

## Interview with Alborz Fallah

**Yaro:** Hi this is Yaro Starak. Today on the line I have with me Alborz Fallah, who is from [CarAdvice.com.au](http://CarAdvice.com.au) and also a good friend of mine. He also lives in Brisbane where I am from. So we are doing a local podcast. We are here to talk specifically about Al's blog and blogging history and how he has managed to achieve what he has achieved. So, welcome Al thanks for joining me.

**Alborz:** Thanks, Yaro. No worries, any time

**Yaro:** Of course, it's okay for me to call you Al, right?

**Alborz:** Yeah, Much easier than Alborz I suppose.

**Yaro:** I figured we'd start at the end rather than the beginning. Tell me exactly where your blog is at the moment and what your involvement is? Just give us an overall picture of everything.

**Alborz:** Sure. It started in early 2006 and I'll just get to the end and where it is now. It is ranked the sixth biggest car site in Australia and that is behind the three biggest publishers: [News Corp](http://News Corp), [Fairfax](http://Fairfax) and [Carsales.com.au](http://Carsales.com.au). Those guys are the ones with \$1 million budgets, so we've done pretty well I have to say. I started it and I'm still majority owner. It's come a long way for a blog, that's for sure.

**Yaro:** In a sense what you're saying is your blog, which is obviously about cars, it's a car blog, is pretty much competing with some of the largest media companies here in Australia, media sites producing car-related content. For those overseas they are pretty much the biggest A-players in Australia in terms of online content production. I guess the equivalent in the US – I know [Autoblog](http://Autoblog) is one of the largest sites there, but that's also a blog as well, isn't it?

**Alborz:** That's correct. Autoblog is only a blog. Here we really don't have much in terms of blog competition. There are a few that have started up here and there, but we're the only blog that actually gets cars to review. And that ranges from Lamborghinis to Aston Martins, so they're not scared to give us cars even though we're just a blog. We compete with [Drive.com.au](http://Drive.com.au), [Carsales.com.au](http://Carsales.com.au) and [Carsguide.com.au](http://Carsguide.com.au). These are massive, massive websites with TV advertising, newspaper, everything you can think of. We're just a website and that's all we



have. We are have about 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the traffic of the biggest site in Australia without any advertising, just word of mouth, in a year and a bit. It's a big achievement.

**Yaro:** What's that translating to in terms of revenue at the moment?

**Alborz:** It's a bit of a different model. We started, obviously, with AdSense. It was always the best to start with and we got up to around \$5000 a month U.S. dollars, but it wasn't sufficient to pay for what we do. We have dedicated server hosting now, we have four full-time staff and two part-time staff. We managed to get ourselves signed up to an advertising agency which pretty much pays us 10 cents per unique browse that we deliver.

On an average day, we get about 16,000 unique browses. You can put that into dollars, I suppose. It's not too bad. It generates a fair bit of income every month. It would average out about \$20 grand a month, but that's just for the advertising. We get other sponsors and things and other stuff like that. Google is still running on the site which gives us another couple of grand a month, but we are always improving advertising. The more visitors we do, the more money we get. That's how it works.

**Yaro:** You keep saying "we." You are almost talking like a company now which is quite amazing to think about because ...

**Alborz:** Yeah, it is quite amazing

**Yaro:** I knew this when you just started it. If we go back into the history, I was actually working at a help desk at the local university here in Brisbane and that's how I first met Al. At that time, Al did not have this car blog. I was in the process of still growing Entrepreneur's Journey. That's the help desk I used to write some of my first year blog articles at. We both did night shifts and at the time. I remember the first time I mentioned blogs you actually told me you had the website domain name "myweblog."

**Alborz:** Yeah, myweblog.com, that's correct.

**Yaro:** That was pretty much the only blog-related thing you had. You did start a blog hosting service on that, right?

**Alborz:** I hadn't at that stage. Actually, you gave me the idea to do it. You said, "Why don't you put up a blog thing?" I did and it was a big hit. It was up to 10,000 users by the time it got there, but it was the sort of thing you couldn't really sell because everyone else was already doing it. It was good because the domain

name was great. It kind of started me thinking and I remember you said to me, "Why don't you start your own blog instead?" I started writing a blog on myweblog, but it was kind of a personal thing and it wasn't really going anywhere.

Then, as I kept reading your articles I thought "Wow, I like cars." So I wanted to start a car blog instead. They always tell you all the best domain names are taken. I got CarAdvice.com.au. That was a lot better than the big commercial ones and it was still available. I took it and the rest, I suppose, is history.

**Yaro:** So how long ago was that?

**Alborz:** That was in May of 2006. Really it's not that long ago.

**Yaro:** We are recording this in August in 2007, so it's not even a year and a half.

**Alborz:** That's right. It's become a phenomenal success to me. It stuck with just me for the first seven months, I think. Towards the end of 2006, I had a contact from a guy who used to run Drive TV on Channel 10. He was a motoring writer and producer. He told me to come up and meet him in his mansion in the Gold Coast. We just went from there. He said that he was really interested in the site. He loved the name, he loved what I was doing and he loved the style of the site. He also loved that I was getting noticed by big media even though, at that stage at least, it was just literally me. I was working full-time as well. I was just writing it when I had chance.

**Yaro:** When you say you were working full-time, you had a job. You weren't working your blog full-time?

**Alborz:** Yeah, that's what I mean. I was working full-time in my other job. I was actually a full-time employee and this blog was just a side thing. But that's how usually everything starts, I guess. We just went from there. There was a bit of equity swap there and it just went ballistic once we had a bit of reputation behind the site. The traffic didn't increase because of him being there, but we started getting a lot more cars and then we got so much more media attention. We started getting invited to all the car launches. Then we just hired another couple of people and, as I said, now it's ranked the sixth biggest one in Australia.

**Yaro:** Let's go back to the beginning. Most people listening to this are at the beginning still. They don't have this phenomenal success yet. So you sat down, you had your full-time job, you were writing a blog about your personal life for awhile, but then you thought "Well, maybe I'll try and do something on cars."

**Alborz:** That's right.

**Yaro:** You found the domain name CarAdvice.com.au. You thought that was a pretty good domain name, you grabbed it, set up a blog on Wordpress there and just used a theme you found on the internet.

**Alborz:** The first theme that I used was horribly ugly. I can't believe anyone actually visited the site. But you gotta start somewhere. I didn't have the time or the money to get a theme designed, so I just started on a generic theme. Didn't even have a single picture of a car. Just a normal theme. What I actually did initially was I sat down and I thought, "I love cars, I love going out, I'm a bit of an IT geek. So why don't I start three websites, each on three different topics and see how we go. I started Car Advice, I started [New Brisbane dot com](#) which is about going out in Brisbane and I started Vista Technician Dot Com as well. The other two took off to a point, but the car one had taken off so much more. Not only that, but I really love talking about cars a lot more than I love talking about Windows Vista. So I thought I'd stick with the thing I really love. I stuck with cars and I spent all my focus on it. With a bit of help from you and a bit of help from other people, this is where I got.

**Yaro:** Thank you. So you started three blogs at the same time. One was a sort of going out in Brisbane guide, the other one is about Windows Vista – which wasn't released yet; you were sort of trying to build up on the buzz about Windows Vista coming out – and a car blog. You wrote content for all three blogs at the same time. Was that sort of one article a day each?

**Alborz:** The car one was always two articles a day, just to begin with. You have to realize with stuff like cars there really is a lot to write about. A lot of people think, "Oh what should I write about? What should I write about?" But if you have a passion for what you are talking about you can't stop writing, that's the difference. It got to a point where I was doing probably one a week for my going out thing, two a day for the car one and probably one a month for the Vista one because I had lost all interest in that one. It's still not bad, it still gets a fair bit of traffic even though I haven't updated it for so long. And the New Brisbane one was overtaken by a friend of mine. She does all the posting for that now and that does considerably for what it is. Just more than 1,000 hits a day. It hasn't failed by any means, but I focused on one primary blog. That was my aim.

**Yaro:** But you sort of threw different ideas against the wall?

**Alborz:** You have to. You can't put all your eggs in one basket to begin with.

**Yaro:** How long was it taking you to produce that much content? That is, at minimum, two articles a day so...

**Alborz:** Absolutely a minimum of two articles a day. With cars there is a bit of research that goes into it. Initially when I started it I wasn't actually driving any of the cars. No one would give me any cars because no one had heard of my name before. It all started with me pretty much just reviewing the cars based on what I thought. It wasn't so much a review. It was a bit of news, a bit of review, lots of my opinion. I do tend to write a lot of my opinion into anything and I think that gave the site so much more than you would probably expect from other things. Once word got out there and people started reading what I was writing about, car companies started taking notice. As I said, I was working full-time at the time at another job – at the Uni, actually. Two articles was getting a little bit – I was doing it either during my lunch break or after work. It got to stage where you had to post so much more and I thought being a full-time blogger would be my life goal. That's where I am now.

**Yaro:** I know you were also spending a bit of time at work on your blog. It must be...

**Alborz:** Oh yes, absolutely. If you have a job that lets you blog it's the best job in the world to stay in for awhile until you get your feet grounded.

**Yaro:** Obviously now you only recently quit that job where you are now a full-time blogger, but you did manage to do both at the same time: maintain a full job and produce a lot of content.

**Alborz:** You definitely can. The way I started my blogging. I started all these blogs not to make a lot of money. I wasn't at all interested in making a lot of money. It just happened to go in the sense where I did actually make a bit of money. But I started because I love cars and I love going out and I was a bit of a tech-head. I actually did like writing about what I like to write – I love people reading my opinion and giving me comments. Even if it was negative, it doesn't matter. People disagree with you all the time. I had the passion for it and I definitely had the passion for cars.

Obviously you get the basics worked out on how to do the blog: the best things about SEO, the best way to write and making sure you use original content. All the things that you always have covered and I have gained a lot from. I think the basic thing for me was that I really did love writing and I managed to fit it in with all my work – or even at work. So it worked well for me.

**Yaro:** You were producing content and essentially that means throwing in a bit of opinion with a bit of research through the web and finding a few photos from...

**Alborz:** Press releases

**Yaro:** The press releases that the car companies put out. So that was your content. How did you manage to get initial traffic coming to your site? You put out some articles, why did people find out about your car blog?

**Alborz:** Well, there are a lot of secrets in that. I guess I can share those. The main thing is that – and it's not just for cars, it's for the majority of things – the old media still has got very little clue as to how the internet really works. They have website design and SEO experts and things, but they still don't really follow the basics. If someone is coming to search for a car, they are most likely going to type in the car name followed by the year or the other way around. The way the big publishers would do it is they would give the title of the car review some random name like "Kia goes down the hill" or "Hyundai rises." You're not going to type that into Google.

I think one of the first things I noticed was that and I just stuck onto it. I thought, "What would I type into Google if I was going to look for this car?" I would just type in the name of the car. I mean, that's pretty obvious. Plus the year and model that I was looking for and probably add road test or review at the end of it. And that's really how people would find us first in Google all the time. We just got first in Google all the time for all the major things that we did. We were getting so many organic hits from Google that people started realizing our name and going, "Oh, well, these guys have a lot of road tests." The other difference is that you gotta realize that it was just my opinion. I'm just one guy and I used to do crap on cars. You gotta tell it how it is. I think if you are honest in your blogging it's a lot better than trying to be something that you are not. You have to have your own style and I think that's really important.

**Yaro:** You got number one search rankings for car names, which is obviously powerful, sort of a long-tail process of getting traffic. My understanding of SEO is you've got some considerations like the number of incoming links you're managing to attract. Your blog was relatively new so you must have had some sandbox issue with your site not necessarily being allowed to rank highly immediately until it was a little bit established. How quickly did you get these number one rankings for car-related search phrases?

**Alborz:** I don't actually think I got sandboxed, to be honest. I did have a few other half-decent page ranked websites that I linked to the car site from. The first-page rankings obviously it didn't happen overnight. The first three months Google doesn't even know you exist and you gotta let it index your site. We used all the Wordpress plug-ins to have the sitemap. That's very essential. Also it's some different things that you always covered.

I think when we got there, I think the thing that really broke it, that I remember, was when the [Holden Epica](#) came out. I don't know, Australian readers, you probably recognize that, overseas you probably won't. It was just the car that created so much controversy. If you go type in Holden Epica right now in Google we are still the first thing that shows up. They had Holden's own website at one stage, I don't know if they've still overtaken us because I haven't checked for awhile, but what I wrote about that car was that it was an absolute piece of crap. As bad as it is, I didn't write that because I wanted to, but it really is. As it ranked number one we were getting calls from Holden to please remove the article and all sorts of different things. I'm not going through that. It's not something I do, but that's when I knew that there was something going on with the site. I had a look at all the keywords coming into the site and I realized that so many people were typing in the sort of obvious things and then we are usually the number one thing that shows up.

**Yaro:** So search traffic was by far your number one source of readers?

**Alborz:** Yep. It was about 80/20 at that stage. Now it's gone down, obviously, because we are getting a lot more hits from other things as well.

**Yaro:** I know you are an absolutely link hunter, you look for links constantly.

**Alborz:** I went on TV to get a link.

**Yaro:** Yes, exactly. We can talk about that in a moment. What did you do during these early days before you were necessarily attracting the attention of Holden because you got a number one ranking for their new car? What were you doing to build links?

**Alborz:** I read a lot about SEO and I read a lot on your blog.

**Yaro:** I know you asked me for a link and I gave you one.

**Alborz:** That's something that helped. That's the sort of thing. I joined a lot of car networks. I did a lot of adding to every sort of link thing that I could find. I spent a

lot of time doing that. Some of it was pretty pointless, some of it was good. Essentially what I really did was at one stage I was doing it all the time and I just stopped and I said, "Look, I'm just going to keep writing content and people will eventually find it and people will eventually link to it." That's exactly what happened because I was writing good stuff. I wasn't copy-pasting.

I never copy-paste. If you copy-paste it's not worth it. You have to write everything from scratch. I wrote original content that was interesting – I thought it was interesting – and people started linking to it. We got people on their blogs linking to car blogs and Australian car blog. Go type in Australian car blog in Google and it's the first thing that shows up. We just relied on people to link to us. They did because we actually had good content. I think that's one thing people forget. They spend more time trying to get links than actually writing content and I think that's just as important, if not more important.

**Yaro:** So a combination there of word of mouth – I guess it is a case of compound affects. You wrote a lot of good content; you had a small base which probably started just from a few friends telling friends. Then maybe a couple of your links brought in traffic and then you suddenly got the attention of an Autoblog or a larger blog or a larger site.

**Alborz:** Oh yes. We got covered multiple times on Autoblog because we were the definitive source for Australian car news in that sense. The other thing is we always covered the news at least two days in advance of all the big guys because they would spend two days to send it to the editor and back and forth. We had a couple of spelling mistakes maybe and one or two grammar things, but we fixed them after we first did it. We weren't going to be the most professionally edited website on the net – that wasn't really our aim. Our aim was to be the first with the news, the first to have the big story and that's what we did. You got one guy who manages to beat that without any editors because they just have so much overhead that it just doesn't work. It's an old media newspaper-style that they do it in. We took advantage of that big time.

**Yaro:** When you were just the only person running this site, how were you managing to beat people or the big sites that were releasing news quicker?

**Alborz:** The only trick to doing that was the companies would put out the press release Monday morning and we'd have the news up an hour later. The car companies would have the news up two days later or, at the very best, a day later. They would first write the article, then they would send it to their editor and then the editor would send it back. I don't know what they did. Maybe they were just slow. I always thought – it wasn't a copy-paste of the press release either. It

was my opinion added to the press release. So we had the news all the time. That was important because it gave us credibility in the sense that people would always find the first news, the latest news, on our site.

I had so many emails from people telling me, “Thanks to you I have cancelled my subscription to Wheels magazine because you guys do all the stuff and I don’t have to wait a month to read about it.” Our review was free so you didn’t have to pay for it. It was good. Lots of older generation people that love cars actually sent us compliments and said, “What would I have to pay for a magazine on the same thing on the same day as opposed to a month later?”

**Yaro:** That’s a very good sign. So, on the back of really good content, you grew your initial traffic, which then translated into search results, which then compounded into more traffic?

**Alborz:** Yep.

**Yaro:** There is certainly a technique you did to find these press releases. I know not every blogger has got the potential...

**Alborz:** Oh, I know.

**Yaro:** For example, I couldn’t really write in my area just by talking about press releases.

**Alborz:** That wasn’t all of it. I’m just giving an example. I wrote a lot of opinion pieces about the roads, the cars, anything that I had sort of something I wanted to talk about I would just write about it. I wouldn’t think about it, I would just write about it. That’s what it was. I just produced more and more content. Some people hated me, some people loved me. That’s a great way to be, I think.

**Yaro:** Once you were getting traffic, when did you decide to start monetizing? I remember I had trouble convincing you to use AdSense initially.

**Alborz:** Yaro, I refused to use AdSense. I really did. I hated the idea of having ads on the site. You know, I was a believer that ads don’t work because I’d never actually made any money from ads on any site. I had AdSense on myweblog.com but it wasn’t generating anything reasonable for me so that I should stick it on. I always thought ads were intrusive and I thought if I put on ads it would detract from readers, but I honestly just gave it a go. I started with a very sort of basic 460x80 – or whatever it is – 480x60 banner ads from AdSense in some of the

articles. In the first day it started making about \$15.00 a day and I was like, “Ah, man, that’s not bad.”

It’s nothing really, compared to what is now, but back then for a small blog \$15 a day was pretty damn good. Then it just started getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. We were starting to make a couple of hundred dollars a day towards before we took it off. That’s what we started with in AdSense for awhile. I decided to put that on after you convinced me pretty much. You said, “Just do it.” And there you go.

**Yaro:** It was tough. It was very tough. Did you try anything else? Affiliate programs?

**Alborz:** I did. I signed up for [Commission Monster](#) and all those things, but AdSense is the model for us because it’s hard to sell anything through a car site, I found. The car companies aren’t going to give commission if you sell a car. It just doesn’t really work that way.

**Yaro:** No.

**Alborz:** Or for other things. We had a “win a car” in a competition run by another agency and that sort of stuff. It worked. It worked, but the monetizing came a lot more from AdSense than anything else. So we just stuck with it.

**Yaro:** It’s worked better with AdSense. My initial reaction was that there must be some car insurance affiliate programs because insurance is usually...

**Alborz:** Yes. They are run through Commission Monster as well. It made us a bit of money, but you know how they work. They have to actually sign up before we get anything.

**Yaro:** Yeah.

**Alborz:** We weren’t really happy with the amount of money we were getting for the real estate that we were giving them. We did a trial run of two weeks this way and two weeks AdSense. AdSense doubled the income.

**Yaro:** AdSense just won out so you kept running with AdSense. Now let’s move forward to the point where you finally got someone actually asking you to buy part ownership of your blog. How did that come about?

**Alborz:** I was just checking my email and I had an email from Anthony Crawford, a director of Drive TV on Channel 10. He just sent me an email that said, “Oh, look, I’m really keen to meet up, see if you can talk about the site and see if we can help you grow it a bit more.” Initially I was a bit hesitant because it was my little baby and I didn’t want anyone to tell me to do anything else than what I was doing. But I was still keen to meet up with him.

So I drove down the Gold Coast with a friend of mine so we looked like a team. Even though it was just me. We drove down the Gold Coast, met up with him and he was just a great guy. Definitely into cars. Obviously was into cars, he had the credibility behind him and he was getting cars. He just said, “Look, we can make your site so much more noticeable if you let me come on board and we’ll see how we go from there.” I didn’t give up too much equity. It wasn’t that much at all. And that’s it.

**Yaro:** Did they want to buy the whole site from you at that point?

**Alborz:** He didn’t. I have had many offers from other companies and other people to buy the entirety of the site out at that stage. As we were growing I was very tempted many times to sell it and then just start again. But I really didn’t want to start again, especially since I love cars. I’d always wanted to write about cars and this was working so well, I felt like, “ I’ll hang out and see what else might come around.” Obviously the aim is to sell it at one stage.

**Yaro:** That wasn’t your aim early on. When did you suddenly switch over? How’d that happen?

**Alborz:** I think it started happening when the AdSense thing started hitting like \$250 a day. We were going, “Holy crap! I can quit my job now.” I think it started getting to the point where I realized that I don’t need to be doing anything else to make money. I could just actually stay at home and write about cars; which sounds like an awesome dream job. It really is. You think about what you want to do in life and this is what I really wanted to do. I always wanted to be a motoring journalist. Other than that, I didn’t have any qualifications whatsoever to be a motoring journalist, but it seems like you don’t need any qualifications.

**Yaro:** Not in today’s blogging world anyway.

**Alborz:** Right. If you have the readership then you qualify.

**Yaro:** You eventually negotiated some form of equity share and they came on board as a backer for your now business, more than just a blog?

**Alborz:** We registered CarAdvice.com.au Propriety Limited. It's an actual company now. So it works. We have people in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

**Yaro:** Explain that. How did you go about bringing on more people? You're not the only one writing content now.

**Alborz:** Oh no, man. I'm one of the last people to write content at the moment. We've got two news posters working on the site and three road testers. There's a difference. The news posters post news, the road testers actually review the cars. I'm one of the road testers so I have about two cars every week now. Which is a bad thing because I can't fit them in my garage. The car companies are dying to give us cars to drive. Most of the time it is everyday cars, but once in awhile it's a Lamborghini or an Aston Martin which is beautiful. Any car lover would understand. It's a once-in-a-lifetime dream to even sit in it let alone drive it which is very, very good, I thought.

**Yaro:** If you want to see that actually look at the sales page of Blog Mastermind dot com, you'll see Al sitting in – I think it's a Lamborghini in that picture, isn't it? That testimonial you gave me... that's one of the cars you got to test drive.

**Alborz:** If you go to Car Advice dot com, the Aston Martin road test is on the front right-hand side featured articles. You'll see a picture of me in the Aston Martin smiling.

**Yaro:** Big smile, huh? Did you bring on writers after you got partnered with this larger company or did you bring on writers before that?

**Alborz:** No, I had no one before that. These guys didn't really bring along anyone either. The way it really happened was we started getting so many emails of people going, "I write for the blah blah blah" and "I write for this blah blah blah, I'd love to contribute a couple of articles a month." So then I went, "Crap, we've actually got to read all these applications to get who is actually decent." So what we did is we put an ad on the website asking "Do you want to work for Car Advice?" and I thought we'd get five or six replies and hopefully one of them would be good. In the first 24 hours we got over 1,000 replies.

**Yaro:** Whoa.

**Alborz:** A lot of them were just everyday people saying, "Oh, please, please, please, please, please, please, can I drive a Lamborghini" and I was like, "No."



But out of that, eventually about 2,000 entries, there were six or seven people who were writing for motoring magazines, newspapers and other car websites.

**Yaro:** These are volunteers?

**Alborz:** No. Initially we asked everyone to contribute one or two articles to see what they actually do. And they did, happily. A couple of them still write for free so don't tell them that. Hopefully they don't listen to this. The thing you gotta realize is some people will still do it for free because they love to write about cars and they found our site to be the perfect medium to tell the world about it. We got two motoring journalists out of that who write for us now exclusively pretty much. They probably do four road tests a month. They go to all the car launches and write about them that very night, which still puts us ahead of everyone else because no one seems to do any work after a car launch. They all wait for a couple of days until they get home. At the moment my job is pretty much just reading the site. That's what I do most of the time. I write the occasional road test, but it's kind of self-maintaining at the moment. Which is very good.

**Yaro:** So you're no longer a writer, you're more like a head editor?

**Alborz:** As I said, I still write the car reviews because I still get the cars

**Yaro:** Right, you get two cars a week.

**Alborz:** I actually want to do that because I love cars. It is something I want to do, not something I have to do. I get about two cars a week, sometimes three. I just write about them, but the news and stuff is taken care of by other people.

**Yaro:** How many posts a day are going up on your blog currently?

**Alborz:** The average is about six to seven; it gets up to fifteen some days, depending on how much news there is. That's a lot. Some of the stuff goes off the front page by the end of the day which I suppose is the good and bad things with this. There is so much to cover every day on cars that you need to do it. The difference between us and the big sites is that the big sites would have three news pieces every two days while we would have twenty in that time.

The other difference is we cover everything. It doesn't matter if it's that significant or not. If it is someone releasing an update to a model, we cover it. It's that simple. You say this company has released this variant of this model. That's it. It takes like ten minutes to write up and a week later someone will be looking for it on Google. That's the key. If you cover everything – not so much garbage – but if

you cover the things that are useful to people, not to everyone, but your niche market of people, I think it's very helpful.

**Yaro:** How have you managed to handle the growth? You send out twenty posts a day, all these writers writing for you – there must have been a time when you were just inundated with activities you had to do.

**Alborz:** Oh yeah. At some stages when we had one or two news posters and one of them would be sick that day or another would be doing some car thing, then news would slow down to about five posts a day. But the thing was, we always just covered it the next day. Even if it was a day late, we covered it and we're still ahead of the rest. The important thing we found was it wasn't so much posting twenty news items a day, it was more important to make sure that what we do post isn't just garbage or isn't just a media press release copy-paste. We really did actually rewrite everything that we wanted to talk about and that's how it worked.

**Yaro:** When it came to monetization, you no longer use AdSense exclusively. How did that come about with the change? Most bloggers I know personally – I don't have access to that advertising network that you mentioned earlier on. How did you get that access?

**Alborz:** Well, they actually came and asked us. We had AdSense running on the site and it was doing good, as I said. It was making a fairly decent amount of money. I thought it was good. Then one of the guys that had bought into the site, a guy that was part of that company, he said we should really look at getting something else – exclusive deals where they pay per visitor a lump sum as opposed to click-throughs. We got in contact with a couple of different advertisers. We had a few interviews and we signed up one advertising company that exclusively works on the car sites. They went out and they signed up deals with Hyundai, Toyota and all sorts of things.

One of the main things that they told us at first was, "You know, you realize you have to be in the advertisers' interest and not write bad things about their cars." And I said, "No. We are never going to do that. We aren't gonna back anything that's crap." And they said, "All right." So they went back and forward and back and forward and that's how it was going to be. They wanted to advertise and I said, "This is how it's going to be." And they said, "All right. Fine." Because, you know, that was part of our credibility. We weren't going to give it up for a bit more money or something like that.

**Yaro:** Journalistic integrity, huh?

**Alborz:** You gotta have it because that's the only thing that's left between big media and small media. That's what bloggers are known for. That's why blogging power is so important, I think. Because people actually believe you when you write something as opposed to "Oh that looks like someone has paid that guy to write that." That's what I work toward. I mean, if you don't give cars bad reviews when they are bad, then what's the point of reviewing it? I'm not trying to sell the cars, so why can't I say it's bad?

**Yaro:** It is a difficult juggle between sponsors and...

**Alborz:** It's a very difficult juggle. It has been a couple of times. At the moment, for example, if you visit the site we have Hyundai as the main advertiser on the site. They wanted exclusivity and we gave them that. They recently released a really, really crap car. And I drove it and I said it was actually really crap. I got an email from them saying, "You want to take it for another drive?" And I said, "No, not really. I really do think it's not a very good car." And that was the end of it. What can you do? It's important to be honest, I think and that's probably the main thing.

**Yaro:** What's the future? What are you trying to get to now? You said you do plan to sell it, but if you did sell it you'd no longer be doing your dream job anymore.

**Alborz:** There are a lot of plans. As I said, it got to a stage where I ended up on TV promoting the site, in a way. They had an interview with me on TV which was quite interesting; I'd never been on TV before. Then, again, another time just very recently. At the moment the aim is – the site is just about to be redesigned and we are moving all our focus to video. We have our own video equipment, about \$10,000 worth of video equipment now. We have already started, but we are going to do it on a much bigger scale of filming all the cars we get. So that we have actual video of the cars driving around. It seems like a really big job and people think that to film the cars, you have to have a film crew. But it's really not that hard. It's just a \$2,000 camera, everyday sort of house camera. All you need is web quality and we just put it on You Tube. That's the best way to do it is put it on You Tube. Don't bother hosting it yourself because not only do you get the credit from other people who would never visit your site hearing your name and seeing your logo, but it's also free hosting.

**Yaro:** So clearly there's a lot more going on now than just Alborz writing.

**Alborz:** Oh yeah. There's so much going on. We have monthly meetings. I fly down to Sydney all the time. There's a lot of push from the other guys to drop the word "blog" out of our title. They want it not to be a blog in a sense, but I said no. We have so much support from the blogging community and I thank them for that. A lot of people, when they talk about a car, they link to us because we are a blog and they mention us because we are a blog. I think it is very important to stick to your roots because that's what made us. We made it as a blog and now we're in the six figures so why should we change now?

**Yaro:** That's a pretty great rags-to-riches story. It's definitely a rare story.

**Alborz:** As I said, I'm still amazed that I'm sitting at home right now and not at work and I'm talking to you as opposed to fixing someone's computer.

**Yaro:** What would you recommend are the key ingredients for people who are listening to this who even want to get 10% of the sort of success you are having at the moment?

**Alborz:** It hasn't all been great. We had some huge disasters. We got banned from Google at one stage – that was a disaster. Our hits went down from 10,000 a day back to like five or six hundred which was a massive disaster at the time. The important thing was we just kept at it. We never gave up. We always kept writing good articles and obviously Google "unbanned" us. I don't know why they banned us, that's a whole different story. The important thing was we just kept it up. I never lost faith in the site because at the end of the day all I was really trying to achieve was to tell people how much I love cars. If I had the passion for it – which I did – and I think that's the important thing. Don't write about something because you think it's going to make you money. Write about something you actually find interesting. And if it happens to make you money that's great.

**Yaro:** Very cool, Al. I was going to ask you, what's the key to growing traffic and what's the key to making a lot of money, but I think you just summed up the answer to that. It's to not worry too much about traffic or worry too much about money.

**Alborz:** I mean, that night we got banned from Google – my girlfriend, she recalled this for me – I couldn't sleep. I was just sitting there thinking, "Oh crap." We just dropped about 80% in traffic. And that's how it was for about three weeks. We were completely off all Google rankings. There was not even a mention of us. Then three weeks later we got back exactly to number one. I think they even boosted it up further a little bit for some of the things we weren't

number one for. It was three weeks of hell, but I just put it out of my mind and I just kept writing and writing and writing. We had a lot of readers that were going to come to the site every day regardless, so the comments were always there.

One thing I do have to mention is that every blog article usually has comments. And that was one thing we really put in the face of all the other companies who were too scared to have comments on their articles and things. In the one year that we've had this site up both [Car Scout](#) and [Drive](#) now have a comment systems enabled. I would really like to say that I don't think they would have had that had we not been around. The way they still do it is ridiculous because you post a comment and 24 hours later it gets published which is not how it works.

**Yaro:** They're not quite catching on to the whole interactivity and community of a blog.

**Alborz:** They have a lot of liability. If something says something bad then they are actually massive big companies who probably care a lot about their advertisers first with what they do. As opposed to us; we do it with passion and the money just happens when people tune in.

**Yaro:** The two worlds are definitely colliding there.

**Alborz:** Yeah.

**Yaro:** You have to have the legal protection of the corporate world as well as the freedom of the blogging world.

**Alborz:** We've had some legal harassment from those guys as well, telling us to do this and do that, trying to boss us around. At the end of the day, the problem is that all of the big companies do not understand how a blog works. If you say something is bad, it's not actually illegal to say something is bad because it's your opinion. They don't seem to understand the concept of YouTube. I've had emails from people at – I won't name the websites – saying "Oh, we think that you're posting illegal stuff on You Tube." I reply to them and I say, "This video is on You Tube because someone put it on You Tube. So if you want someone to remove it, why don't you get into contact with You Tube?" A car website putting something on YouTube, like an overseas car or something on You Tube, asking for people to embed it on to their website, but they don't seem to understand the concept.

As I said, you shouldn't worry yourself about anything except producing decent content. The SEO is obviously important. You need to have decent, basic



understanding of how to do it. Don't come up with fancy names for the title of the post which mean nothing to anyone looking for whatever you are writing about. Basic things you follow, but apart from that, the key is just to write good content and I think that's what's really important.

**Yaro:** Thanks for joining me on the call today Alborz and good luck with the continued success of your blog.

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