



Episode 572: How Can You Monetize a Blog?

Guest: Yaro Starak

WOODS: I love this book. I actually read *Blog Profits Blueprint* last year, and at that time I already had an established blog, and since I've started podcasting I just don't have the time to blog as much anymore, but the principles you're talking about are largely the same and can be applied to a podcast. And I remember thinking to myself, if I were doing things all over again, if I were starting up just a plain, vanilla blog and I didn't have a podcast, I would do it the way you're describing. Now, I do want to talk about your own personal story in a minute, but what I want to clear out of people's minds is I think the customary way people think a blogger goes about monetizing his blogging activity. I think a lot of people think it's what you call "the magazine model," that you try to drive immense traffic to your blog, and you hope that while they're there, they click on a few ads. What's the problem with that strategy?

STARAK: Well, I mean the problem is the difficulty in establishing enough traffic to make that a full time income as a bare minimum. And I've been there. I spent the first, well, about five or six years of my own blogging, not only doing advertising, but certainly having that a big part of my strategy for making money. But then when I switched over to selling my own products, it just makes so much more sense, because if you can imagine, a blog or a podcast or a video channel, it's you on there. It's your message; it's your ideas; it's your personality. And then when you say, I have this product that I've created, it's from you, you know, the connection is so much stronger. Plus, products will sell for anywhere from, let's say, \$10 to \$2,000, depending on what you're selling, where advertising, you're getting paid pennies per click usually at best, or maybe pennies per thousand impressions.

So the equation is basically try and get a crazy big blog that's like a magazine, you know, probably have a team of writers, basically write the next *TechCrunch* or *Mashable* or *Huffington Post*, which is basically a big startup type endeavor. You know, nothing wrong with that, but it's a bigger mountain to climb, in my opinion, versus, you know, I'm a specialist, I'm an expert, I have unique knowledge about a subject, and I'm going to share that through my own blog; I'm going to sell my own products and services. That to me just seems much more realistic for most people out there, especially if you're an author or a speaker, a writer or a coach or a trainer, someone with expertise and knowledge to share.

WOODS: Now, if you're looking to monetize a blog, as you say in the book, of course one thing you're looking for is a subject that you're going to love writing about and that you're going to still be happy writing about years down the road. And of course there's no guarantee that you're going to earn money and that you're going to be successful monetizing it, but if you've been doing something all along that you enjoy doing anyway, well, then it's a great bonus if you're able to monetize it. It's not like you wasted your time if you never earn money from it. But there are ways to do this, and that's the point of your book. People can read it, by the way, at TomWoods.com/Yaro, is how you can get this book and look at it for yourself. For a free eBook, I was telling you before, it is very attractively laid out. It's very easy on the eyes, the subheadings and everything. It's not just blocks — it's not just a PDF of a Word document.

STARAK: (laughing)

WOODS: It's actually pleasant to read. Now, what I like about it is that it emphasizes a point that seems obvious once you read it, but it's not so obvious before, and that is moving away from the idea of let's try and start up a site that gets, you know, 500,000 hits a day or something, and instead thinking about what if I pitch what I'm writing to a smaller group of people, but a group of people who will be motivated to buy things, because my niche is a focus niche, and it has a strong appeal, but not to everybody in the world. The trouble with this is you have to balance two things it seems to me. On the one hand, you want to find a subject where there's enough interest to generate, you know, enough traffic and enough people who are interested in what you're doing, but at the same time, if you — let me start again. If there's no competition at all in some niche, you might think that's the niche for me. I'll be the only person. But maybe the reason you're the only person is nobody cares.

STARAK: Right.

WOODS: But on the other hand, if there's too much competition, how do you stand out? How do you navigate those two problems?

STARAK: Right. You know, the issue of competition is a funny one when it comes to the blogosphere, online blogging and podcasting and so on, because I think we have a lot of traditional notions around competition from, you know, the business world. It's about I win, you lose. Where I find on the Internet and certainly in my industry, there's a lot of cross-pollination, you know, sort of people are sharing each other's content; they're promoting each other's work; they're even promoting each other's products and services. So what you might see as a competitor could actually be a partner. As long as there is — and this is what like you said, you're trying to find your little specialty, your niche, your slice, what you can stand out for.

And you might all be in whatever it is. You're all about weight loss or you're all about trading on the stock market or whatever your main, big market is, but you have a little specialty in there. Maybe you're focusing 100% on a specific type of food for weight loss. So the key here is like you said: you have to make sure you're going into a market

where people actually have a need that they're motivated enough to solve, but don't necessarily look for a market that's got no competition, because like you said, it could be a sign there isn't any money to be made. But also don't try and go out there being the big solution to the big problem. Like, you can't just say I'm a weight loss expert, because then you sound like hundreds of thousands of other people –

WOODS: Right, right.

STARAK: – and no one's going to pay attention to you. You have to say I'm really good at this one little thing and then build what's often called a "tribe" of raving fans around that.

And that doesn't have to be a big amount of people. We're talking about 100 people buying everything you sell or maybe a few hundred or something like that, and that can equate to a significant income. Even if you do basic mathematics, if you can get 100 people to spend \$1,000 a year on whatever it is you sell, that's \$100,000 a year income stream from a blog or a podcast or so on. So I'm a really big believer in that, because I just think it's so much easier and more gratifying to sell to people who love what you do, rather than trying to be an answer to everyone and then getting competed away by the big players with the big budgets who are already well established. So that to me makes the most sense, especially for someone just getting started today.

WOODS: By the way, before I forget, speaking of products, I actually bought your Social Slider plugin.

STARAK: I saw that.

WOODS: I use it at TomWoods.com (laughing). I really like it. I think it's very attractive. Again, just like the – either you or whoever's designing this stuff has a good eye for design, because I don't want something hideous on my site. I think it looks beautiful. What do you say to people who say these days people aren't reading blogs anymore, the trend is away from blogs?

STARAK: Well, you know, I think everyone's actually reading blogs; they just don't realize it. You know, if you're on Facebook and you click through to an article, it's probably sourced on a blog. If you're listening to this podcast, chances are it's being delivered on a blog. In fact, I'm pretty sure The Tom Woods Show appears on your blog, and that's where the actual file is; that's where it's distributed from. You might listen to it through iTunes or Stitcher or whatever it is, but still, the blog is the source. So, you know, it's a fundamental platform for getting a message out there and doing content marketing, so it hasn't really disappeared; it's just become less the only tool that we have.

You know, back when I started, it was social media. There was no other platforms; there was no Facebook; there wasn't even things like YouTube really back then. But today, it's just one of these tools that slots into the overall sort of online marketing

channels we have to use, but I still see it as the center point. I like to call it a hub. It's where your main identity sits, where most of your information about who you are, what you do, what you stand for, you know, like you've done. You've got all these great pages, resources; you've got your podcast, your blog, the products you sell, the books you sell. You know, everything's there. It's the one stop shop about who you are. You might spend a lot of time growing your audience on a platform like Instagram or Pinterest or LinkedIn, but you're still trying to get them back to the blog. That's where the relationship really starts to deepen. So I don't see it having gone away. I think it's perhaps even more critical, and you have to do a better job with it now. That's probably the only difference. You have to be a great blogger, not just a good one now.

WOODS: Yeah, it's interesting that your book is a 2016 update, because things have indeed changed, and of course the number of sites and blogs out there just continues to explode, so conditions are different from what they were when you initially started out. So let's talk about that for a minute. When you started your blog, was it always Entrepreneur's Journey, the one you have now?

STARAK: Yeah, it was. It was mainly a hobby site. It wasn't supposed to be a business, but yes.

WOODS: So okay, it turned into a business almost by accident. Can you explain how something like that can happen?

STARAK: (laughing) Well, how many stories do we hear about that, you know, the YouTube star who got plucked from just singing on YouTube. But my story's not that much different. Back when I started blogging, you literally could just publish a blog, write some content, and it would get picked up by Google for search results. Other bloggers would share your content much more readily, because there were just so few of us. You know, there was just a handful of people in each topic, so it was a lot of cross-promoting and sharing content. And that's what I did. You know, I connected with people like Darren Rowse down in Melbourne, Australia. He was writing the Pro Blogger blog and another blog, and then there were a few other people who started to sort of show up, and from my point of view, my blog just started to — you know, I was telling stories about my life as an entrepreneur.

So before my blog I had spent seven years running a couple of other online businesses. I had a card game store when I was a teenager, and I had an editing and proofreading business by the time I was in university, so I told stories from those businesses, and people showed up. I won't say I was completely surprised, because I had already had experience online owning a website, but I didn't expect to have this situation where you kind of become a little bit famous, which is something I didn't see coming.

You know, you're just writing to a blog, and I hadn't seen myself as a writer prior to this either. You know, my best claim to fame as a writer was a grade A in high school English back in Australia. You know, no qualifications beyond that. So to see an audience show up and then actually see this turn into a real business, people buy my books, they buy my course, I'm a paid writer essentially in a lot of ways, and that's

amazing, because think about how many people want to write a book and have an income stream from their writing.

That's quite rare, so I'm very grateful that that happened, but you know, it's not something that was completely planned. I think that's the difference from today versus when I started. You can plan what you're doing. You can be strategic about how you build a blog. A lot of what I did was let's throw some content out there and see who shows up, and I would never recommend you do that today, because you might be there a long time before anyone does show up.

WOODS: Right, and I think that's one of the key benefits of the mastermind program, which I want to talk about in a minute. You mention writing, and I keep telling people when I'm urging them to start blogs, just do it for your own sake, because a lot of people who listen to my show have very strong opinions. Well, then, write about it. Write about how you feel about current events or whatever. Do book reviews of books that you think are important. And the process of just writing regularly – it doesn't have to be every day or five times a day, but on a regular basis and trying to keep it relatively short, because most people's problem as writers is that they're not concise. If you can keep it short, and you can stick to topics that interest you and do it regularly, you will improve as a writer. In fact, apart from reading good writers, practicing good writing is the only way to become a better writer, and that's a skill that you're never going to regret having. So the process of blogging has benefits other than strict monetization. It can benefit you in other ways.

Now, what do we do about traffic, though? It's true that I don't need to have a million visitors a day to my blog to be a success and even to be able to monetize it, but I do need some. And what would be some ideas of how people can get started, given that – in a way it's like an author. I write a lot of books, and every year there are a couple, in the United States, anyway, there are a couple hundred thousand new books released every single year. How's my book going to stand out against the other 199,999 is the same question that any blogger has about his blog.

STARAK: Right, which is why you should get started right now, because the sooner you start blogging, the sooner you build a following, you grow an email list, and every time you do produce something like a book, you have an audience ready to go. So that's one of the most important benefits I think we should highlight is the fact that you gain a community that you always have access to, so each time you do release a new book or something, whatever it is you write, you produce a software product/service, there's an audience ready, eager to buy it.

However, you have to first get that initial first subscriber, the first reader of your first blog post, and so on. The simple answer I give to all my coaching clients in my program is, first of all, to ask yourself where does the person who's the target audience for what you talk about hang out on the Internet. Where do they go? Where do they spend time right now? The answer to that question will be in many places. They probably listen to certain podcasts. They might read certain other blogs. They might hang out in certain Facebook groups or LinkedIn books or associations or so on.

There might be some popular forums. There's all kinds of social media platforms they could spend their time on. There's all the niche platforms as well that we shouldn't forget about.

So really the key here is thinking where are they now, and then how can I get myself onto the platform they're already paying attention to. This is the key here. So if there is a podcast that has your type of audience, your job is to try and get yourself onto that podcast as a guest, so getting yourself interviewed, for example. The same might be said for YouTube. If you notice there's a few key YouTube channels that have a lot of audience that you're trying to reach, forming a relationship with the owner of that YouTube channel is a good thing to start doing. Same with simple things like a journalist, for example, who might right for one of the larger blogs, maybe *Huffington Post*, maybe *Business Insider*, maybe *Mashable*, *TechCrunch*, whatever it is. Chances are they're on Twitter, so you can start forming a relationship through Twitter to them and have them eventually write something about you, or even you get to write something on one of those websites. It's actually surprising – I won't say it's easy, but it's not that unrealistic for you to get your own column or your own guest article on *Huffington Post* or *Business Insider* or something like that.

Now, once that happens, you then get to obviously stand in front of an audience, virtually speaking, share your content, and then end it with a call to action to say come back to my blog. That's essentially how all forms of online marketing happen now, at least if it's content marketing. It's different with paid advertising. But that's what content marketing is about. Go and stand in someone else's audience, give them some value, and then say come back to my blog. That's how it works.

WOODS: In your own program, how much emphasis do you place on paid traffic as opposed to free and organic traffic?

STARAK: I am a strong believer in organic traffic, because bloggers by their nature are content creators. So you know, I like to give people who are good at content creation a very clear pathway to use their content creation abilities to also grow their traffic. Plus, I'm not an expert at paid advertising, so I wouldn't try and teach something I'm not good at myself. My own blog has always been 100% organic growth. The last 10 years I've been making my living entirely off organic basically content on my blog and on my podcast, so I focus on that. But this is not a case of you have to do one and ignore the other. That's the beauty of the Internet. Once you have something that people want, you have so many ways to get out there and reach new people and potentially grow really quickly. I've had some friends do amazing things with Instagram, with a podcast and just build massive audiences, certainly large enough audiences for a profitable business in a short period of time.

WOODS: What do you think about people who are concerned about SEO, search engine optimization, that I need people to be able to find me in Google, and so therefore I have to optimize my site? Now, there's nothing wrong with that, but there are different ways of going about it, and maybe there's too much emphasis placed on it. For instance, there are black hat methods –

STARAK: Right.

WOODS: — there's always some new product that's going to somehow trick Google into giving you a higher ranking, and Google's going to figure that out. You're going to be wiped out; you're going to regret doing it. But I know people — or I know one person — I guess I shouldn't mention his name. I'm not friends with him, but I know him — who hires people through these Fiverr sites to just arbitrarily click on some of his key posts so that they'll rank in the engines, so that when this product launches, everyone will see when they Google that product his link, and they'll go and they'll buy from him through his affiliate link. And there are all kinds of tactics like this.

STARAK: That's risky.

WOODS: Yeah, it is risky, but what do you do — and I don't recommend it at all. But is there anything about SEO that people need to know as bloggers?

STARAK: You know, I used to spend a lot of time worrying about SEO in the first few years of blogging, and I spent a lot of time researching and trying to change things, trying to guess what Google wants, basically, and I came to a conclusion several years ago that, really, good SEO and getting traffic for free from Google is a byproduct of actually being a good content producer and a good marketer. So everything I said to the answer to, you know, the previous question about going out there and reaching new audiences, that's actually a key part of good SEO. You have to understand, the reason why your blog, your website can start ranking highly in the Google search results is because you have a lot of other website linking back to you. That's always been the predominant principle behind how Google ranks sites. Incoming links from other high quality sites will raise your own ranking. So if you go out there and do this marketing, you're going to get incoming links organically. If you continue to produce good, valuable content on your own blog, that's going to help rank for more keyword phrases, more terms. So if you essentially just be a good content producer on your own blog and also a good marketer, naturally you're going to get good SEO.

The key, though, is to understand it's not something that just will appear overnight. My own experience with Google, it's very much a trend-based process. So they look at what you are doing over a period of months, even years, and then reward you accordingly. So being consistent, making sure that you've got some kind of marketing so you've got some kind of organic growth of incoming links, obviously making use of social media, all these things can compound the positive signs you need to show to Google that you're actually in it for the long haul, you're a high quality content producer. My advice is don't stress about that. Think more about the audience you're trying to serve, giving them high value content, and going out there and making sure you find new people. It's really important you get in front of new audiences and bring them back to your blog.

WOODS: I want to say a quick word before I turn it over to you about coaching programs in general. I've become much, much more favorable to these in recent years, because I think back to years when I was getting the podcast started, and I live out in

the middle of nowhere, and there are no audio experts who can help me. The idea there's an audio expert anywhere within 80 miles of me is laughable. And yet, I needed my audio questions answered, and I just kept trying to struggle on my own, and my wife would say, why don't you just fly so and so in and pay him \$1,000 and he'll solve this for you, and you won't be spending 50 hours trying to fix it yourself. And I thought, well, no, I want to save the \$1,000. Well, what is 50 hours worth to you? Your time is worth something. Or likewise, I needed to learn email list segmentation. Now, you can find that online if you look around, but not the specific questions I had. So I suddenly thought, well, again, instead of pouring 100 hours into this problem, I'm going to hire, okay, somewhat pricey coach for two hours, will answer all my questions, solve all my problems, and I'm saving money and aggravation and time.

So when I look at your Blog Mastermind program, I think to myself, this is something, again, if I were starting out, if I wanted to, number one, save myself 100 or 500 or 1,000 hours of aggravation and frustration and dead ends, I would want to enter your program. But secondly, it's not just that your program brings together a lot of stuff I could find for free. You have knowledge through your own experience in excess of 10 years as a blogger, and you have all these unbelievable success stories. That means you're going to teach me something I couldn't find elsewhere. That's the ideal kind of coaching program. That's why I wanted to talk to you on the show, because you're not just some shyster, because there are a whole lot of those out there.

STARAK: Right, and thank you for the compliments, Tom; I appreciate it. You know, I take great confidence in the fact that I have seen so many other people apply this system. You know, they go out there, they blog about what they know, they build a following, they grow an email list, and they sell their own products and services. And I love seeing it happen in a niche like how to treat adult acne or I have someone who started a blog about a ski slope in Bulgaria, which to me was like, I can't believe it worked, but it did. So seeing those success stories is important.

But like you said, this is about following a specific strategy. I love strategic thinking and planning what I'm doing, and that I think is one of the biggest risks for going out there and just sort of trying to piece together lots of different types of information, is you're lacking the overall strategy to guide the steps. And I believe personally that you need to only study and implement what you need to solve the problem that you have right now, and that's one of the biggest challenges, because you need to find information only for what you're trying to do now, and the Internet's full of information about all kinds of things you don't need to do now, things you might need to do next year when you already have an email list or when you already have a product or when you're ready to do the next step.

But if you're not there yet and you read that information, you feel overwhelmed, you feel lost, you don't know where to begin, so that's why I've put together the Blog Mastermind program, is to sort of introduce you to this whole concept of how to sell products and services from a blog, but then also take the steps to actually implement the system, build your own platform, become well known for what you do, create your own tribe of followers, and feel confident that you have basically a business that you

can tap into whenever you create something. That's what I love about this. You want to teach something that your audience values, and you can send an email and write a blog post and have customers straight away. So to me, that's really special, and that's something we haven't had access to until the Internet, to be absolutely fair. I don't know what I would have done if I wasn't born when the Internet was around, because

—

WOODS: Yeah, me either, me either. I'd be out crawling in the dirt looking for sustenance. I don't know what I would do. The Internet is tailor made for the skills that I have, which is why on the show here from time to time I do want to explain to people that they have this unbelievable opportunity that people would have killed for in ages past, to build a business without having to do a lot of the traditional work and to reach people on their own terms and to — I mean, YouTube. To make videos that can reach anybody, or a podcast that I just do out of a little office here that can reach — I mean, it reaches people in 140 countries. These are incredible opportunities that you have to grab.

Now, let me just anticipate one objection. When you go and visit your Blog Mastermind page that explains all about it, you do say, look, it is possible — it is possible — with a blog if you're doing it right — you're not following the magazine model, but you're doing it right — it is possible to earn a five-figure monthly income. And as soon as you make claims like that, that it's possible to do that, immediately the cynics come out and say that's a scam, that can't be done. But of course it can be done. I know a ton of people who are cleaning up on the Internet who easily make a five-figure monthly income. But when I say "easily," I mean it's easy for them now, but they had to build the infrastructure, they had to do it right, it took a lot of time, and now they can earn that money with much less labor than they had to do at the very beginning. So yeah, of course it would be preposterous to say tomorrow you're going to earn this kind of money. But there is a blueprint out there that if you are willing to put in the effort, and if you're willing to fight against the natural inertia that is the enemy of every entrepreneur, it is conceivable that you could do it.

STARAK: And that's exactly why I give away the free book, *Blog Profits Blueprint*, because I don't want people to jump into this whole process or take my coaching program if you're not prepared for what you're up against. So you know, the *Blueprint*, 88 pages long, it's free; I have an audio version if you prefer that, and that will show you what you're up against. So this is what you have to do; it'll give you an overview of the system you're going to implement, and it'll help you decide, is this what I want to build, are these the outcomes I'm hungry for, and then if you're looking for the more hold-your-hand, coaching, step-by-step guidance, my coaching program, Blog Mastermind, is available.

But as much as the phrase "Make money while you sleep," makes people cringe and go that just sounds like a scam, most of the people I know, including myself, have been doing that for many, many years, because the Internet's a 24-hour system, we're selling digital products, using digital delivery — so we don't have to ship anything necessarily ourselves. We just have automatic software that basically delivers an

eBook or delivers a course, and we get a notification when a purchase has been made. You know, PayPal, obviously, it's an online payment system. There are several others. All of that's automatic; all of that's online; all of that's digital. So especially for my sake, I was living in Australia for most of my life, with so many American customers, a lot of my sales do come through the night, so I do wake up to having made money while I sleep. So as much as it is a cliché, it's actually true for a lot of people.

But like you said, it's not easy. There's effort required. That's the thing to understand. But I think if you really care about helping a certain group of people or reaching a certain group of people with your message, that's what carries you through the hard work. And not only that, it's a joy. I love producing content. Even at the beginning when I didn't really have a big audience and I made no money from it, I just loved sharing what I knew about and I really got a kick out of someone leaving a comment or the first person to subscribe to my email list and the first person to buy my first product. You know, those milestones are huge things to celebrate, and that's what keeps you going. So I really recommend celebrating the small steps, and I think, you know, small step number one is to grab a free copy of my *Blueprint* and decide whether this is the right step for you.

WOODS: Yeah, definitely check that out. You'll get that for free, as Yaro says, at TomWoods.com/Yaro. And incidentally, I'll just close with this, some people may think, well, I'd love to do it, but I just haven't got the time. If you get one of those time management apps and really study where your time is going every day, you do discover there is an hour there. There is an hour and a half. There are 30 minutes. You can find them, and when you use them more productively, like creating content for a blog, frankly, you feel better about yourself. You feel like every single day or every few days, I've produced something. I've done something. I can point to that and say I did that. My name is on that.

In fact, that's really why I started this podcast. I started it because I was in the middle of a huge, huge product that was consuming all my time, but people expected a product from me. They expected output. They expected content, because I was a blogger and I was an author. But if I did this project they were never going to hear from me. But I just found a half hour a day to do this show, every day I could still say here's something I did that I think people are benefitting from, and there is some satisfaction that comes from that that isn't entirely monetary. But if it's also monetary, well, who's going to complain about that?

Well, Yaro, thanks so much for your time. I am going to direct people to TomWoods.com/Yaro. I've got your blog up at the show notes page for today, which will be TomWoods.com/572, and best of luck and keep on helping people, because it is a tremendous thing you're doing, and I'm so glad you're doing it.

STARAK: Thanks, Tom, and you keep podcasting. I'm looking for Episode 1,000, no doubt pretty soon.

WOODS: Oh, you betcha. It's going to be a big, big party that day. Thanks so much.

STARAK: Thank you.