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The \$100k/yr. Franchise Opportunity Helping Small Businesses Grow

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How to get press as a small business

9 Minute Read

Have you ever wanted to create your own podcast? How about one that brings in \$100k/yr. while helping small businesses grow?

Then you should meet Lee Kantor, founder of Business RadioX, an Atlanta-based small-business radio/podcast network that can be replicated in any market. What started as an Atlanta radio show—*Mr. Fitness and the Fat Guy*—has evolved over the past decade into a 9-city franchise, with plenty of room to grow.

Kantor, a longtime marketer, has turned traditional radio advertising on its head by offering local businesses an opportunity to host their own podcasts that target hard-to-reach audiences. His company grew out of his frustration with seeing how hard it was for small businesses to get any attention in the press. Unless your last name is Bezos or Musk, there's no guarantee your company will ever get a media mention.

As a radio and podcast host himself, Kantor has interviewed thousands of entrepreneurs and business owners, so he understands their challenges. One of their biggest hurdles? Getting their business in front of the right audience, without doing a hard sell. As Kantor sees it, being salesy isn't cool, but telling an authentic story never goes out of style.

Business RadioX is a new kind of Media as a Service (MaaS), giving business owners a platform to reach niche audiences while serving up content that often has nothing to do with their business.

In this interview, we turn the tables and ask Kantor about his unusual platform and how much money his franchisees make. We also discuss the limitations of paid marketing, how to differentiate yourself as a small business, and the challenges he's overcome building his own company.

Key Takeaways:

- The big guys have plenty of marketing channels. It's time to give small and mid-sized business owners a voice.
- Staying hyper-local builds a more dedicated audience.
- Small niches can still have wide reach. Kantor's shows boast a devoted listenership that tunes in from as far away as Colombia, South America.

* * *

You started working in the audio space back in 2005. How did you get your start?

Kind of accidentally. I was doing marketing for a friend who was opening up a fitness center, and after 9/11, the business was struggling. We decided to write a book about it. Then we went on a radio show to talk about the book. We had a really good banter back and forth. Then we had the opportunity to start an internet radio show before there even was podcasting.

It was called Dr. Fitness and the Fat Guy. In the process of doing that, I discovered that it's fairly easy to get guests for a show. At that moment, I thought maybe we could do radio in a different way and reverse engineer shows to help our clients meet hard-to-reach people. That was the germ of an idea that led to Business RadioX.

I'm not a traditional broadcaster. I'm more a marketing person who saw how to leverage the medium in a different way than it had been monetized in the past.

Business RadioX was created to combat anti-business bias in traditional media. How do you help businesses overcome that bias?

Business journals used to be the only place for business people to get the stories they were interested in. It seemed like a few business people were sucking the oxygen out of the room for the small to mid-sized business owner. Those owners weren't really getting that chance to tell their story.

Every day in local markets people are battling and grinding, but that never gets media attention. We thought our platform

would be a more suitable place for underserved small to mid-sized businesses to tell their story. How many more stories on Elon Musk do we need?

Our stuff is hyper-local, so the people who listen and care also tend to be hyper-local. We leverage the internet to share their story. It helps that person in a local way, even though it's a global platform.



Almost every company is a content producer these days. How does this trend affect Business RadioX and your subscribers?

It goes deeper than just every company. I think every individual is a media outlet. I mean, if you look at their social media activity, that's a media channel.

People listen to our shows from all over. We have a studio partner in Gwinnett County, which is a Northern suburb of Atlanta. His is called Gwinnett Business Radio, and he spotlights businesses in Gwinnett. Unbeknownst to everybody, for over a year there was a banker in Colombia, South America, who had a side hustle of this fruit-flavoring

business. And he was thinking at one point, “Maybe I’ll go and expand to America.”

As part of his research, he stumbled upon Gwinnett County, which was one of the country’s fastest-growing counties at the time. He starts paying attention to what’s happening there, and he found the Gwinnett Business Radio show.

He became a regular listener and learned about all these different businesses that were there, and hired one of them to help him with his international business plan. He eventually moved to Gwinnett County with his wife.

And now the business he started is worth \$1m+ and he has offices in Gwinnett County and Colombia. He stood up at the Chamber of Commerce and said, “Everyone I know is through Business RadioX.”

So this is an economic development tool as well as a business building tool?

Other countries are hungry for American business knowhow. This guy was an example of somebody who was searching for that, found resources, and found a place to expand his operation. To him, America was one big thing and this helped him narrow down where in America he should move to.

We don’t do commercials or interruption advertising. Instead, we do sponsorships or underwriting where the brand or the client is more of a product placement. They might co-host a show or we’ll spotlight them. Then they are part of our community and we help them meet the hard-to-reach people who they want to do business with.

Can you be more specific about how you help companies find

those hard-to-reach prospects?

We had a guy whose business is long-term care insurance. When it was time to have him on the show, his first inclination was, “I’m going to do a show about long-term care insurance. Talk about the top benefits, and how it works.”

We started asking questions about who his perfect customers are. When we started talking in those terms, we learned that the ideal prospect for him is a successful businesswoman.

He found that men tend to put it off and say, “I’ll worry about this later.” Just like they do with visits to the doctor. But women say, “I better take care of this. One less thing to worry about.”

He was open-minded, so instead of the show being about insurance, it turned into a show about successful women entrepreneurs.

Our clients use the show as a way to grow their ecosystem. We’re truly trying to support and celebrate and distribute their work. We tell their story in an authentic, unscripted manner that gives them a piece of content they can share.



What does it cost to do this and how do you make money?

I make money in two main ways. One, I founded the company. So I have a studio here in Atlanta. I have clients who are local and trying to reach local people.

What I'm trying to do now--and we're putting a big effort into doing this--is to expand the network and show other people in their local market how opening a Business RadioX can help them serve their community while creating an additional revenue stream.

But the way that we monetize is to get granular on the hyper-local manner. Like the insurance guy who pays us a fee to come in and have a show on our network that airs monthly.

We produce one show for him a month, but his show is available to stream 24/7. And that's why he pays us. The structure of this deal is much different than traditional media that's sold like an ad, or a cost per thousand. We negotiate a value.

In our studio here in Atlanta, it's pretty much \$1k a month or \$5k for six months when you pay upfront. Every studio we have, they have complete discretion to charge whatever they want.

How successful have you been?

I started this as a lifestyle business; I was a stay-at-home dad. I was making six figures in a fairly short period of time working part-time around my kid's preschool schedule.

And then my business partner was a guest on the show, and he thought there was nothing special about Atlanta--that the concept could work in other markets. We have some studio partners that are also making six figures. But it works in different ways and people are making different amounts of money. We want them to be as successful as fast as possible.

But since we don't get paid royalties or anything, I don't know what anybody is making exactly. But I do know they feel like they're serving their community, making an impact, and helping improve the positioning in the minds of their local market.

We have physical studios in the local markets because our value proposition is bringing our clients with their clients face-to-face. Spending time in this intimate radio studio experience really helps with that. It's kind of our secret sauce. I could just have one studio here in Atlanta and do interviews all over the country, but that's not the point. We don't want to do this virtually.

How do you spread the word about your service?

We're still figuring it out. We have three studios in Arizona. A woman in Phoenix had a business coach and they said, "You should do podcasting." So she did some research and she stumbled upon us.

She contacted us through LinkedIn and said, "How does this work? Why aren't you doing this in Phoenix?" She came down here and we explained what we do and why we do it. It resonated with her. Then she started Phoenix Business RadioX. And this is her business, not a franchise.

She pays us a monthly subscription fee to have access to our platform, and then she serves the market in the way that she sees fit. We need to figure out how to get more of her.

When people start their own Business RadioX, they are totally in charge. The only rule is that you need to be transparent about if your guest is a sponsor. There are a lot of big networks out there that have pay-to-play and don't advertise the fact that those are pay-to-play conversations, not interviews.

If I wanted to start a new Business RadioX today, what would it cost me?

It's \$1,500 a year for the activation fee, and then it's another \$500 a month. So for around \$7,500 a year, you'll have real estate on our website and a 24/7 stream of your content. And then you can sell whatever you sell for whatever price. You keep 100% of that money.



What's your vision for Business RadioX?

My vision is that it is going to be a multimillion-dollar company. Just do the math. There are around 8,000 Chambers of Commerce in the United States. When you're talking about the most active Chambers, that's maybe 2,000ish. So that's, say, 1,500 potential studios. If each of those is paying \$500 a month, that starts adding up into millions.

I want everybody in the network to benefit from the network. So as the network expands, all the studio partners would benefit.

Then if that's happening in 1,000 to 2,000 places around America, or the world, and we all get to benefit because everybody's helping, that seems like a sustainable way to have a good business doing media in a positive way.

How have changes in the news industry impacted your business prospects?

I think the reason that newspapers and traditional media are struggling is because interruption advertising doesn't work as well as it used to. There was a time when there were fewer choices and people succumbed to those ads.

Historically, I don't think that model has been great for the advertiser. I worked as a copywriter, so I've seen that side of it. And it always bothered me as a copywriter that you'll write an ad, and then you couldn't tell if it worked or not. Your boss liked it, so does that mean it worked?

I like our model because we're showing a value. This isn't a hypothetical audience. This isn't impressions, or clicks, or any of that stuff. It's a value proposition I feel good about.

I know for a fact that I can put you in front of the people that you curated and decided were the right people to be in front of. My platform delivers the value that we promise.

How has the distrust of media impacted your business?

I believe that a lot of people aren't trusting the news in the way that they did before. I don't think people are trying to trick them in that manner, but the consumer isn't trusting certain channels. They find their own group that they like, and they trust that channel, and then everybody else's is not trustworthy.

We have an unabashedly pro-business agenda. We say some media lean left, some media lean right. We lean business. Specifically, small to mid-sized businesses.

And we feel that's a noble pursuit. 80% of the economy is made up of small businesses, so let's spotlight them. Let's give them some attention and some love. These folks are out there battling without ever feeling appreciated, without ever feeling like what they're doing is worthwhile. It's nice when somebody says, "You know what? Great job. You're doing important work."

95% of our guests never write us a check. We're just there to tell their story. And then a handful of listeners raise their hand to say, "Hey, how do I have a show?" That's all it takes.

Do the math: If they're paying \$1k a month, and say \$10k a year, you have 15 clients in that market, and you're making six figures. You don't need to have 100 clients. You don't need to have lots and lots of people that raise their hand and say, "I want to do this."

You talk to a lot of people who run businesses. What have you learned from them over the years about how to approach entrepreneurship?

That culture is super important. You need to create a culture where there is some sort of a why for the people that are working. The people who have some bigger reason to do their work than just money will be more successful. You've got to really invest time and energy into the culture.

If you're interested in speaking with Kantor directly, you can email him at lee@businessradix.com.



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