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Interview with Matt Moog from Viewpoints Network



Adrian Bye: Today, I'm here talking with Matt Moog from Viewpoints. Matt was actually formerly the CEO of Cool Savings and helped drive CoolSavings through a lot of its changes. Matt, welcome to the call and I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Matt Moog: Thank you very much.

Adrian Bye: Do you want to tell us a little bit about your history – who you are, where you grew up, where you came from and all that sort of stuff before we go onto what you are doing?

Matt Moog: Sure. I guess, I'll give you a little bit of a personal background first and then, over on the business side. You can interrupt me at any point.

I was born in Upstreet New York, lived all over the East Coast, spent seven years in the hills of North Carolina, went to college in George Washington University in DC and after several years of working for Microsoft right out of college, moved with my fiancé at the time to Chicago, kept working for Microsoft and have been here for the last 14 years. After four years at Microsoft in business-development roles, the last couple working on both the

launch of MSN and their internet platform, I left and joined a couple of, actually, people I was working with as customers who had launched a company as you said, called CoolSavings where I joined as the fifth employee – the VP of Sales and was there ultimately, for 10 years. The first five, I ran sales and marketing, and just as we went public, I took over as the President and CEO, and ran it as a public company for five years until we took CoolSavings private at the end of 2005. In the mid-2006, I had left CoolSavings after a decade there and started a new company called Viewpoints Network.

We have a ratings and reviews platform which you can see at viewpoints.com which we're both building our own destination website and building co-brands for partners and licensing the technology so it's a multifaceted business model in the ratings and reviews space, now bringing us up to date.

Adrian Bye: So, here you are today.

I want to ask you some questions about that, if I may for what you've done in the past.

Matt Moog: Sure.

Adrian Bye: First thing I noticed on your bio is that you did a presentation of Internet Explorer 3 with Bill Gates.

Matt Moog: Yes.

Adrian Bye: How did that go? What was it like presenting with him? What's he like?

Matt Moog: Well, I'll tell you the history there is that – very early on in my career...I mean, I was 23 or 24 at the time...I had heard rumours that Microsoft was developing a platform to compete with AOL and the guy that was working on it had previously been Bill Gates' technical assistant which was a pretty plum job. His name was Russ Siegleman. I sort of got in to see Russ and somebody who was working with him – a guy named George Mange and worked my way into being in one of the first business development functions for MSN. That was back in the middle of 2005 and if you remember, there was a famous memo that Bill Gates wrote after visiting Europe called the Internet Tidalwave where...

Adrian Bye: Two thousand five or 1995?

Matt Moog: I'm sorry. Nineteen ninety-five, yes.

That was right around the launch of Windows 95 as well that includes August 1995.

I took the job as Business Development Manager for MSN but it very quickly transformed into Microsoft realising that proprietary online platforms were not the future of online services and that really, an open standards internet was.



I started basically, to evangelise and train the Microsoft sales force how to sell internet technologies against folks like Sun, Netscape and others that were prominent in the space. In the process of doing that, it developed a comfort and an expertise in the area of the sort of burgeoning internet technology set and as a result, was told on to give a number of demonstrations to board of directors of a company that we worked with or large conferences, etc. Occasionally, those were with either Steve Ballmer or Bill Gates.

All of my exposure to Bill Gates over the years is that he's even better than most people think he is. He has an incredible ability to absorb information both on a very, very deep, technical level and a macro business level, to analyse where the whole world is going, figure it out and those kind of things. So, it was always a lot of fun...he's a legend, obviously...to be with him, be on stage with him, have him introduce me, do the demos and all that kind of stuff. But, it was the fun part of the job.

Adrian Bye: Was he easy to work with? Was he hard to work with? How actually was he?

Matt Moog: As you might expect, he was very intense, direct but not difficult. I mean, I was never in a position where he was ripping plans apart or anything else like that. I was just making sure the presentation was going smoothly that we were giving together.

Adrian Bye: Right. Alright.

Another point you touched on which was really interesting is CoolSavings, that you were there. Did you take the company public?

Matt Moog: Yes, I was there. I ran sales and marketing so I was the Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing at the exact time that we went public and then six months later, I took over as the President and COO. Then six months after that, I took over as the CEO.

Adrian Bye: Did it go public via an IPO or a reverse merger?

Matt Moog: Yes, the traditional IPO.

Adrian Bye: Okay.

Some companies in the internet space today are considering going public via reverse mergers which seems like an interesting option. But then, you've been in a public that was public and then, had reasons to go private. Can you talk about why you did that?

Matt Moog: Well, there were several reasons. I mean, one is that when the bubble burst at the end of 2000, CoolSavings was in a very difficult position – frankly, near bankruptcy and insolvency. We brought in a strategic investor called Landmark Communications which bought more than half the stock and then over the years, continued to buy the rest of it eventually to the point where there was such a small amount of outstanding limit – it didn't make sense for us to be a public company. Landmark Communications is a multibillion dollar, privately-held media company and we were a public entity, sitting under their private corporation.

But, I'd also say that the expense, the time and the distraction of being a public company is really not worth it in my opinion. If you're at least a \$100 million business on a very fast growth pace to be at \$250 million a year – if you're anything less than that, I don't think...my personal thing...it's worth being public unless of course that's the only way that you can raise money. But, it comes with a lot of heartache and distraction that in my opinion, you're better off staying private and raising money from elsewhere.

Adrian Bye: That is really interesting because there are quite a few people in our community who suggest that reverse merges are a good idea and can be a way for \$10 million and \$20 million companies to raise money and kind of move forward. The suggestion is that companies like AOL and MCI got their start through reverse mergers and were able to do acquisitions and kind of fuel themselves this way. You have an opposite viewpoint.

Matt Moog: Yes. I mean, I'm not an investing banker, I'm not an expert in these kind of things so I've not been in all the situations that people might be in. But for our specific situation, it didn't help us to be public. We didn't have the liquidity. We didn't get the premium pricing.

The vast majority of money managers are not at all interested in companies that are that small. So you have all the regulatory issues and options compliance and all those kind of things – disclosure issues that make it difficult to get things done.

I mean, doing acquisitions or other kind of things like that are much more difficult when you're public because of the required disclosures.

Adrian Bye: The number I've heard is that a CEO can take up about 30% of their time if they're a public company. I guess what you're saying – also for a smaller company, that's going to be a much bigger drag on the company overall.

Matt Moog: Yes. You have your financial staff doing it and you have to read through the Qs and the Ks and all of those kinds of things. Unless you're a large company on your way to being a \$1 billion company, you're irrelevant to a vast majority of people who have large amounts of money to deploy in a public stock market.

Adrian Bye: When you're talking about a \$100 million company on its way to be a \$250 million company, is that a company that you're talking about taking public via an IPO or would you consider the option of a reverse merger?

Matt Moog: I frankly don't know that much about reverse mergers so I can't comment on one versus the other.

Adrian Bye: Okay.



Matt Moog: If I was a \$100 million company and I was growing at 30%, 40% or 50% a year, I was nicely cash flow positive, I really locked in a business model, I knew exactly how to grow, and I just needed more cash and more visibility, I would consider going public. But on the other hand, private equity if you really need a capital is also good avenues.

Adrian Bye: For cashing out, would you consider because IPOs are pretty hard to do now so your purpose for cashing out on a company would be more towards an acquisition order.

Matt Moog: Yes, I'm personally not of the mindset that you should build a company with the idea that you're going to have some major exit event and cash out. I would prefer to build a company that is very profitable and is sustainably profitable that in itself represents a future flow of cash for the investors and for the owners, and not think about it as – we need to build it and flip it.

I know I'm different from a lot of entrepreneurs out there who try to figure out how to build something with the eye towards selling it within two, three, four or five years.

Viewpoints Network is not being built to slip.

Adrian Bye: You're one of those old-fashioned guys. That sounds like the right approach to it. Amazing! Anyway, most direct marketing type companies are built by cash flow anyway so that's an interesting thought.

Matt Moog: Yes. At the end of the day, most of these are sold because the owner doesn't think that the future cash flows from the business are reliable, predictable or scalable enough to make it worthwhile staying in. Otherwise, can you really redeploy your case? It's also a risk mitigation strategy as well or a time mean. I mean, those are lots of different reasons.

But right now, I'm very comfortable with the idea that we will continue to run and hold Viewpoints Network for a very long time.

Adrian Bye: Alright.

Tell us about Viewpoints. I wasn't familiar with the site. I went and looked at it. You've got a pretty high Alexa at 44,000 so it seems like there's a lot of activity happening on the site. Can you tell us about what it is and what it does?

Matt Moog: Yes. I mean, I'll give you a little bit of history, too.

Back in the middle of 2005, I started looking around at companies that at the time were either very new or they were growing quickly – things like MySpace, craigslist, Flickr, etc and I was just amazed. At the time, CoolSavings was over 10 million unique users but I was amazed at how quickly these other companies were growing based on either user-generated contents or social networking. Most importantly, they were doing it, not by paying for all the traffic but by getting it organically through viral marketing, SEO or other things.

I thought that CoolSavings ought to get into the business and started sort of thinking about ways that we would do that. Based on my knowledge of what advertisers wanted in virtually every case that we worked for them, they were looking for in-marketing consumers – consumers who were actively considering making a purchase who have high click-through and high conversion rate, and who would end up being loyal customers for their businesses. That's where we really struck onto the idea of building a ratings and reviews platform that would both be very organic and very viral in its nature but of course, ratings and reviews...

Adrian Bye: Is that your opinion 10 years later?

Matt Moog: I'm sorry.

Adrian Bye: Is that like Epinions 10 years later?

Matt Moog: Yes, I think that's one way to look at it. I mean, we obviously think, we're very different from Epinion – a heck of a lot better.

But, yes, I think for people who are aware of what Epinions is and how it's grown – at one point, they had nine million uniques and they've been declining for almost every month for the last five years and haven't really taken advantage of some of the more modern social networking strategies. In my opinion, they haven't really listened to their users or their reviewers to the extent that they should and just sort of let it atrophy.

I saw an opportunity to create a new reviews platform that both very wide and very deep. What I mean by that is very wide in that you can review anything – any product, service or business that you choose to on Viewpoints and very deep is that in doing so, you develop very rich profiles of the reviewers that are the core of a social reviews platform and ultimately lead to a very viral and community-oriented experience. So, it's a new approach to an old problem but we clearly think it produces better results and it has more scale potential.

I think we've seen that I mean, the site's only been live now for six months. We're already at a half a million users and growing to like...

Adrian Bye: Your Alexa rate is 44,000 after six months.

Matt Moog: Yes. I don't follow Alexa much. I look more to things like QuadCast, Compete, Hitwise and things like that.

But, we're happy with where we are in terms of traffic. We're expecting to break into the several million this year and we won't stop until we get over the 10 million mark – is really what our goal is.

Adrian Bye: What's really interesting then is that you came from a lead-generation company and so, you're knowing where the monetisation point is. You came at this problem of where can you get the user when they're about to become a customer and that's what got you to the point of review site. It wasn't like Epinions is out there, it's dated and we're going to knock it off. You came out from where's the revenue and we're going to build a company around that. Is that correct?

Matt Moog: I think that's exactly where to look at it, yes.

Adrian Bye: Interesting. Okay.

What kind of methods are you using to sort of drive traffic on the site?

Matt Moog: If there's one thing I've learned at CoolSavings...we must have spent \$200 million on online marketing...is that there's never a single silver bullet. You have to know how to execute across all the various disciplines so it's everything from SEN to SEO, viral, word of mouth, affiliate marketing, CPA, CPM and CPC. It's every tool in the bag that's available basically.

Adrian Bye: Okay. Now, that's really interesting because I've worked with some companies and one thing that companies really would like to be able to do is do viral marketing on a site where you can also do media-buying. That can be a very, very difficult problem to solve because the site that you can do viral marketing for where people want to recommend things, there often isn't enough dollars behind the business model to be able to do both viral marketing and media-buying. It's either friends want to refer each other and therefore, that's the way to drive traffic or you can go out and buy media.

Yes, it sounds like you're doing both.

Matt Moog: Yes, yes, yes. I mean, reviews are an unusual kind of viral content and if you look at a lot of the research, you'll say that reviews are actually the most popular form of user-generated content out there.

So if I talk to you about a party I went to last night or who my girlfriend is, etc, that's one form of viral, user-generated content. But if I tell you about a great vacation I just went on, the hotel I stayed in, the restaurant I stayed in and those are all things that are actionable that you could go ahead and buy or make a reservation at, etc then it becomes a different kind of environment.

We're clearly trying to organise the information on Viewpoints in a way that really helps consumers make smarter decisions but in doing so helps advertisers get good quality customers.

Adrian Bye: That is really interesting. Which form of driving traffic is working better, the paid media or the viral media?



Matt Moog: The viral – that’s intentional. I mean if you do it correctly, viral and SEO can be significant drivers of traffic.

Adrian Bye: ...meaning you have a popular site. You’ve then basked out what a customer’s worth. I mean, are you funded? To be able to go and do media-buying on that, are you able to do media-buying at a positive cash flow or is that actually you like burning some investment money?

Matt Moog: That’s probably a private question.

Adrian Bye: Okay.

Matt Moog: Let’s put it this way. It runs against my core grain to buy media at a negative margin. It’s not something that you want to do for very long if you do it at all.

Adrian Bye: To buy media at a negative margin – that’s to lose some money on media.

Matt Moog: What that?

Adrian Bye: It’s to lose some money on media – that’s what you do or you don’t do. I mean, don’t answer if you don’t want to.

Matt Moog: I don’t do. At CoolSavings, that was our business because we were spending \$60 million a year in online marketing and getting positive arbitrages on the traffic that we were driving. It’s something that hopefully, we know how to do well.

Adrian Bye: Very cool.

Just in general on traffic forms, you’re doing search engine marketing, you’re doing SEO, you’re doing viral. When you talk about viral, is that like invite a friend like address book importing – that kind of stuff?

Matt Moog: Yes, we forward to a friend, post to Facebook, RSS feeds and all those kind of things.

Adrian Bye: I’m taking notes.

When you’re buying media, you’re going out, going to lead-generation site companies and saying, “We can pay this amount for leads,” or something to that site. You design the lead-gen form and if they qualify then they join up. Is it that kind of stuff?

Matt Moog: It’s not exactly that. There’re all sorts of different forms of buying traffic and then watching how that traffic behaves, what value it has to you and everything else.

One interesting thing about Viewpoints, I think, is that every user that uses our service that writes a review makes the service itself better which is a dynamic that we didn’t have at CoolSavings where we could have added a million users and the other eight million users wouldn’t have known at all that the site was any better or any worse for that. But when you have a platform like Viewpoints where they’re constantly creating content that other people then consume, use and find valuable, there’s a really interesting exponential effect that goes on where every person that joins makes it more valuable for the rest.

So, I think it's somewhat...

Adrian Bye: So, why do users join? I mean, there are these sorts of sites out there. If I already know that I can go on search and post on Epinions, why would I go to Viewpoints?

Matt Moog: Yes, it's a good question and understanding the motivations of why people contribute content online is, I think, an evolving art and really getting to know them in, I think, what we've found is that there's lots of different motivations as there are in life for a lot of things, right?



So, some people will do it because they feel like they've gotten something out of the site and they want to give something back. Some will do it because they like the recognition. Some will do it because they like to sort of compete and show that they can get better feedback and more visibility. Some will do it because they want to be compensated in some way.

So, there're all these different segments of reviewers, things that motivate them and the reasons they do it. Frankly,

there're successful models across the social web of examples of sites focusing on just one of those models being successful in all of them so I don't think there's a single answer to the broader question of what's the value proposition for the contributor. It's just figuring out in your unique categories and with your unique audience what makes them feel positive about becoming a part of the community.

Adrian Bye: So, you haven't had to come up with like a totally different messaging or a different positioning statement. You just said, "Hey, here we are. We're a new site and this is another great place that you can write reviews." You haven't said, "We're the new site that is better on reviews because of (X, Y or Z)..."

Matt Moog: Well, our focus is on, one, ultimately helping people find people like them. So, it's reviews from people like you – is really where we consider to be our core point of difference. I think, we're executing a better community platform than the vast majority of review experiences.

If you look at reviews on retail websites or other standalone review sites, they tend to focus mostly on the thing being reviewed and the review itself and not on the reviewer. I have a bias that the person who wrote the review matters a lot to me. As much as I can know about them, it's going to help me put their review in context.

Of course when you have a platform where people need to reveal a lot about themselves, it becomes a good platform also for creating social connection between people.

Ideally, I want people to be able to find other people that are like them whether it's their friends, their family or people they've met online who share their personality, their profile, their passions.

So if you happen to be really into surfing, I want you to be able to find other surfers and have them recommend you what beaches to go to, what equipment to buy or what vacations to go on and the same is if you're an owner of a golden retriever, you're going to have specific questions about that or if you happen to be a person who buys all the latest technology, you'll want to find a group of people like that.

Some of those might be your friends and you just know that they're that way. Others may self-identify that way and congregate online.

It's a hard problem to solve in organising people into their passions in that way and really understanding what motivates people's view of trust and credibility but to me, it's a big, important problem that needs to be solved and it's a really interesting one.

Adrian Bye: So if I'm a user on Viewpoints, how will you level-organise me and serve people like me? Based on what I've done, what do you know about me that makes me like other people.

Matt Moog: Right, it's a great question.

At a basic level, we obviously ask you, "Are you male or female?" and, "Where do you live?" which is some starting information and then every time that you write a review, we ask you to describe yourself with what we call I-am tags in the context of that review.

Just as an example, our most popular I-am tag on the site is I-am-not-rich. In the travel category, the most popular tag is I-am-a-budget-conscious-traveller but we also have luxury-travellers, world-travellers, family-travellers and business-travellers.

So every time you write a review, we'll ask you to describe yourself in that way and we've collected more than 500,000 tags as a result of people describing themselves in the context of a specific review. We'll then use those tags as a way for people to find other people like them to navigate the site.

So if I say, "I am a food connoisseur," "I am a fast food junkie," or "I am a speed demon when it comes to my car," – whatever it might be, those are all ways for people to find others like them that are going to have information that way.

That forms the basis for us to then start to understand what categories have you written reviews in, how have you described yourself in the context of those categories. The next stage of our development is to figure out how to best now bring those people together and allow them to be more social on the site. Adding things like forums, discussion groups and things like that are directions that we're going.

Adrian Bye: This is fascinating. You've taken tags which can sometimes be a little bit of an obscure concept and people don't make it very clear, and you've made it really, really clear in the context of your side in finding things.

I've just gone into the travel section and said that I love travel even though I actually travel too much for business. I'd actually be better of saying, "I hate travel."

But anyways, “I love to travel and I enjoy great food,” and so, it’s now picked out the best hotels and resorts for me – Canyon Ranch in Lenox, Massachusetts, The Wellness Spa. I guess that’s what people like me who love to travel supposedly and enjoy great food – that’s where they like to go.

Matt Moog: Right.

Adrian Bye: That’s fascinating.

Matt Moog: Obviously, this is the kind of thing that as you have more and more reviews and more and more people, you get better and better results based on a broader base of coverage. So being six months into this, I’m proud of where we are but I also still feel like we’re in the first inning of a nine-inning game here and this year, we’re going to make some really great progress in continuing to differentiate how we approach the problem of reviews versus other sites in making them more people-centric and even more social in their nature.

Adrian Bye: Basically, you’re taking the Epinions market and I guess to see Epinions stagnating a bit, you’re coming in and adding in all these new sorts of things to it, driving traffic properly and then, you come in with the knowledge of lead-generation – you come in with the knowledge of acquiring traffic and then selling it in terms of lead-generation. So, this is in fact, a huge lead-generation site.

Matt Moog: Yes, yes. Like for example, we have a category called education and I’m sure you and all your readers know that online education is a huge lead-generation category on the web where hundreds of millions of dollars are spent. We’ve started ranking the best online schools and collecting hundreds of reviews from people who have actually gone there. The better we get at that, we’ll be able to cover all sorts of categories so ideally, we’ll cover obviously, auto, real estate, mortgage, financial services, online trading – all the categories where generating a lead is very, very valuable in particularly of somebody who isn’t doing their due diligence and doing research to find out which one is the best.

Adrian Bye: This is an absolutely brilliant idea!

Matt Moog: Thank you.

Adrian Bye: How long did it take you to figure this out? I mean, did you guys all sit in a room somewhere and think all this for like two years? Have you just been evolving it as you started? How did this all materialise?

Matt Moog: It basically has been three years since we originally came up with the idea. There’re a lot of difficult problems – both technical problems, marketing positioning problems – the whole gammon of issues that have to be overcome. I think we’re doing pretty well but I think, we also have a lot left to do. It’s not an easy problem to solve. It’s not the kind of site that you whip up and expect it to sort of takeoff immediately and start making tens of millions of dollars but the important thing for us is we’re building a very strong foundation, a very scalable website and we’re expecting to be able to scale it into the millions of users without adding a huge task to do so.

We’re very interested in partnering with companies who specialise in the various verticals so if you’re a company that specialises in selling health insurance leads or online education leads, etc... We obviously know a lot of those companies from what we did at CoolSavings but we’re interested in finding partners in all the appropriate areas.

Adrian Bye: You’re looking for lead-buyers. Is that what you mean?

Matt Moog: Yes, yes. In cases where it's appropriate, we'll work directly with the end-buyer and in some cases, we'll work with the aggregators so depending on what works better.

Adrian Bye: I guess, your preference is obviously to work with the end-buyer.

Matt Moog: Not always. As you know in some cases, the aggregators can pay more because they know how to use a lead sort of through multiple channels.

Adrian Bye: Right. Okay. So, let me ask that point. Let's say, I'm a housewife in Nebraska. I went on a nice vacation in Massachusetts because I love to travel and I like good food. I filled in some stuff on Viewpoints about my holiday and then, I suddenly get 20 spam messages a day for other stuff that's similar.

I mean, there's obviously the monetisation aspect. How do you handle that in a way that doesn't go bad?

Matt Moog: Everything that I've ever done in the online marketing space has always been permission-based and in a very upfront, consumer-friendly sort of way so they have to opt into anything that they do.

Just as a one measure, we send right now, three e-mails a month to our members.

In CoolSavings and other sort of online marketing companies, that's how many they send a day, right?

Adrian Bye: Right.

Matt Moog: So, we've taken a very different consumer-friendly approach to how we market to our member base, how we engage them in the community, etc and then, the ads on the site – you know, you're not going to be automatically opted into anything. You're going to have to click on something, read what it's all about and respond to it. If you fill out a form that is very clear on what they're asking for and they collect information from you, that's part of just being a smart online user and knowing when to give your information to a third party and when not to.

Adrian Bye: So in the case, I'm looking at the reviews of AIU, I can say, "I can find a review helpful." So, how do I go in and how do I submit a lead? How do I become a lead for AIU?

Matt Moog: I'm not looking at it right now but there should be some cost-per-click ads to the side of that.

We haven't really gotten around to striking these individual lead-gen relationships with the various companies yet.

Adrian Bye: Alright.

Matt Moog: We're waiting to build a bit more traffic in scale. We'll start doing that this year.

Adrian Bye: Okay, you're not actually doing lead sales yet. Your focus is just around getting traffic, getting the site up and running. You're doing a little bit of monetisation with AdWords, AdSense and that's it.

Matt Moog: Yes, that's right.

Adrian Bye: Right. Then later on, I guess, there'll be a big, green button or something that says, "Sign up for AIU now." Is that the sort of thing and you're not going to.

Matt Moog: Exactly, yes. ...or request information – those kind of things.

Adrian Bye: Yes, right.

As far as lead-gen goes, I don't know how far you can go with it because you can do a hot call right there so you can have a hot transfer right off the site.

Matt Moog: Yes.

Adrian Bye: That would be pretty valuable.

Matt Moog: Yes. The idea is that these are consumers who are actively engaged. They're in-market consumers. They're actively engaged in making a purchase decision which makes them very different from somebody who just happens to respond to a banner or an e-mail.

Adrian Bye: Yes, right.

I want to ask you some questions about a somewhat related site. Maybe you can tell me how related it is – a site named Judy's Book.

Matt Moog: Yes.

Adrian Bye: I've been reading the blog of the CEO – a guy named Andy Sack, I guess is his name and watching as they've evolved from various different things and then, they ended up going towards being, I guess, a shopping site – something like this one and then now kind of gone downhill.

What are your thoughts on what they've done and how does this compare to what you're doing and how you can avoid having what happened to them, happen to you?

Matt Moog: When they started out...and I think, they started out in late 2005 or early 2006...they were competing against Yelp and Insider Pages, and focused on the local market.

I've read Andy's blog as well. I've followed them and got to know them a little bit. I can't speak to exactly what per se they did wrong or they did right.

I think, what we've done differently from them is we obviously cover many more categories than they do. We're not just local. That's just one of our 20 different categories. We focus pretty heavily on the social aspect of review writing and building a community. I think that's something that is important and if you want to be viral and grow that way, you have to do that.

But, the combination of having very rich profiles of reviewers, creating a very social platform and then, allowing them to rate and review a very wide range of products, services and businesses is really sort of the secret sauce in the whole recipe.

Adrian Bye: You got the business started through, I guess, some kind of an investment or have you been self-funding?

Matt Moog: I raised \$5 million in a series aid to start the business.

Adrian Bye: Right.

Why ads in Google AdSense? Do they provide a lot of revenue?

Matt Moog: What's that?

Adrian Bye: How come you have the Google ad? Why not just forward since you're funded?

Matt Moog: You know, our partnership with Google is an important part of our strategy and I like relevant ads particularly when it can be all done automatically the way Google does it. So, I don't have any reason to switch.

Adrian Bye: Let's say, you've got then a direct partnership with AIU and you're doing hot transfer leads for them – you'll still keep the Google pay-per-click ads once you're got that going?

Matt Moog: We'll see. We'll see where on the page and how on the page you might put it – exactly how that works but it's certainly not assumed that they would go away.

Adrian Bye: How would you compare what you're doing here to Mahalo?

Matt Moog: Yes, it's interesting. Mahalo is really broad-based so where we focus on reviews, they tend to focus on any kind of content in any category at all and the majority of their writers are paid writers.

But, I do think, there are some similarities. I mean, we see the world similarly in some instances.

Adrian Bye: They're not doing reviews, are they? They have like one category owner for each category whereas yours is user-contributed content.

Matt Moog: Right.

Adrian Bye: What about integration with social networking sites? I mean, is there a way for me to put my Viewpoints stuff on Facebook?

Matt Moog: Yes, you can easily pick your own feeds and drop it straight into Facebook. I do this. All of the reviews that you write on Viewpoints will show up in your Facebook feed.

Adrian Bye: That means basically, anytime I write something into Viewpoints, that will then show up on my Facebook to all of the people who are monitoring me. That will show up to all of them so that they can see that I've written a review on this particular place in Massachusetts.

Matt Moog: Yes, right.

Adrian Bye: That, to you, is yet another form of driving traffic.

Matt Moog: Yes.

Adrian Bye: Is that a Facebook application that you've done that's included in Facebook, an RSS feed or something else?

Matt Moog: It's just an RSS feed that Facebook can accommodate.

Adrian Bye: Okay, very interesting.

So, the kinds of people you're looking for right now – you want lead-buyers, either direct or aggregators. Do you want people that can help you drive traffic? I mean, what are the other areas of where you're looking to partner with people?

Matt Moog: Yes, one of our big points of emphasis is we want to attract more people to write reviews on Viewpoints so finding sources of people who really enjoy writing reviews and even better if they're in specific categories – electronics, travel or other categories like that. We tend to be attracting a pretty diverse audience with the concentration in a female audience, married, presence of children in the home – just a lot of your soccer mom...

Adrian Bye: A lot of those soccer moms – I think they run half the internet, maybe even more.

Matt Moog: Yes, that's for sure.

Adrian Bye: I don't think we'd have an internet if it wasn't for the soccer moms. I mean, it seems like they do everything. I don't know. I mean, maybe it's just some of the stuff that I'm around that they're everywhere.

Yes. So, you want more soccer moms and you want that kind of traffic. Is that what you mean?

Matt Moog: Yes, yes.

We are not explicitly targeting sort of the younger gen Y, hipster, urban dweller. We're definitely going after people who are homeowners, kids and some very practical needs.

I'll be very happy if we end up doing well in vacuum cleaners, humidifiers, strollers and car seats as opposed to big screen TVs, digital cameras and things.

Adrian Bye: Do you also see this as becoming a big revenue-generator from affiliate commissions as well or is it mainly lead-generation?

Matt Moog: No, I think we'll do both. Obviously, you have to negotiate the right revenue shares of affiliate programs but I think, there's a potential there.

Adrian Bye: How does that then work? Let's say, I'm browsing the reviews on Viewpoints and I'm shopping for a humidifier. I read some great reviews and then, I go to the link to click on it. Does that then mean that I buy from the links that you guys have provided but that ends up costing me like 10% more because you've got the highest payout for you but that wasn't the best payout for me as a customer?

Matt Moog: No, retailers don't change their prices like that. It's the same for everybody.

I see what you're saying. Do we show the merchants based on their yield?

Adrian Bye: I mean, are you going to show multiple merchants or would you just show the one merchant that's your featured merchant? How does that work?

Matt Moog: No, we show multiple. Yes. But, you pull out any product in our database and you'll see that there're usually five or six different merchants. In some cases, there're 15.

Adrian Bye: Right. You'll have then affiliate relationships with all of those. I guess, you would then rank them by yield but then, that's up to the consumer to then select which one they want to buy from.

Matt Moog: Yes, what we've really done here is we've partnered with Shopping.com so we have access to all of their merchants and we tap into their ATI.

Adrian Bye: Is that something you're going to do long-term or is that just for now?

Matt Moog: No, I think, we'll do that long-term and maybe not with Shopping.com long-term but we will work with our shopping comparison engines who already have that business optimised.

Adrian Bye: Is that so much work to go and get all those – it's easier to work with someone rather than do it yourself?

Matt Moog: Yes.

Adrian Bye: Right.

Did you ever end up with fake reviews or untrustworthy stuff? I mean, do you see any issues in that sort of area?

Matt Moog: Yes, I think, that's a common concern or the common question.

We have a number of ways to try to address people's concern in that area.

One is...and I think, we're one of the only ones that ever does this but...at the bottom of every review, we specifically in a separate question, ask people to disclose their affiliation with the thing that's being reviewed and if they are related, are they the owner, are they an employee, are they an agent of, etc. So, they are relying on the goodwill of people to tell the truth.

Then, we also have a second mechanism where every time a review is read, a reviewer can rate it as either helpful – yes or no, or they can report it as inappropriate and report fraud where they believe that it exists and then, we rank our reviews and display them based on their helpful rating. So in time, reviews that are clearly not accurate, not helpful, etc really won't get any visibility in the system.

At the end of the day, we are allowing anybody to write reviews so it is possible that somebody will commit fraud, violate our terms of use and not answer the questions accurately but we have not seen it to be a significant issue today.

Adrian Bye: I guess if guys are coming in on effort or anything like that then the tone will be somewhat picked in the review and then, it will be voted down.

Matt Moog: Yes. Obviously, we need to get better also and we're focused on building a good reputation system for our reviewers.

So if you come in and you write one review that's an absolute puff piece of your hotel, you're not going to get the same kind of credibility scores associated with your review as if you had written several reviews in lots of categories and gotten already lots of good feedback.

In that respect, it's similar to the problem that eBay, craigslist or anybody else grapples with when it comes to sort of fraudulent usage of their own services.

We'll have the equivalent of an eBay power seller type of rating on our system.

Adrian Bye: Will there be any comments on the system at all or is the revenue just focused around lead-gen, pay-per-click type ads and affiliate commission.

Matt Moog: Yes, we're not planning to be a merchant.

Adrian Bye: Cool.

Is there anything that we should talk about which we haven't covered?

Matt Moog: No, no. I think, you've done a pretty good job covering what we're all about, who we are and what our plans are, etc.

Adrian Bye: Cool.

Well, Matt, thanks very much for your time.

Matt Moog: Okay. Thank you. I look forward to seeing the interview.