

Sept 4, 2019



Jeff Rose Contributor

He Built A Multi-Million Dollar Business With Zero Paid Advertising - Here's How

Disclosure: I met Josh Elledge at Fincon -financial blogger conference - several years ago and consider him to be a friend.

To be completely accurate, he's generated more than \$6 million in sales with less than \$500 in advertising. His name is Josh Elledge, and he has a completely different approach to advertising. He doesn't use it.

His trick? He got himself in the media more than 2,000 times. How did he get that much exposure without spending any money?

One word: authority.

When you have it, you don't need to spend money on advertising. That's the message Josh has shared with thousands of clients. Though the whole concept of authority has primarily been an Internet concept up to this point, Elledge has expanded beyond the web, and is showing how it can be a multi-million dollar miracle for businesses and individuals.

Who is Josh Elledge?

Like many so many other successful entrepreneurs, Josh Elledge's success was born in failure. Just a dozen years ago, while living in Western Michigan, his fortunes were so poor that he had just lost his second home in a short

sale, and was living under the threat of having his utility service cut off for lack of ability to pay the bill. The cause? He had failed in business six times.

Not knowing what else to do, he started a business called Savings Angel, as a membership-based website where he would help consumers cut their grocery bill in half. After all, if it was one thing Elledge knew after multiple business failures, it was how to cut expenses.

Now as is usually the case with any business, he was starting from ground zero. But one thing he had learned from his business failures was that exposure is everything. He didn't have nearly enough on his previous business ventures, and that's what he knew needed to change.

To get his business off the ground, Elledge began cold calling everyone he thought might have an audience. That meant newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and TV stations. He caught a break when a small, local Christian radio station invited him to do a quick segment on an experimental basis.

The segment went as well as could be expected, and by the time it was over, he had logged \$359 in revenue on his website. It didn't seem like a lot, but it was a start.

The next day, he collected an additional \$120. In four months after the radio segment, revenues totaled almost \$2,000 – just for three minutes of air-time on a local radio station. The radio station agreed to have him come back several more times. And each time, Elledge's revenue increased.

Gaining Exposure with Other Media

From there he reached out to his local newspaper, writing a monthly column on couponing. Within a couple of years, it turned into a syndicated newspaper column, reaching 1.1 million readers throughout Michigan.

Next came TV, which eventually became his bread-and-butter. He did a TV segment in Kalamazoo, Michigan. That was followed by additional segments with stations in Grand Rapids, Michigan, then Chicago.

After moving his family to Orlando in 2010, he became the consumer expert for three different TV stations, doing as many as six segments per week. He got a bit of a break in 2011 when the TV show *Extreme Couponing* hit, since he was already well-positioned in the couponing space.

The media exposure, as it turned out, isn't just Josh Elledge's bio – it's also his message.

Put another way, media exposure equals authority, and with authority comes success. That's the message Josh has been preaching to thousands of others ever since, through his latest website *Up My Influence*.

When You Have Authority You Don't Need to Sell

Through his media exposure, Elledge gained the kind of respect that causes people to seek out his opinions and advice. As his exposure – and authority – grew, his income skyrocketed to six figures per month, leading to a first ever seven-figure year.

That's when his business direction began to shift. Once he began mentoring and doing one-on-one sessions in group settings on how to get into the media, Elledge began getting requests for paid consulting. It's one of those unexpected but delightfully positive outcomes that tend to happen when you're on a roll.

Not surprisingly, his consulting clients similarly experienced success through media-driven authority. Existing clients began referring him to new prospects. He got so busy he started an agency. The *Up My Influence* website provided the ability to reach clients around the globe. Business has been so robust he now has a team of more than 20 staff members.

The company goal: to help clients get more sales, higher conversion rates, more speaking invites, more partnerships with influencers, and pretty much everything else they want to do in business.

Authority vs. Direct Selling – Why Authority Wins

Josh Elledge is emphatic that consumers have radically changed how they engage with brands in the digital age. Customers are much less likely to respond to sales and marketing efforts. And while it seems counterintuitive, this is actually good for businesses. After all, sales and marketing campaigns cost money. But gaining authority only requires the time and effort involved in increasing exposure.

As Josh was doing media, he was increasing his visibility. That increased his authority, which translated into a dramatic increase in sales through his couponing website. Best of all, the effort didn't require a financial investment.

While positioning himself as “America’s Savings Angel”, Elledge became known as the guy who can get you a deal, a hookup, or an upgrade on anything in life.

“There’s never been a better time to shift your focus from just throwing money at better and better ads, to truly investing in your own personal brand and trusted authority,” Elledge maintains. “Your audience is trying to figure you out before they’ll ever engage you.”

With so much information and activity taking place on the Internet, Elledge maintains that 90% of online purchasers don’t buy anything until they check you out. And when they do, they’re looking for credibility. That credibility comes from the authority you gain from media exposure.

Today’s customer is studying user generated content, influencers, social media conversations, reviews, and articles and media sources about you and your business. In a real way, it’s about getting other credible sources – existing authorities and influencers – to sell your products and services for you.

Building Authority, According to Josh Elledge

Elledge believes everyone has a message that can positively impact the world. The basic idea is getting that message out to the world, without attempting to do a direct sales job. That is, before you have the right to ask anyone for a sale you first have to provide the kind of value the prospect is interested in.

It’s no longer enough to simply build a winning website or sales page. Prospects are looking at how professional your website and emails are. They’re also looking at your social media presence, and making judgments about your follower count and the level of engagement. This is often referred to as social proof, and it’s become critical in modern business.

It’s also important to present your successes and accomplishments. They need to be displayed where your prospects are likely to look. Associations are critical as well. For example, who you’re scene with on the web and in the media pays big dividends, because the authority of other influencers transfers to you.

This also helps to explain why so many successful businesses will put the logos on their websites and marketing materials of where they or their products or services have appeared in authoritative media. This increases the credibility consumers are looking for before they’re willing to buy from you.

Through his Up My Influence program, Elledge lists 40 indicators to help you determine where you stand on the authority ladder.

What’s the reason why consumers are so interested in authority today? “Noise,” cites Elledge. “The American Marketing Association estimates the average consumer is exposed over 10,000 brand messages daily, and people are just exhausted. Your message is drowning in all the other noise out there.”

Authority to the Rescue

The key reason for the success of authority is that it stands out above the noise. Authority isn’t about making sales – it’s about building trust. That’s the part that makes you stand out.

The Internet has created an unlimited number of leads that can be generated. Many businesses are getting all the leads they need, but they’re not converting those leads into sales unless they can convince the consumer that they can solve the prospects problem or fill their need. Elledge maintains that if your authority is high enough, your advertising doesn’t even need to be that great.

To build authority, Elledge warns against putting all your eggs in any one marketing or lead generating basket. “What works in marketing changes,” says Elledge. “But one thing always stays with you, and that’s your personal authority. Once you have a respected name and you’ve helped a lot of people, it really doesn’t matter what you do, you’ll likely be successful.”

Conquering the ‘Digital Barrier’

The Internet is where most business takes place today, and that’s both good and bad. The good part is that getting connected is pretty simple. The bad part is what Elledge refers to as the digital barrier.

There’s a lot of competition out there, and you need to become visible amid the clutter. The best way to do that is to step above your competitors, and become a trusted information source. That’s what building authority is all about.

It’s no longer about simply building a better mousetrap. It’s about developing the credibility that will enable you to sell those mousetraps.

Elledge claims the way to do that is by becoming an influencer. Those are people who are constantly promoting someone else’s products and services. The basic concept is that if you promote someone else’s product, they’ll respond by promoting yours.

The way to do that is by being authentic. You need to give other influencers so much value that they feel compelled to pay you back by promoting your products and services.

“Your own needs to come last,” Elledge maintains. “Most people really screw this up. If a journalist smells sales and marketing on your breath, you’re dead in the water. But if you reach out and bring value, you’ll live another day. You start investing in a relationship and begin to gain some authority.”

Eventually, your sales will grow as they come from people who already know, like and trust you, at least a little bit. You’ll have climbed the digital barrier by standing out above the competition.

Adds Elledge, “When you have higher authority, it will feel like you can pretty much succeed at nearly anything you want business-wise, and you get supported. Why? Because people trust you.”

How to Achieve the Kind of Authority that Increases Revenue

Elledge suggests being “committed to getting out from behind your computer screen, and onto more stages, both virtual and physical.”

He uses six general strategies that he maintains will increase your authority:

1. Never pitch a story about yourself or your company. Elledge refers to it as “news-jacking” – suggesting a topic a journalist will absolutely be writing on or doing a story around anyway. He focuses on trending and breaking news topics, which often requires being the first “expert” to show up and help out. Timing, he maintains, is far more important than coming up with the perfect pitch.

2. Focus on the long game. This involves concentrating more on repetition than on quality. For example, when Elledge started doing TV, he felt he wasn’t good at it. But the more he did it, the better he got. As he went along, his exposure increased. He recommends that strategy in any authority building effort.

3. Become a subject matter-expert. Elledge recommends becoming a virtual geek in your topic area. The goal is to become the go-to

guy or gal in your field. To the degree possible, you and your area of expertise need to become one.

4. If authority opportunity arises JUMP. Elledge will drop almost anything to put a story together for a journalist. He maintains that if you can do most of the work for them, they're much more likely to come back to you again and again. He'll do it for free, because the real payoff is the audience he gains.

5. Use Twitter to connect with media influencers. Journalists need great story ideas and content. Twitter is where they often find it. Put your ideas – but not sales pitches – out in consistent tweets.

6. Build a team around media appearances. Producing stories can take time, and you can't work alone. He's hired researchers and writers to help improve his performance. He recommends you do the same.

Raise Your Authority and You Raise Your Profile – And Your Sales

Logic alone proves the validity of Josh Elledge's claims about authority. It's not just the success he's enjoyed in his own career that makes the point. Today's consumer is subject to a marketing and sales blitz on an everyday basis. Ads have become so common that we've all become "ad blind" – the ads are coming at us, but we've trained our eyes, ears, and minds to block them out.

Instead, were sifting through the ad storm, in search of credible information. That comes only from those who we recognize as authorities on the topic were searching out.

If you want to stand out from the crowd, you'll need to stop selling and start building authority. Once you do, your prospects will increasingly come to you. In the process, your marketing costs will fall, and your revenues will increase.

It looks and sounds like a winning strategy, with Josh Elledge positioning himself as the authority on authority.

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*I am a certified financial planner, author, blogger, and Iraqi combat veteran. I'm best known for my blogs GoodFinancialCents.com and LifeInsurancebyJeff.com and my book, *Soldier of Finance: Take Charge of Your Money and Invest in Your Future*. I escaped a path of financial destruction by being a college drop out and having over \$20,000 of credit card debt to eventually become a self-made millionaire. My mission is help GenX'ers achieve financial freedom through strong money habits and unleashing their entrepreneurial spirit. My work has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Reuters* and *Fox Business*.*

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