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Audio Transcript

Episode 210 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with Mike Blinder

Publication date: Monday October 30, 2023

The banner features the E&P Reports Vodcast logo on the left, which includes a Wi-Fi symbol and the text 'E&P REPORTS VODCAST'. In the center, the URL 'EditorandPublisher.com/Vodcasts' is displayed. On the right, there are images of a camera lens and a professional microphone. Below the banner are two video thumbnails. The left thumbnail shows Ryan Dohrn with his name written in cursive above him. The right thumbnail shows Mike Blinder with the E&P logo above him. Below the thumbnails are their names and titles: Ryan Dohrn, Founder, Brain Swell Media, Owner/CEO, Niche Media; and Mike Blinder, Publisher, E&P Magazine. In the bottom right corner, it says 'Episode Sponsor' with the BLOX DIGITAL logo.

[Ryan Dohrn's "ad sales punch list" to maximize revenue into 2024](#)

In this episode of "E&P Reports," sales consultant, coach and trainer, Ryan Dohrn goes one-on-one with E&P's Mike Blinder offering actionable, real-world advice on how to maximize ad sales into 2024. Topics covered in this fast paced, idea driven interview include better prospecting for new business, how to find and retain quality sales talent and what are the best qualities and methods for leadership in today's competitive, ever changing, local media sales ecosystem and more.



0:00:04.2 Announcer: This is E&P Reports, a Vodcast from editor and publisher magazine, the authoritative voice of news media Since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

0:00:18.1 Mike Blinder: And greetings once again, Mike Blinder Publisher, E&P Magazine, as always, we kick off with quick housekeeping, if you are listening to this program on whatever podcast platform you prefer, there's a lot of peace in that one there Ryan. I like alliteration. Please follow us watching on YouTube where you see Ryan's face and mine, go below us, quickly hit the subscribe button, smash the bell to the right or do whatever you feel like doing to it, you'll get an update each and every time you upload our weekly podcast Vodcast series, E&P Reports, old friend known for over 20 years, Ryan Dohrn, if you lived under a rock, you don't know who Ryan is in the media business. But most of you do. Ryan is, I would say, one of the preeminent sales experts in the industry today, you have a consulting firm where you still consult media companies far and wide, you're also the CEO of Niche Media, am I correct of that as well sir?

0:01:13.9 Ryan Dohrn: That's correct.

0:01:15.3 MB: Which I've been honored to appear at a couple of years in a row, an amazing conference with more energy than you can shake a stick at, but you're a sales guy like me, and that's why I love these conversations, when I bring people like Jim Dolan from the video, and I can really get into the sales side of the industry, and we're gonna chat about where you believe the industry is today with the latest data. Is the data showing the truth of what's really going on, how are you advising media companies to capture those dollars, and then I wanna swing the conversation into how do you find the right people and who are they. That can sell for you. Does that sound fair sir?

0:01:53.4 RD: Fantastic, I love this conversation already.

0:01:55.7 MB: We're gonna get to it right on the back side of this message.

0:01:58.5 Announcer: This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly Town News, even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever, BLOX Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management and more, join the over 2000 news publishers worldwide that power their ongoing digital transformation with BLOX Digital, serving over 141 million monthly users who view over 6.5 billion pages of content each year, you can trust BLOX Digital to empower you, to connect you at scale with the community you need to reach. BLOX Digital, formerly Town News. Now re-imagined to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond, Learn more @bloxdigital.com.

0:03:01.6 MB: Okay, Ryan, first you got Pharrell predicting a four-point... I think it's 4.5 or 4.6% increase in total ad spend over the next year, BIA/Kelsey is doubling that now saying it's 9%. Both are showing advertisers being in a good frame of mind, which I find interesting 'cause some of these studies are taking place during wars.

0:03:29.5 MB: You remember when... We go back to the days where when conflict erupted, we used to sometimes watch advertising drop, but there seems to be a good feeling in and both are showing a slow down in digital and kind of like either growth or just we've hit bottom when it comes to legacy, in other words, magazines, newspapers, broadcast are not per se anymore, actually, they're being part of the media mix. Are you feeling that when you're talking to your media clients far and wide, are you...

0:04:01.0 RD: Yeah, yeah indeed, I really do agree with the data, because the data is good data that we're working from and it's not outdated. The other piece is the trustworthiness factor, as reported by the likes of Neilson is so unbelievably high, the pointer Institute, most recent study, 74% of citizens trust local community media, local community papers. There's also this very brief and interesting story, like my brother who's 40 years old, lives in Denver, he's got two smaller children. Loves their community paper. I said to him. Yeah, but it's all online. He said, yeah, but I like the little paper, is what he calls it.

0:04:38.8 RD: The little paper. So I feel like there is a bit of a cycle that's occurring when people get so saturated with digital, they're like, Hey, I don't wanna see any more when I get home at night, and they like the visceral experience of looking at a community, at a community paper, but I think the biggest thing is saturation, and that really is where I'd love to focus for a couple of seconds, everybody's doing digital. So when a salesperson is out on the street, Mike, and they say, just like you and I have done for years, they'll say, well, we're, the advertising, we're doing digital. Well, are you doing digital or are you talking about social, because social is one marketing strategy and digital is a separate marketing strategy, but they're both so saturated that people aren't seeing the results they once did, so they're cycling back to traditional media, which is great for all of us.

0:05:28.0 MB: It's funny that there's a growth in direct mail, which I'm finding fascinating with all the programmatic hyper-targeting that you can still do, you know Google's making some changes in the future that people are going back to buying a neighborhood zip code and sending it in the mail, but I think it sticks out more now, right?

0:05:45.9 RD: It does 3.4% response right now, it's with some of the highest we've seen, and because think about it, email marketing is just not as effective as it once was, you and I both see it in the emails that we do, people still open them and read them but that direct mail piece, I think for the Niche media conference, we're gonna do postcard mailers, save the dates, and stick things in people's mail boxes again. The response rate is crazy, but the cool part is editor and publisher, it's high and direct mail, that's what it is, and that's why we know who's getting it and why it works so well.

0:06:17.9 MB: Savvy-ness of buyers. This is what, I talked to Jim Brown in this program just a few weeks ago, and he said that almost a 30% rise in local understanding of media concepts, like if you

were selling five years ago, most people didn't understand what email pushes were or didn't understand lists or even display ads or video or OTT, now one out of two buyers you trip across, do you see that as well, have a much more how should I say savvy-ness when it comes to understanding media concepts, you agree?

0:06:50.8 RD: Sure, I would say in general, there is the knowledge base of the local advertiser is much higher, but I still believe that we have a need for marketing summits to be held with advertisers and to teach them and do the things that you recall you did in the past, were kind of a pioneer of and that is bringing these people together to educate them about marketing strategies, because an educated buyer will buy more stuff, but the other thing is Mike as fast as we feel like digital is growing and new ideas are coming out. Quite honestly, we've had programmatic for almost the last four or five years, so people have had an opportunity to kinda catch up, and the shiny object syndrome has kind of worn off a little bit.

0:07:34.0 MB: I was about to say that.

0:07:36.2 RD: And so people have gotten to a point where they're... Not so much has changed in programmatic that now they haven't caught up on it, if you look back though, five years ago, brand new, everything was new, what are these ads that follow us around, what is this. What is that? People were kind of overwhelmed. Now they've had basically five years to kinda catch up and not a lot in the last five years has dramatically changed, we're not delivering programmatic to that much differently.

0:08:00.3 MB: The other thing I'm noticing, and Jim backed me up on this, is that, what's old is new again. Buyers are responding to God forbid, reach and frequency discussions again. Remember TOMA?

0:08:08.2 RD: Yes, I do. Top of mind awareness.

0:08:14.3 MB: Right, you have to achieve this top of mind awareness, it's back. Buyers are understanding branding is important and connecting to the community is important again, and I think we should dust off. This is just my two cents, dust off those old reach and frequency packages and get back out with them again, rather discussing media. Discussing message. Do you agree?

0:08:33.8 RD: I agree, and so what I teach is the triangle of marketing success, and that really is traditional media as the basin on the bottom, digital on one side, social and the other, but there's three things in that triangle we do for advertisers, bring in new business on the bottom, on one side, re-engage past customers, on the other side is retention and referrals, so if you use the triangle to show here's the three things you should be doing as a successful business, and here's the three things that we do for you on that marketing triangle, it's all about TOMA, and it's bringing back to those good old conversations of the reason you advertise is because when people see your name and brand enough and they have a need, they're gonna think of you first.

0:09:14.4 RD: That's the goal. It's not magic, and if we can stop trying to sell magic. That's the bad part. We're not selling magic, we're selling marketing. And when we sell magic, people want results like this, when we sell marketing as a holistic experience and advertisers are educated, we get more



money from them, that's why we should spend budget for educating, and that's why I love those marketing summits. Not a lot of people are doing it Mike, we need to get back to it.

0:09:39.0 MB: I think you're right, I think that buyers are craving knowledge again, and too many people are just pitching product, product, product, product. So I think it's, what's old is new. And this is right...

0:09:53.0 RD: That's great, 'cause that means we're both 25, so that's awesome.

[laughter]

0:09:54.9 MB: I know. What I used to always say in the 1600s to sell a cow, you nailed a note to a tree, we're still selling the cow, we're just changing the notes and trees. All right. Everywhere I go now, and I heard this recently at the America's newspapers Conference in Chicago, that there is just trouble recruiting, right? In all aspects of media, not just... Obviously, we can discuss operations, you can discuss editorial, but in sales now, what I hear is, how the heck do I find and retain talent? You must hear that, of course from your clients as well.

0:10:33.4 RD: All the time.

0:10:33.5 MB: But what solutions are you offering now to them?

0:10:36.5 RD: Yeah, all the time, and there's a kind of an open secret, if you will, out there in the world of recruitment that people need to wrap their head around, and it'll take less than 30 seconds to explain, research from the '70s asked people, what are the three main things that you're looking for in your life. Okay, in the '70s, three main things you're looking for in your life, number one, get married, number two, own a home, number three, find a job with a steady paycheck. Okay, now fast forward 2023. The same questions are asked by the Pew Research Center, they didn't do the previous research, that's from somebody else, three things that they found out of current people looking for employment, number one, they want a gig-based job, so they wanna just be paid to do a gig, they don't really don't want a long-term commitment to some type of corporate or some type of body, number two, they're looking for flexibility with the focus on time off, time with family or time away from the workplace, and then the third is their priority is repaying debt, so we go from getting married, owning a home and having a steady paycheck to, I really don't want a steady job, I want a lot of time off, and I need ways to pay back my debt when I'm not actually at work.

0:11:47.1 RD: So you can see how the contradiction... We're dealing with a different... A completely different group. So let's go back to the question you asked, where do we find them? And how do you find them? The good news is we have moved from sales to marketing advisement, it's a different world. Most people don't wanna be in sales, Mike, they just don't, but I do, 'cause I like making money, but most people love being in an advisement role, so what I'd love for people that are listening to the podcast or the vodcast, whatever. Is to think about what can you do to create marketing advisement roles. So when you're hiring somebody, you're not hiring somebody for sales as much as you're trying to hire a marketing advisor, so that they can go out to local businesses and begin to advise them on marketing solutions based on common scenarios and recommendations, teach Marketing Summit. You're really looking for mini-marketers and not so much sales people,

and all of a sudden they'll start finding a different group of people, will start applying for those jobs. Marketing is sales and sales is marketing is what I'm trying to say.

0:12:46.0 MB: So how do you find them? What is the best motive recruitment? Is it still like, networking, LinkedIn, get to know the people in your city or town. Or is there some magic bullet you have found, what are your...

0:12:57.8 RD: Yeah, so you definitely are not gonna find them on Monster or ZipRecruiter and all those websites, in my opinion, you're gonna find them by stealing them from other companies or recruiting them from other groups, and I know it sounds bad to poach folks, but when I go to a meeting or something like that, and I'll say, Hey, I'm Looking, do you know of anybody looking for a media sales marketing job? I've got an availability. Anybody that you know, send them my way, and the number of times they'll say, what do you got? I might be looking. Because those that are looking for a job in sales, that means they weren't probably good in sales, 'cause if they were good, they wouldn't be looking for a job, so...

0:13:36.1 MB: It's so true. It's so true. Yeah.

0:13:38.5 RD: Right, so I think that's one of the first things that you wanna do. You wanna switch from asking for sales people to people that are marketing advisors, the second thing is using pre-hire assessments, each week I'll run six or eight assessments of people before you hire them, because we know what joy characteristics people need to be successful in sales, and we can test for that.

0:13:57.1 MB: Are you discussing personality dynamic testing or what is this assessment?

0:14:04.2 RD: Great question. It's actually different than that. I worked with this group called Harrison, and this isn't a pitch for me, it's just so people get an understanding, that Harrison, it actually identifies the 10 joy characteristics that salespeople need to find joy in doing, being a business and being a business analyst, being somebody that enjoy psychology being somebody that enjoys being persistent, those type of things. The Harrison assessment identifies whether the individual taking the assessment will find joy in the 10 characteristics needed to be successful in sales, so while it does identify their personality, it's not a DISC assessment, because I need to know if they're gonna be successful in the sales business, so pre-higher assessments, I think they're well worth the money, whichever one you choose... It's gonna answer a lot of questions for you before you hire somebody.

0:14:54.1 MB: Last time we chatted, I was reviewing our conversation's been about a year, we talked about the qualities of the sales coach, the leader being the most essential part of the equation for retention, I guess nothing's changed there every time you visit a media company, I mean, you can call them the sales manager, the coach, the leader, the person who's managing the team, is that still a critical part of retention?

0:15:18.1 RD: Unbelievably critical because all the experts will tell us that people don't leave companies, they leave toxic leaders, they leave because they don't like their boss. So most of the time, whenever I left a job, it wasn't 'cause I didn't like Walt Disney, it's not that I didn't like the

Disney company, I didn't care for the boss, just as an example. So when you think about those things, it is important to be a really good executive coach, and unfortunately most leaders, most sales managers don't know what it means to be a coach, and so I think that there is some executive education that could occur as I became certified to be a coach, I realized, Oh, I have been mentoring people, I have not been coaching them at all, and once you use all of a sudden start realizing that mentors download information and coaches help you discover the answers inside of you. When you wrap your head around that little thought there, all of a sudden that can be a game changer for some sales managers, but then again, a lot of sales managers never meet with folks one-on-one, they have one group sales meeting a week and off they go and there's a problem in and of itself.

0:16:19.1 MB: And then again, I still see it when I visit media companies that they tend to promote the person who's the top biller, 'cause they obviously have the skills, 'cause they didn't look they were built.

0:16:30.4 RD: Almost never works, right?

[laughter]

0:16:32.8 MB: 'Cause the skills didn't make you an amazingly impressive salesperson may not be the same skills to be the boss correct?

0:16:41.7 RD: That is absolutely correct. Do you know what I cannot actually think of more than a couple of occasions where we've seen the top sales person be promoted to management and it actually worked. As a matter of fact, I can tell you many more examples of seriously good sellers that now don't like their job, and they've said, Listen, could you please just let me sell again, I don't wanna manage people, managing people is a different skill set. As you know, it's a different skill set than selling.

0:17:06.8 MB: It took more energy for me to be a sales manager than ever in my life, because a good seller is spending so much time selling you on why something's not gonna work, and you have to have the most amazing sales resistance as a manager, so the two are like... It's almost like an oxymoron. If you can sell hard, you're not that manager, you gotta find that. So where do you find good management talent, or how do you train up for that, do you offer... What are the keys to that person, how do you find them and get them into the team?

0:17:39.1 RD: Yeah, so normally, you really do wanna have somebody who has some type of media background because there's gonna be so many juggling of parts and departments and things like that, I almost feel like sales people don't necessarily need to media background to be successful, but managers usually do, because they have to juggle so much. It's of hard to do on-the-job training as a manager, but what I'm looking for in good managers is people that are motivators, people that can herd cats, people that really understand how the operation works, but more than anything, how to keep a team motivated. And so that's what I'm looking for when I'm interviewing. What do you do to keep teams motivated, tell me about your one-on-one coaching philosophy, so who are some of your best... Who are some of your favorite authors that you've read from, or people that have been mentors or you kind of looked up to? So for me, a lot of times, it's not even somebody that there's need to probably have some media experience and maybe even in a little bit



different industry for those managers.

0:18:36.9 MB: Finally, a niche media. I keep seeing more and more and more traditional media companies entering the niche media world building niche products, whether they're digital, print combinations of both. As now the CEO of this huge organization, what advice do you give now legacy media companies when they start thinking towards niche and what would you give a tele publisher in today's world about entering and exploring doing nice products.

0:19:12.2 RD: Yeah, people tend to get really excited about a niche publications the same way they do they did in the past about special sections. If you remember back before COVID, people got real excited about special sections, holiday gift guides, heroes, all that kind of stuff, and it's kinda lost its luster, what we're noticing is that niche publications, even for newspapers that'll put out a niche magazine are seeing some great success based on the shiny object syndrome. Now, the interesting thing, for example, the publication called FACES that many local different newspapers and magazine are doing where it's a publication that says 74 pages featuring the faces of automotive, the faces of real estate, the faces of chiropractic, those niche publications are garnering some good money and gain some good momentum for about five years, because folks just really like to be involved in those special shiny object projects, but after four or five years...

0:20:07.6 RD: You gotta drop it. That's the problem we had the newspaper space, we didn't know when to say when on special sections, and so we don't wanna get people so hooked on niche, if they get hooked on niche, then the problem is they lose advertisers in the main paper or in the main magazine, so we wanna make sure we're always coming up with new shiny objects to keep these advertisers excited about it, but the niche publications fall in all different categories, there could be business categories for things like FACES. I've got a gentleman in Fargo, North Dakota that is doing a publication called Great Places to Work, so it's all a publication about great places in Fargo, North Dakota to work. Those types of niche publications get advertisers excited 'cause it's something new to talk with them about, now, I'd suggest you should sell them into a plan that is the niche publication as well as it is in the newspaper in our digital, not one or the other. But no more is it just like a home section in the paper, it's like literally a home guide, that is a 34 or whatever page, nice looking publication that's printed like a magazine and newspapers are doing well with it and people are buying it, and hey, if they're buying it's those who should be selling it right?

0:21:19.7 MB: When's your next event? Electro marketed right now.

0:21:23.6 RD: Oh, that's great. Well, we'd love to have folks come to Chicago, April 17 through 19, 2024. And right now we're planning on about 350 folks come in and getting together, and then we're gonna see all kinds of conversations about AI, all kinds of conversations about new sales strategies, and lots of focused on emerging technologies. So love to have our publishers and their sales people come and I've got 4 new classes I'm gonna be teaching on the sales game, and so hopefully it's Love to see you and Robin there as well in Chicago.

0:21:52.9 MB: And that's Niche Media dot.

0:21:56.5 RD: @nichemediaevents.com.



0:21:57.8 MB: Nichemediaevents.com. Ryan Dohrn your email address.

0:22:01.4 RD: Ryan@ryandohrn.com is where you find it.

0:22:05.9 MB: He was pointing to the screen, if you're listening, it's R-Y-A-N-D-O-H-R-N. Ryan always a pleasure, thank you for including the program.

0:0:17:28.5 AV: Thank you very much, Mike. It's been a pleasure. Appreciate it.