



V-cast with Producers Market: Create a lead gen machine with Instagram

Host: Richard Falish, CEO at VBOU

Guest Speaker: Keith Aguada, Co-Founder Producers Market

Highlights

On this episode of top marketer, we host Keith Aguada, co-founder and CEO of Producers Market, a new way to digitizing the Agricultural value-chain over blockchain. Keith and his team are building the most comprehensive community of farmers and consumers.

We discuss how Producers Market, an agri-tech startup, is connecting producers with distributors and buyers by creating a self-sufficient process of generating leads through Instagram, for them and for their producers.

Keith and his creative digital team leveraged Instagram and real stories from Producers to drive traffic and clicks from their Insta BIO to their website, which pushed them up in the ranks on Google as an authority on the matter. From there, they scaled this process horizontally across different producers markets.

They also used their first relationships with producers to get them on the platform by sharing real life stories. The authenticity of their posts, created a momentum and following on Instagram, which helped them build enough substance to create a business model and raise investor money.

Great marketing success and a genius way to drive leads, with a team of 20 hard working people in an industry that is hard to crack.

What's Producers Market?

Producers market is a new way to digitizing the agricultural value chain over block chain. It's a digital ecosystem where we're working directly with agricultural producers globally, these are farmers, packers, processors, the co-ops associations and helping to tell their story digitally and getting them onto the new digital technology in order for them to connect directly with buyers upstream and also share their stories in content with end consumers around the world.

Why is it important to share stories in the case of a producer?

For ourselves as consumers, we love to know who's growing our food and learn the stories behind the groups that are growing it. And one of my most memorable moments is going to farmers markets, visiting farms and getting to know exactly who's growing our food, how they're growing it, the stories behind their technique, oftentimes with the food that we buy at the supermarket, restaurants or online. We don't really know what's going on with the food: is it organic? Where it does it store from? Can we trust who's growing it? and all their information is kind of lost right now. Therefore we're kind of blind and tend to ignore it.

Are you using this mechanism to facilitate the lead generation process for the consumer?

Absolutely. We look at storytelling in two buckets: one is qualitative which is the soft information like photos, videos, stories, interviews, history and farming practices. But the other side of it is the quantitative, the actual hard data: When was this harvested? How is this packed? What was the farmer paid? How is the environment treated in ways that could be validated with data?

Because unfortunately, in today's day and age, people don't really trust brands anymore. So we feel that the future of our products and consumer industry is around validated data and know the statements being made, whether that organic, fresh or natural trade has an actual data validation component.

Aside from the producer and consumer, you also have a third target market. Who would that be?

We see that the true stakeholders are the people who create the physical product and then those who consume it. But the way that the product gets to us as consumers is through businesses distributors, wholesalers, retailers and our consumer brands.

So we're really looking to facilitate the direct relationship between those who are creating the product and those who are buying it in order to sell it to the end consumer and connect this value chain seamlessly, as well as the information and data that's received by the buyer.

How did you accumulate traffic? What did you do to get this initial traffic and build an asset to position yourself as a powerful lead gen machine for producers?

I can't take credit for being that smart. We figured this out by accident. I think what were really guided by these that we, as consumers, want authenticity, integrity and trust. We don't want any more greenwashing. We want to know exactly what the truth is and that's what we're looking for as consumers, so what we did is working with this avocado farming family to just tell their story authentically. We took photos and videos of them, went to the farm, spent time with them and slept at their house. We got to know them and understand how they're farming, who they are, and what their practices are. We documented it and then, we just started sharing it first on Instagram, making little photos and clips about who the farmers are and how they grow their products, pack their avocados and we created a simple website that shared all that information. We made a like a cool, three-minute video about the process on Instagram, it started building a little momentum.

Nothing crazy, I think we have like 4,000 to 5,000 followers, but what happened was we built a really authentic community who loves avocados and our farming story and they engaged with us and what happened is that they clicked the link on our Instagram profile and interacted with the page. And with that process of clicking our link and then also having our website sharing the information, something surprising happened: we started getting phone calls and emails from wholesale buyers, importers, retailers, restaurant chains and people from all over the world across 25 countries who wanted to buy our avocados directly.

We were at first like "how did this happen?" And one day, we started messing around on Google and we typed in "Organic avocados Mexico", at that moment, we couldn't believe that our little brand of ten family farms came up number one on Google before Amazon, Collaro and Mission. Here's our little avocado company that these are billion dollar brands and were beating them in Amazon just by having four thousand followers and five hundred people interacting with our community. This absolutely blew our mind and that's really how we started building this kind of global idea for storytelling in order for the consumer to drive the buyers.

Right now, so much of how our industry works is that the buyers tell the consumers what's alike, but we figured out a system that allows the consumers to push forward and then gain the interaction so that the buyers come to us because the consumers are interactive.

As Google pushed you as an authority in the field for this specific key term "Avocado in Mexico", is it the first thing you would look up if you want to source avocado from Mexico?

Absolutely. It's funny because we hear Procter & Gamble and Nest doing these studies like: how can we connect to Gen Z? How can we connect to Millennials? They are so hard to market. The answer is like "Don't market to them; just be honest with them."

Did getting traffic from interesting stories around Avocado and replicating it across different industries make you able to get leads?

Yes. And our goal when we started wasn't just being avocado company. This was just a case study for us to learn how to interact and tell the stories to a global market of consumers and how to attract buyers. So what we then did was "Okay, we did this with a family farming group in Mexico and it worked super well for them; here's a group that didn't know what even Instagram was. ... they've never sold avocados directly to retailers internationally and they don't understand how to tell their story. So we started trying to figure out how we can give these tools or leverage our media platform in order to help farmers around the world and agricultural producers who have amazing stories and great products.

So we took the next step and started trying to work off Instagram handles and accounts, that can tell a broader story about different products, communities and supply chains and then started to connect it directly back to our own media site which is essentially our marketplace www.producersmarket.com where we can now share these stories across lot of producers all over the world, and started to connect with consumers and buyers on Google.

Are you investing in paid ads on Instagram or primarily building up the stories in different channels?

No, we didn't spend anything on advertising. We spent our money on creating and curating great content so when we get a bunch of photos from a producer, we try to pick the best ones. If we want to turn them into an infographic or some type of engaging viral content, we will figure out all the methodologies like which colors to post, in which order, the best time to post, the people we should target with certain posts, the hashtags we should use. We invest in curating the right content but we don't invest in advertising because we believe that getting the best content out there helps you attract the right people.

Are you telling a little introductory story in addition to filling the post with a hashtag?

Yeah more or less. And you know who are the key influencers in specific category, trying to figure out niche, cool recipes and uses of products. What we always stress to our team is not to worry about trying to get a thousand or million likes but rather creating content that really inspires you and enjoy making. We don't have multi-million people followings on our accounts, but maybe ten or twenty thousand.

What we're now working towards are the key influencers and celebrities that can help us expand our communities that we can send them links and they can also send us links and start to engage with each other in a way that's very authentic.

Are you paying these influencers?

Yes. We're still figuring it out. We can devise with a company equity, giving them profit shares of products. So we're looking to get creative, but we just want to keep things energetically really pure. We don't ever want our community to feel like we're using them or we're trying to sell them something. We want to truly have the intention to bring value to their lives.

If I'm a producer and have a farm of Mangos, how do you work with me?

We have an automated onboarding process where they contact us and we put them through a process where they upload all their information, who they are as a company and all their certifications which we verify in the database of the suppliers or the certifiers, then they upload all of their content: their photos, videos and who their farmers are, any other stories, awards, information and their harvest amounts, just as much data as possible. Some of it is optional and other is mandatory, but the content, photos, videos and story time go into the producer profile database which is used to generate their profile in our system, and also sent to our digital marketing team, which is used to be curated across our platform and shared with our community that have their profile submission, and someone from our team will contact them.

Most of the producers onboarding now are from our own networks so we already know them, but we verify that they're actually to grow with the product. As they are on the system, we start sharing their information and content in our community and ultimately, what we want to do is generate new sales for them so we connect them with buyers around the world through this filter and they go on and make the direct transactions.

How do end consumers find you? Is it through organic search?

We're working on this concept. We call the storybook and it's basically our logo and we're considering putting a QR code. Essentially, we want to have it so that when it's on a package of coffee or when you're at the deli counter buying fish or at the restaurant on the menu that you can start to pick your cell phone, plug into our storybook and it brings up our app and shares with you the information about the product, the founders and such. So that's how we want to engage with the consumers.

How big is the team right now?

We have about 20 people on the team, mixed between our digital marketing, programming, UI/UX and business development operations.

How big is the marketing team?

The marketing team is about eight people.

What do you think is the most critical, trickiest or hardest thing about getting your first client?

I think to a certain degree, in order to have the funding even if it's a small amount of angel funds, you need to show something. So getting to the point where you're showing some progress is not just an idea. I woke up this morning to have a great idea now "give me money" ... like unless you've already raised millions of dollars and sold multiple companies, it just doesn't work that way unless you have a rich uncle, a mom or a brother who believes in you. So you have to constantly work and power through the whole blood sweat and tears, in order to show that you've built something that has value, even if it's a minimal value.

Once you have some value to show like Instagram accounts in the community that's engaged, you can bring that to a potential client and say "look what we've accomplished? Do you want to test this with us?" or "we'll do this for free with you but can you do this with us as a farmer or buyer?" I think it's about finding the resources in order to make that first push. Getting to that first point is like the hardest part so far.