

Episode 23: Our Year Wrapped: 2021 + What's Next

Lauren 0:01

Welcome to the Launch Your Blog Biz podcast. I'm your host, Lauren McManus, I used to be a full time tax accountant and CPA with a whole lot of limiting beliefs and "I can't's" whenever I thought about starting my own business. Fast forward a few months, and I quit my job after starting and growing my first blog to six figures in just a year. This is my space to share and yours to listen and grow, about how to build and scale your own blogging business and design a life on your terms. Let's get started.

Lauren 0:35

Hello, and welcome back to the podcast. I hope that my sound quality is okay today. I actually just flew back from Florida to Germany a couple days ago, and my luggage is still lost from my flight, they just have no idea where it is. And my microphone was in that suitcase. So I'm on my regular Apple headphones today. So hopefully the quality is going to be okay.

Lauren 1:03

So I feel like 2020 was the year that all the bad stuff happened, there was like #2020, something else has happened. And I gotta say 2020 was pretty great to me personally, I don't have much to complain about and business was pretty great. But man, these last few weeks of 2021 really knocked me down pretty hard.

Lauren 1:24

I've spent the last few weeks in the states, in Florida, at my parents house. And both of my parents have been in the hospital. My dad actually for a stem cell transplant, and my mom because she's had some heart and lung issues for a while. And my mom died last week. And God, it still just feels very weird to even say that out loud. And I'm still trying to kind of understand what that means, especially because I live in Germany. So I feel very displaced from an already living so far away.

Lauren 1:54

But it's been a tough few weeks, I have not been much focused on work. And you know, I often am a few weeks ahead of time recording these podcast episodes. My ideal length of time is to actually record three months ahead of time. And we have been there at certain parts of this year. But I can tell you right now that I am recording this just a few days before this episode is going to go live because I am very behind schedule on a lot of stuff. But that's just how I am getting through the end of 2021. And leaving myself just a few days to spare to really think pretty hard about what I want to do in the new year. And anyway, I digress.

Lauren 2:34

We are not yet talking about the new year. In this episode we're going to be talking more about this year. And what happened and, oof, what a year it has been y'all. It's really been another year of big changes. The coronavirus pandemic really had a major impact on the world in so many different areas. And honestly, I think that we're still going to be in a period of adjustment for quite a while.

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Lauren 3:02

It has changed the way that we live and the way that we work and the way that we communicate with each other. And I can say that that last one has been a really big one. I've noticed it in so many different industries. I've read articles on it recently, and you know, at the hospital near my parents house in St. Petersburg, Florida, there's actually a new sign up on the front of the doors. And it's been etched in as in semi permanent fixture these words that state that the hospital employees have a right to be treated with dignity and respect at all times.

Lauren 3:37

And when I read that, I just thought, are you serious? Is this what it has come to that we have to actually explicitly state this on the door of a hospital, especially in a place like a hospital word, so many people are putting their lives on the line, you know, during the pandemic, but also just generally to take care of other people for a living. And that just absolutely blew my mind.

Lauren 4:02

But at least in the States, this is the world that we live in, I guess. I was reading an article about how it's very much seen in the restaurant industry right now. People are just kind of speaking with a sense of entitlement and just honestly treating others like crap. In the name of you know, "this is my freedom, I have the right to do this." And ugh, man. I just think that's not okay.

Lauren 4:25

But anyway, y'all. My point is that things have changed pretty significantly over the last almost two years now since the pandemic started. And y'all the online business world has changed a lot too. There's been an increase in interest in online courses, the explosion of TikTok, so much has changed. And in this episode, I'm going to give you a little bit more insight into what this year looked like for us--some of our ups, our downs, our changes, and what's on the horizon for us for 2022.

Lauren 4:59

All right. So what has been going on this year at Create and Go?

Lauren 5:04

Well, starting at the beginning of the year, we launched a podcast. This has been a really fun learning process for me. And honestly, the podcast has really created this awesome outlet for me to be able to reach my audience in a different way. And I got to say that too, putting down my thoughts this way, or maybe not putting them down, but actually speaking them out loud, and in this conversational style, you know, talking to you to my audience, it really has also helped me truly understand more about my business and where I want to take it. Especially getting to interview people over the last few episodes, you know, it has definitely taken me in a few different directions and got my brain moving a little bit in different ways. And it's just been so amazing.

Lauren 5:55

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And first of all, it has been a huge expansion of my own personal skills. As I've mentioned a lot on this podcast, I am not the best public speaker. And I can already tell a major difference between my episodes in the very beginning to my episodes now. I'm still working a lot on speaking slower and articulating more, but I can already tell that I've come a long way. And honestly, it's just been a really fun project for me to practice putting myself out there, because I am someone that really likes to stay in my comfort zone, and honestly to the detriment of my business at times. So this has been a fun exercise in really getting me outside of my comfort zone, and tackling a big project like this for my business.

Lauren 6:44

And along that path, I did take a course on podcasting, because I didn't want to try to navigate these waters on my own. I wanted to make sure I did it in the right way, and then I did it in the least amount of time possible, because it still was a pretty time consuming project in the beginning. And one of the reasons that we created this podcast was really to create a buffer against other changing algorithms.

Lauren 7:07

So we've seen Pinterest go up and down a lot. And we have less of a reliance on Pinterest now than we used to. So that's part of why we expanded more into Google SEO and into podcasting. Why we also chose to get into YouTube a while back. So just generally starting a new traffic source like this is a great way to diversify what you do, reach different people, and give yourself a buffer from other algorithm changes.

Lauren 7:36

And the other reason for starting it was that y'all were asking for it. We had so many students of ours, asking us to start podcasts, and just really telling us that it was a platform that they really wanted to hear more from us on. And you know, for all these reasons, this is why I decided to start the podcast.

Lauren 7:54

And again, it has been such a great decision. It's still a bit too early to dive too heavily into the analytics, because so many other things have been changing this year. So it's difficult to say really how much value it is bringing to the bottom line. So for sales, but I can just say for me personally, and just from some of the reviews that we've gotten from our students, I know that's 100% the right decision.

Lauren 8:20

And so definitely want to get more into the podcasting game. We're going to be doing more interviews next year, and also increasing our own training in our courses and whatnot to teach ya'll more about podcasting as it becomes a bigger part of what we do.

Lauren 8:38

Next, another big thing that we did this year is that we launched an SEO course. And not only that, but this is the first course that we launched where we weren't the primary teachers. So

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Noah Riggs, who is part of our Create and Go team here and has really taken over on our YouTube channel this year as well. He has actually created most of this SEO course. He did build it together with Alex, the outline. But if you're in the SEO course you know that he's primarily the one teaching it.

Lauren 9:09

And that was pretty exciting for us to be able to launch something like this under our brand name that wasn't created entirely by us. I can say that that was a little bit difficult for me, because I do tend to be a bit of a micromanager. But it turned out to be a really awesome partnership that we have with Noah and honestly it's I think it's part of the way of the future for us at Create and Go because it allows us to teach more to our students without us having to be the complete expert on absolutely everything.

Lauren 9:42

Because as I tell y'all you know often in our courses, if you're an expert on everything you're going to be an expert in nothing, right? I can't be a complete expert in all things SEO, all things podcasting, all things Pinterest, all things do YouTube. I just don't have the capacity as an individual to be able to do this. And so far it has been myself and Alex being able to teach y'all. But this allowed us to really expand into a different area, and teach y'all some really, really important things that we've been implementing in our business. But you know, and Noah has actually been, you know, our SEO manager and helping us do that.

Lauren 10:17

So that was kind of how that came about. And this is something that we want to explore in the future, potentially creating a YouTube course or maybe other courses, but through partnerships and having other people help us teach them. So we will see how that goes. But so far, it's been a really, really great experience.

Lauren 10:36

Now, moving on to some of the not so great things about 2021. We definitely saw lower sales than we have really seen before. And while this was hard to deal with at times, I also know that we weren't unique in going through this, in that I talked to people in our industry, people in similar industries and people in very different industries. And I was surprised and actually somewhat happy to find out that many people were seeing lower sales since the pandemic started to ease. And our business definitely fluctuates, we have times of the year that are higher than others. And it's not like we have been on the up and up every single month since we started. That's definitely not true, we have some years that are better than others. But this year, in particular, we did see a bit of a sharper decline. And honestly, y'all, I think that it is for so many different reasons. And there's not really a way to be able to pinpoint that to one thing.

Lauren 11:44

First of all, I think that we're seeing a huge post pandemic swing, because we had our best month ever during the pandemic. And I think that with, you know, the pandemic, we saw so many people leaving their jobs and changing careers, everybody was home watching online

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courses, because they had so much time on their hands, right. And I now think that we're kind of seeing a swing back from that, in that things were super, super, super high, and now they are getting much lower.

Lauren 12:14

People have been spending way more time outside this summer, since you know locked down to the restrictions eased. There's definitely way more competition because many people created a lot of new things during the pandemic, there are more entrepreneurs, more people teaching things, selling courses.

Lauren 12:31

I think there's also definitely some ad fatigue going on. We do run paid ads to funnels that sell our products. And I don't know about y'all, but I myself in super ad fatigued right now, I am so tired of seeing an ad about absolutely everything on Instagram and Facebook or YouTube, whatever, when I watch TV, when I do anything now they're just ad absolutely everywhere.

Lauren 12:57

And I think that people are starting to get a little bit tired of it. And we're getting to the point where, you know, people have stopped buying absolutely everything that got marketed to them on Instagram, because they realize that this is always going to be here, there's always going to be the next new product in your face all the time. And I think last year, people bought and bought and bought because they were home and they were bored. But this year, I think that some people are trying to find a bit more of an adjustment in the world and figure things out, and they're just buying a little bit less stuff.

Lauren 13:33

Anyway, that's my hypothesis. I've read a little bit about it too. But it's also just how I feel. But anyway, it's just another guess about 2021. And there are also a lot more people in remote work right now already. So maybe fewer people are jumping over to start an online business because their job is now remote anyway and they already get to work from home. Now that is also in fluctuation because so many people now are having to go back to the office now. Many people are quitting their jobs because they don't want to go back to the office. But my point is, is that there are so many different factors at play here.

Lauren 14:08

And I started out the episode talking about some of these random crazy cultural shifts and stuff just to let y'all know that we are still in a period of flux. Almost two years later, things are still not totally normal. I know they are getting to be a bit more back in the States but I can tell you all in December in Germany, it is absolutely not back to normal whatsoever. We're not going to lock down it looks like, but Amsterdam has locked down and there are still quarantines set up for people traveling from the UK, and in Europe coronavirus is still absolutely thriving everywhere, and we have lockdowns and masks and all kinds of stuff. So life is definitely not normal over here, and I know as much as the States wants to be back to normal, it's not quite yet. I think we're all still trying to find our footing from the pandemic.

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Lauren 15:01

And the next thing I want to talk about with what's been going on this year is ads and webinars. So because of these fluctuations in some of these declines in revenues, we've been working really hard on creating new ads to generate more traffic to our website. And this has been a really tough experience for me too, or a tough project, I guess I should say. Because with these ads, we've been working on webinars, and because webinars are video, on camera, I don't love public speaking, it is really outside of my comfort zone.

Lauren 15:38

And, you know, I'm pretty comfortable with teaching and what I'm talking about, because I'm teaching the same concepts and strategies that I'm teaching in our courses, and that I teach on this podcast. But in terms of wrapping it up and packaging it up to sell something at the end, being a little bit more heavy on the marketing and the sales side... This has definitely been a bit more outside of my comfort zone. And I've had to really work at the messaging to be able to try to sell without feeling like I'm selling too hard. Because I just don't like that, and I never want to be in a place where I am trying to overly convince somebody they need something they don't want. That's absolutely not what I want. So that's definitely been quite the trial and error. We have created quite a few webinars and haven't quite found what's really going to be the next big thing for us.

Lauren 16:33

And, you know, I'm going to transition now into talking about what's on the horizon for us in 2022. Because that's kind of related to the ads and webinars. It has led us onto this path of really evaluating the products that we have, and wondering if it's time for a restructure. Now, it wouldn't be the first time. We used to have four courses, right now we only have three, and we had one called make money blogging for beginners. And we actually created that later on. And then a few months after that, we actually absorbed that into our main Launch Your Blog Biz course.

Lauren 17:10

So we have created additional courses and restructured before, it's not the first time. But you know, sometimes we do get a little bit stuck in our comfort zone. And in that place, we don't evolve as quickly or, you know, as we should. And, you know, actually on the latest episode with Natalie Bacon, she and I got on this discussion of, you know, answering this question of, "If you could do it all over again today, would you do anything differently?"

Lauren 17:39

And my answer to that is honestly, not many things. Because the courses that we sell still work, they still are what we are using today for our businesses. But I do know that Alex and I sometimes getting this rhythm of fear of change and what we call breaking things. So when things are selling, when things are working, we don't like to disrupt that balance to try out new things. It's something that we used to do very often in the beginning before we had really found

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our groove. But now that we found it and things are working, we can be hesitant sometimes to make big changes, because we don't want to break anything.

Lauren 18:15

Now we have affiliate programs for our courses. So restructuring our courses is not something that we take lightly, because that would require a lot of work on our end, as well as a lot of communication to our affiliates and having them change what they're doing as well.

Lauren 18:30

But this is something that is probably on the horizon for us in the next year. We're going to be doing some restructuring and things won't be drastically different. They'll likely again, just be restructured, but we are talking about potentially discontinuing the course, maybe creating a new one. So I'm really excited about these things, because I am really left at a place here where I am wondering what is the next step. And I want to make sure that I am continuing to evolve with my business.

Lauren 18:59

And I'm going to leave y'all with a few questions here to think about because we are going to talk more about this in the next episode. But make sure that you are evolving with your business. Make sure that you're asking yourself this question: "If you could do it all over again today, would you do anything differently?"

Lauren 19:18

Think about your comfort zone and ask yourself, "have you been holding back on yourself in any ways?" And then ask yourself, "what is the next big move?" Is it getting started? If you haven't even started yet, well, think about that first step. Is it to start driving more traffic? Is it to start on a new platform, like I did with podcasting? Is it to make more money, or make money, period? Is it to restructure something, whatever these things are, whatever your next big move is, make sure that you prioritize it in the coming year. And we'll talk more about how to do that in the next episode.

Lauren 19:54

But I think that is where I'm going to wrap it up today. I hope that it was helpful for y'all to kind of get a little more insight into what's going on in our world. And, of course, now that I have this podcast and this awesome platform to be able to, you know, keep y'all in the loop about what's going on, I will be informing y'all throughout the year on what's going on. As soon as we get our courses restructured and decide on what that's even going to look like, we will be telling y'all. And I'm just really excited for it.

Lauren 20:23

So every year brings something new and something different. But I am super excited for the next year, and I hope that you are, too. I hope that everyone has a safe and happy new year, and I will talk to you soon.

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Lauren 20:39

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