

AC: I read his book like the bible. When I got to the point of being ready to go to print and ready to do the marketing, I went to him with 40 questions that hadn't been answered yet. They were all questions specific to my product that hadn't been answered yet. He helped me out on that as well.

RB: When you got into this you were making \$5000 off of \$350.00 spent in advertising. What are you doing now?

AC: I sometimes do \$50,000 a month.

RB: Is this something you've refined that someone could do, or would they have to go through the steps?

AC: They wouldn't have to do what I did over again. They could take my database and put a press kit together and make the phone calls and pitch the stations. They wouldn't have to go through all the lessons I had to learn the hard way.

RB: What in addition to having the list are key elements—to putting together the kind of a track record that you're building from?

AC: Number one. The person has to understand they are selling a show. They are not selling a book or their product or service or whatever they want to hawk. They are selling a show. That's the first and foremost thing they have to understand. The producer does not care what they are promoting. The producer only cares what they are going to say to their audience. What are you going to say when you get on the airwaves that is going to keep my listeners from changing the channel. When you put together your pitch, your press kit, your press release you have to focus entirely on what the producer wants, needs and desires. And completely forget about what you're promoting. You will get your plug so long as you put on a good show.

RB: How do you get a good sense of what those wants, needs and desires are for a producer?

AC: It becomes more obvious as you talk to them . One the things I use is a list of 20 radio show topics. You get a feel for the type of topics they look for and you can angle your pitch to those topics.

RB: What time frame would someone be looking at to put their presentation together, their presentation, press kits together, and also their rap. You've got your story down to a cadence which I can hear. What kind of time frame would a typical person be looking at?

AC: It depends on where they are in the process.

If their book is done and they have a pretty good idea of what their selling points are, I would say they could put their kit together in a week or two. They have to have to take into consideration the foundation they need to have in place before doing that. For example, Do they have a toll free number? Is it set to an answering service? Is their website set up so that it has online ordering? Are they using auto responders? There's a myriad of things that need to be in place. If they are selling a book, do they have a distribution network set up? Are they selling at bookstores, or are they going to sell direct? What's their shipping? Who's their toll free carrier? Do they want a vanity number? All these things come into play and they are all building blocks to be there before you get on the airwaves. If everything's in place it could be a couple of weeks. If they aren't, it could be a couple of months.

RB: Are there any limits to the kind of product that can be marketed this way?

AC: Absolutely. Poetry will not sell.

Look, if you don't have a topic that will sell... It's not entirely the product. There's a guy who sells dried fruit and vegetables. That's not a sexy topic. It's not of interest to radio people. They are going to say thanks, but no thanks. His claim to fame is that he's got a photographic memory. He goes in and does a show on photographic memory. He talks about all the things necessary to have a photographic memory. One of those things is that you have to supply your brain with proper nutrition, which of course, includes his fruit and vegetables. But, that's a back door approach in how he gets the publicity.

I heard a show the other day coming back from Los Angeles. There was a woman doctor from St. Louis talking about early diagnosis of smallpox. She was talking about the possibility of a smallpox bio-terrorism attack. That was the basis of her show. But, at the end of the show she got her plug as a cosmetic surgeon. That she was the author of a book on cosmetic surgery. That's a great example of someone who's promoting something entirely different from what the show is about.

RB: The book is the lever?

AC: Absolutely. A book gives you credibility. It's one of those instant things. I would say that 80% of all guests invited onto shows are authors, especially on the radio. The other categories are generally politicians or spokespeople for organizations who the media approaches for commentary on breaking news stories.

RB: What's next for you, Alex?

AC: The next book has gone to press, it's called "Speeding Excuses That Work." I will be doing another massive radio blitz starting the day after Thanksgiving and going through a few days before Christmas. I expect to sell \$100,000 worth of books during that period of time. I think this will sell a million copies. What's next for me is making that happen.

RB: More of the same promotion, your writing and consulting?

AC: It works for me.