

**Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for
Differentiation**



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Dr. David Phelps

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Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

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David Phelps: Good day everyone. This is Dr. David Phelps of the Freedom Founders mastermind community and Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast. Today our topic is going to be, how do you differentiate yourself in your practice, your business, in an era where there seems to be a lot of commoditization? So my guest today is Mr. Shane Simmons from Crimson Media. Shane, how are you doing sir?

Shane Simmons: I am doing great, David. Thank you for having me on here, looking forward to this.

David Phelps: Well, as I just said a little bit in the intro, the era of dentistry, which is still very much a service oriented business, is one that's turned into a lot of declining margins. There seems like there's many cities, many MSAs, there's almost a dentist on every corner, almost like Starbucks. It's just become proliferated to that extent. And the rank and file dentists today, I think, are finding it's difficult. It's still doable, it's still tenable. The vision they had when they were coming out of school, whenever that was, sometimes they're getting a different look and it's not always the one that they thought they would be looking at. So we're going to talk today about how you help, your

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

company, helps dentists to better differentiate themselves from the other dentists. Lack of commoditization.

Let's talk about where you came from though. I know that what your company does, primarily your kind of tagline is, helping dentists build freedom in their practice. You're located in the Northeast area of Indiana. You receive a lot of referrals from your clients, which shows that you have created a lot of trust, which is a key thing in any kind of a client, customer based business. Something else I want to bring out and find out more about you is you're a two time Emmy award winner. And one of the key things that you do is you help embed what we call, or you call, storytelling into the marketing, the message. Talk about, where did you get your Emmys, in what area?

Shane Simmons: Yeah. So David, I always tell people in my past life, before I got into dentistry, I worked in broadcast journalism. And so that's really where I learned storytelling and could appreciate the impact that it could have on people. And so after I graduated from Indiana University I took a job at an ABC affiliate in Illinois, worked there for a couple of years. Then worked in Louisville at a ABC affiliate. Had a number of different stories that I worked on both locally and then on the national level too, and that's when those Emmys came about. Won a couple of different... One on a more serious front, and one on a more kind of lighthearted story that we would tell. And once I realized that journalism wasn't necessarily for me after several years, just a crazy industry as far as what it's going through, and the work life balance, it was just tough.

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

So I wanted to see how I could use that skillset to impact others. And so I had originally, once I gotten out of news, taken a job at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. And that's where I took a job at the marketing department, and really started to learn how great storytelling could bridge the gap between marketing and customer acquisition. And so at the same time had a friend who was just getting out of dental school recently, bought a practice from a retiring dentist, and he's like, I know nothing about marketing. I know you work in marketing at the Kelley school and have this background, so would you be able to kind of help me out? And so that's kind of what we did, was kind of just, dentistry kind of fell in my lap, so to speak. And I started to gain a real appreciation for it.

And so what we started to do, because as you mentioned David, it's so competitive out there now. And almost every practice anymore it seems like is marketing, when back in the day you kind of stand out because that was kind of taboo in dentistry to market. And so what we had to do was figure out a way that we could be different. And what we found was the relationships that our doctor was building with the patients, a very easy going rapport. It was kind of like a farmhouse type practice that had been converted to a dental office. So there was that story.

And then there was also the impact of the confidence that people would have after they had work done, and didn't necessarily fear going to the dentist anymore after visiting this particular practice. And so we just started videoing this and kind of telling it in a story the way that you would kind of tell a news feature story almost. And we started to put that out into the market, and that's kind of how

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

something clicked with me. It was like, there may be something to this. And the rest kind of is history, so to speak.

David Phelps: So really it was starting with your friend who needed help with marketing. And that's kind of the case study you're talking about right here, is how you developed that, the personality of the story of who this particular dentist is. So you're right, going back decades ago the marketing really was more advertising, if anything, when it started out in the '70s. When it became not necessarily ethical, but it became legal. First they had to get through the FTC for professionals of any kind to be able to advertise. So advertising was the first thing. And this is many years ago, many people probably don't remember that there's this thing called a Yellowbook, Yellow Pages. I don't know if you've ever seen them. They usually use like in highchairs to lift kids up now today, that's really their best purpose. I don't think they deliver those anymore. I think they're gone.

But back in the day, one of our marketing pieces, just to take the audience back, was the Yellow Page rep would come around and sit down with the dentist in their office and develop next year's yellow page add. And they try to sell you the bigger, the quarter page, half page, full page. You know, they try to sell you on that. And that was a big piece of our, quote, "marketing", if you are advertising. And I remember that what those reps would tell us to do is, well, you need to talk about you. But you in the sense of your credentials, where you went to school and all the CE you took. And then make a list of bullet points of all these services you offer from root canals to cosmetic whitening to, you know, preventive.

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

And I mean, it was this, you looking at it today and go, oh my gosh, gag me with a spoon. Right? But that's what it was. So you're talking about the evolvment now. And today it's not as bad as what our yellow pages were, but still, when we think about the different forms of marketing that's done today, for those who have evolved to that point where they realize it's necessary, we have the terms SEO, right? Search engine optimization. We have Facebook, social media, Google AdWords, PPC, right? Email. People are putting out videos, Facebook Lives.

And then we talk about this big area of, quote, "content creation". Sounds really complicated to anybody who hasn't dug into this. And I agree that it is, it's very complex, right? So the differentiation today as I understand you're talking about is, instead of talking about credentials and the latest greatest technology, and this and that, and same day crowns, which maybe has a place, we're talking about differentiating the practice and the owner of the dentist as a personality. As someone that you actually want to get to know because you like something about them besides the fact that... Well don't we just assume Shane, that everybody who has a degree is licensed, you know, has a certain level of capability. So take us down that road a little bit because what you discovered.

Shane Simmons: Yeah, so you're exactly right. It's kind of two sides of it is one, is telling kind of the story of the dentist, of the practice. And again, that's just, I always tell people, it breaks down that barrier of dentist and patient. Getting able to know them more personally than just kind of, okay, they're the dentist who works on my teeth. So that's the first part of it, is kind of telling their story. What is it

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

that drives them? Why do they love going to work every day? People like to hear that, because again, it's something different. It's a breath of fresh air. The second side of it is actually, you're telling the stories of your patients. Which I think have the biggest impact. Like you mentioned, to put out there that, oh, we do implants, we do ortho, root canals, et cetera, et cetera.

But it doesn't connect with anybody. But when you actually put a patient in front of someone who has had that treatment, talk about the before, talk about the after, the whole process, the transformation and how that's made them feel personally, especially when you start getting into highly cosmetic cases, that can be really powerful. And as you know, social proof is one of the most powerful influencers for human beings. And naturally we are like coded genetically to look to others in order to get advice or to see if that's something we want to move towards, et cetera, et cetera. So it's really, what I tell practices is, I know it's tough to think about all this content creation and trying to map out all these different schedules and, when should I film this? When should I film this?

But what I tell people is, try to document everything you can in your practice. At least dedicate one day out of the week where you can have someone on your team, even if it's just with a cell phone, going around and documenting kind of the day in the life of the patients coming in, and the doctor. And of course you want to be sure to get written consent from your patients. But it's just that documentation process is kind of a way that you can stand out in what is really just kind of a red ocean out there of businesses and dental practices. When people

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

start seeing kind of the inside, the day in the life, they start hearing the stories they hear from the doctors, that is going to make you stand out. And by doing that, it's going to kind of have a ripple effect, David, on everything else that you're doing from, you know, if you're doing a mailer campaign and you're sending people to a website, they're going to see that.

It's going to up your conversions. If you're doing paid ads or SEO, they're going to see this interaction. And we actually have clients who, you know, we'll do a monthly Facebook video, and of course we'll target, we've kind of got our own audience created now. We'll target those people. And it can be something as simple as kind of a fun Halloween ad that we're running in the dental practice, to something as like a same day crowns with CEREC. And so we'll run these ads out there and people start to just get inundated with seeing our doctor's face on Facebook, on Instagram. And to the point where they'll start getting recognized at the grocery store.

Like I've had them say that many times. It's like, hey, you're that dentist on Facebook. That's what you want to become. And it is a longer play, but when you play the longer game, you're going to get greater returns in the end because you're going to get higher quality patients, versus just throwing a \$29 new patient special out there. You see the patient wants and then they're gone.

David Phelps: You really hit a great point there, Shane. I'm going to just reiterate what you said is, is playing the long game versus the short game. And I think too many businesses, not just in dentistry but businesses in general, play that short game. Meaning, there's a current need right now, the

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

influx of more patients or clients or customers, so that's the lifeblood. It's not everything, but it's what most business owners focus on. I need more patients to come in and want treatment or services. And so they go out and use a tactical approach, right? Well let's grab this thing, let's grab that thing. And there's no congruency to it. And what you're doing is you're making the dentist, the dental practice, the social proof, the case studies, really omnipresent out there in lots of different areas. Where, again, as you said, it's kind of a top of a mind thing.

The subconscious is picking these things up. Even if the patient doesn't click on every video, they're seeing these things, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam. And now the day that it's time for them to take action on something, that they've been putting off, right? It's just like, you're top of mind. You're right there and there's a reason why. Because it's not just seeing ads or a name, but there's a connection of an identity. I guess it's an identity, right? There's that personality and these people, and that's what people are attracted to.

It's like you said, other people like them. And then who's this business entity? Is it just the name on a billboard? Or a name on an office sign? Or is there other people behind it? I kind of think about the old sit-com Cheers, from the 90s right? Where everybody knows your name. I mean everybody went to Cheers not because they had necessarily maybe the best ambiance. I mean the people made the ambiance. It's that people knew you and you walked in it's like, you felt like you were at home. You're in a place where you felt comfortable. Right? And I think that's what you're looking at what you're creating is that, that kind of feeling. Would that be fair to say?

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

Shane Simmons: Absolutely. That omnipresence is the word, that kind of the magic word there. That's what you want to create. Because I think, David, in this day and age that we live in, and listen I'm a millennial and I love tech and everything, but I still think there's a part of us, we're getting back to where we want that more personalization. We want that everybody knows your name, kind of that be able to talk to your neighbor. I think we're getting back to that a little bit because people are getting numb to the fact that everybody's on their phones and connected digitally, but maybe not face to face.

And so that's kind of what you're able to do even though it's through a digital medium is your just, your, I guess just making it more personalized at the end of the day. And that's what people absolutely are wanting, rather than maybe just seeing a giant billboard up there say you offer this, that with the stock photo, it's not going to make the same connection. So that's exactly right, it's just creating this omnipresence around letting them know that you are going to personalize everything, their treatment, their experience, everything from the get go before they've even made an appointment you've started to do that. So the expectations kind of fall from there.

David Phelps: Attention spans today, Shane, we live in a world where we're blasted, you know just constantly, as you just mentioned. You know where everyone's connected on a smartphone today, and if you're not getting text messages or Facebook messenger stuff, or Instagram or Snap, whatever it is people play on. People are everywhere on their phones, or they're on their computer, and then just out in the regular space, there's lots of noise. So how do you use your overarching strategies of storytelling to cut

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

through the clutter in an attention deficit society today? How do you make that get through to people so it's, bam, they pay some amount of attention?

Shane Simmons: Yeah, it's got to be short, sweet and impactful. Which is obviously not the easiest thing to do necessarily, to have something shortened down to have an impact. But anytime that we're putting content out there, and in this case I'll use an example of a video. Say we're going to be putting up a patient testimonial video out there to those who are maybe interested in implants or we're trying to build a group of individuals who want to come in for a consultation. Then we will keep that patient testimonial video short and sweet, a minute or less. And the first opening line that you use in that video should be the most impactful line in it. Because again, it's got to be quick. If we were developing a two to three minute video, you might want to reveal that towards the middle obviously. But when you're doing these short snippet videos, like in social ads, it needs to hit right off the bat.

Like if they say, this changed my life, without a doubt it changed my life. If they start tearing up, use that at the very beginning, and then go into what it was that changed their life. That's first. Secondly, this has been something that I have found to be super useful, and if you follow any sort of marketers or online influencers. Tony Robbins, I'm a big fan of Tony Robbins. They start using this app, it's essentially called, InShot I-N-S-H-O-T. And basically what that app allows you to do is any sort of videos that you have, you can put texts above and below the video. And so if you're putting something out there, again, on the example that we just had about, you know, life-changing dental procedure. You could put that text right there over

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

the video while the person is talking, it's above and below them.

That's going to grab someone's attention, versus again, just something you're scrolling through, you see a video like you would on your Facebook timeline or your Instagram, whatnot. So it's by adding the text to the video, one, and being able to keep it short, sweet, less than a minute, have the most impactful stuff right at the very beginning. I promise you if you start doing that, you're going to see more people engaging with it, more people watching. And ultimately more people kind of funneling through that.

David Phelps: Great tip. Great tip. So I'm assuming that really what you're talking about is primarily using video. Am I correct? Okay.

Shane Simmons: Yeah, video is right now just, it's kind of the hot medium that we're able to get, you know, the lowest cost and the most eyeballs on it. Not to say that photo still doesn't have an impact, if we're talking about advertising. But right now videos are just really, really powerful.

David Phelps: So what's the process? Let's talk about, so how you work with your clients today in helping them create the content through the video. Just give us some examples, are there different ways they could work with you? Because I'm thinking as, you know, as a dentist focused on what I do chairside. Okay, I've done a few selfies on my phone before, but boy I am not good in front of a camera. And figuring out this whole storytelling. Or, getting patients in and creating the emotional connection that we're talking about. How's this going to work?

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

Shane Simmons: Yeah, absolutely. So I tell people it's really a holistic approach to your marketing. It's like, you know, first off before any sort of videos or anything's created, you have to be seen. You know, what's not seen does not exist. So got to make sure that your organic search, you know, you have systems in place in your office where you can generate patients. And we certainly help with that as a digital marketing company for dentists. But let's say we've checked those boxes and we're ready for something a little more deeper level. How we specifically work with people is, we'll come in and we'll actually, we try to keep it as raw as possible as far as we try not to script out like the doctor's answers or anything like that. Because like I said, I worked in broadcast for several years.

It took me at least two years doing it every single day to not sound like I was reading a script, when you're reading a script. So you can't reasonably expect a dentist who's never on camera to be able to do that on the first time. So we'll come in with a list of interview questions that the doctor gets before we come in, but we show them what the questions are, but then we want them to answer it in the most natural way as possible. And obviously with editing tools it's very easy to splice things together so that way there's no pauses and things like that.

So we come in with a list of questions that we're going to go through. But then the one thing that is somewhat scripted is the overarching theme of what the story is we want to portray. What type of office do you have? What's the culture you're trying to create there, and the type of patients you're wanting to attract? So obviously there's a lot that goes into that as far as knowing who your target audience or your target patient is. I know Steven Schlenz

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

was on your podcast here recently talking about that. Very important.

Also just knowing that and in combination of your actual team being onboard as well. So once we come in, we have those boxes checked, it's literally just like having a conversation. I tell people, you know, it's like sit on the front porch and have a conversation about why you are a dentist, why you created this practice. And really finding that why, unveiling that a little bit. And then once we kind of have figured that out, and you start to open up and start to, I guess, be a little bit more comfortable in your answers, that's when we can start getting more into specifics with patient specific stories, et cetera. So when we come in, it's like you don't want to expect like you're on a film set and you've got to memorize lines and things like that, because it's just not going to be authentic that way. The bottom line is if you mess up, if you sound nervous, it's okay, because the patients actually are going to appreciate that a lot more than they are if it seems fake and scripted out.

David Phelps: Yeah, I totally agree. I think that we always are our worst critics, right? And we think we want to be perfect and polished, but people want to see real people. Who, just like themselves, slur a word or stumble here or there, forget something completely, you know, not that you... But like you said with editing, you can make these interviews, these questions, really come natural, right? And I always tell people, just think about when they're doing these kinds of things to think about a specific person they're talking to, like one person that they're trying to convey the story about who they are and their practice, and what their passion is and what drives them.

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

The things you're pulling out is just, think about that one person, you're talking to them. Picture their face right there and have that conversation, as you said, with them. Don't think about a camera that's going to be spilling this out to all kinds of people all over the internet, which is what happens with it, which is the good thing. But you're talking to one person. So how often, Shane, does somebody working with you need to be creating this? Is this like a once a month thing, or what's the pulse of this look like in most cases?

Shane Simmons: Yeah, so with the more professional shot stuff, really like once every year, couple of years, is fine to have that content created. And if you do enough, like if you have enough testimonials, we take enough different angles on the shoot, you know, that can last us for a year or two years even on the professional side. So as far as that goes, not very often do you need to get that done when you have kind of the big equipment and so to speak. But with the more day-to-day stuff, when obviously a company like my company can't be there every single day, that's where we want to work with our teams and our dental offices to dedicate one person who can go around on the cell phone, the iPhone, whatnot, and do some documentation that way.

And there's some coaching that goes along with that as far as things to look out for, what to do, what to say, what to ask, that sort of thing. And with that kind of content, I say, you try to start out, try to get your team member to be able to put together maybe just one little video testimonial a month. Start out with that. You know, start low. And then from there if you can start cranking out two, even three different testimonials, or kind of like doctors,

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

like tip of the day, your tip of the week type videos. You start to regularly do that, you can use those on your social platforms, et cetera, your ads. But then your more professional polished videos can be on the actual website itself. So that way you're kind of hitting on both sides of that.

So the more professional polish, that's more meant for the websites, maybe even pay per click campaigns where you're sending people to a specific page for that. And then on the social media side, that's where the more raw cell phone footage is best used. And if you look at some of these big influencers today, and personal development or marketing and whatnot, that's kind of the same format they take. And people are, you know, for whatever reason, more inclined to watch a video on a cell phone that has a little bit of shake to it on their Instagram feed, versus something that's more professionally shot, which is going to fit better on the website.

David Phelps: Yeah, very, very good. So the offices, when they're doing their once a month or documentation, doing it once a month, that patient testimonial, then they send that to you? So they don't have to worry about how to put all this out there, which ones we'll put out, you'll do the editing, you'll clean it up. And then you create and maintain the campaigns, correct?

Shane Simmons: Yes, yes, exactly. So they film the video, then let us do the dirty work of editing it together, polishing it up, and making sure that it's ready to go out to the marketplace and has the proper messaging.

David Phelps: Excellent. One of the areas that people, I think, also have a lot of confusion today, because it changes all the time,

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

but it's the Google search, right? So talk about how that works today and why it's important to be able to use that in the appropriate way, the most effective way.

Shane Simmons: Yeah, David. So outside of internal referrals or insurance referrals, the number one place that people still go to find a new dentist is Google. It's a Google search. And so I know sometimes it's not as sexy as some of the other platforms out there, because it has been around for a while. And it's not, you know, the videos and all of this thing that we get to talk about, but it's still imperative to your practice. And so when we come back to this term omnipresence, you know, for whatever reason, people think that when they go to Google and they type dentist near me, or whatever the term may be, whatever comes up at the top must be the best. And they must be the best, whether it's a dentist, a restaurant, whatever the case may be, that's just the way people think.

And so we have to be sure that we're playing that game. So there's a couple of things that you can do right away to help your organic search rankings. Because, quite frankly, you know, a lot of docs that I talk to, you know, I go around and I do lectures on this. They say, I've had a SEO company for four years and never really noticed anything. We didn't get up in the search results. They said they would. Well here's some of the things you need to be looking for, first, there's the obvious, there's, you know, the website has to be optimized for Google. It has to load quickly, it has to be mobile friendly. You know, all of those things that fall under the onsite optimization is important. And most companies will check the boxes on that.

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

Where people drop the ball though, and where they don't tend to get the results is the most important thing that's going to get your website up at the top of Google, where 80 plus percent of people are doing their searches for a new dentist, is you need what's called backlinks pointing to your website. And this is actually not too hard to do, it just takes effort. Hence why people try to hire out for it because they don't want to put the time into do it, reasonably so. But a backlink essentially, how I like to tell people, it's a link from one site to yours. And it's kind of like a popularity contest in Google's eyes. If one website has a bunch of links pointing to it, it kind of tells Google that, okay, people are talking about this website. You know, it must be super relative for the terms that it comes up for.

Versus the site that you have the awesome design, you know, it might be the most beautiful website in the world, you paid \$15,000 for, something crazy, and then you're like, nobody sees it. Well if nobody's talking about it then it's really, you know, it's nothing in Google's eyes. So at the end of the day Google's like primary goal is to provide the best experience for their users. And so by doing so, if a website is being referenced and talked about, then that is considered a good experience for the user as far as the website goes. So what you need to do is you need to first figure out, where can I get my site listed? So there's a number of different directories out there. It's funny you mentioned yellow pages earlier, that's still a place that you can get your website actually listed on, your practice listed on there. And even though nobody goes to it, it's still, it's a credible link in Google's eyes.

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

So websites like that, those are citations that you can bill. Secondly, there are actually links that are in articles. So if you're like on a dental town or something like that and you're reading and you see an article for dentists in Indianapolis and it points to your site, that's going to be a really powerful link that's going to pull you up in those rankings. And so what we typically do is get about three to five of those links every single month for people that we're working with. And that's where you start to really see the magic happening. So for you guys out there, if you don't have a company doing this right now, what I would suggest is anything like your chamber of commerce, if there's other local businesses out there that maybe you can partner up with that have a blog, like chiropractors, plastic surgeons, anybody, orthodontists, any referral sources you have out there.

You could literally just say, hey, what if we wrote a little article about how we refer our orthodontic patients to you guys, you refer one to us, and we'll trade links that way? And that's a great way to do it if you're kind of doing that all in-house and don't have somebody to handle that for you. Another great opportunity to do that is any sort of sponsorships that you're going to be providing. If you're going to be sponsoring a little league at a local school nearby. Education links have huge power in Google's eyes. So if you can get your website listed on a local school as a sponsor or anything like that, that's going to be massive as well. So those are some steps that you can actually take to do it yourself. But again, those backlinks has kind of been the missing component, David, of a lot of campaigns that we've seen over the years.

Ep #244: Shane Simmons - Storytelling for Differentiation

David Phelps: Really, really great. Great tips, Shane. Certainly people can do these things themselves, all capable and smart enough. But what I would I say is it's best to work with companies and teams that really integrate all this together, and let us really focus on what we do the best. So I know people will probably want to follow up and engage with you, and your website is crimsonmediagroup.com. We'll put that link in the show notes, of course, with some of the other key tips that you gave today.

Really, really instructive. I think, again, as you said, the whole point of what you do in our topic today is, how do you differentiate yourself with all the noise out there today in trying to be something different than just another dental office on the street corner? And that's the key to any business today. So well done, sir. I love talking with you. You gave some great information, and I look forward to keeping up with you and seeing more stories coming out about real people, real patients, and the doctors and teams that take care of them. Thank you, Shane.

Shane Simmons: Thank you, David. Appreciate you having me on. Keep up the great work. Thank you.

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