

Host: So, Sam thank you so much for your time, I know that you have lots of interesting things to be doing right now. Taking the time to talk to me and to my Brazilian followers and whoever else is interested in having an exciting career. So, just introducing Sam, he's a digital entrepreneur concentrating on scalable high-growth start-ups. Travels constantly typically 25+ countries a year, investigating opportunities and getting a better understanding of the global market space. Has developed business operations and strategic partnerships spanning 4 continents and his projects have resulted in multi-million acquisitions in the last eight years. He views business as the ultimate sport. Well, second to ping pong, is that true?

Sam: That is true.

Host: That is true.

Sam: Is ping pong popular in Brazil?

Host: Not really, I actually texted you I don't know if you actually saw, I have a friend here, my best friend here in Chiang Mai, he's Canadian and he actually hired a ping pong coach and he goes to this place where they have like hundreds of ping pong tables, have you seen this here?

Sam: No I haven't.

Host: You haven't?

Sam: I just found a new badmington place yesterday which I've been keen to try out but I didn't know ping pong was taking off in enterprise level.

Host: It is, I should totally hook you up with him because he has classes like from 3-5 three times a week he's going crazy.

Sam: You see that's how I want to spend my entire day just ping pong, you know...

Host: Yeah

Sam: ...with a coach, that's the life I guess.

Host: Really? Any other sport that you're into?

Sam: No, not really. It really tails off after high school. It's going from playing like five sports to the zero in about six months so...

Host: Really?

Sam: ...ever since then its just been work.

Host: And when you were in college what was the sport?

Sam: I did a lot of things like very average, so I was like wrestle, swimming, tennis, baseball football, and played a little bit of golf but I was just okay at everything but yeah it was a lot of fun where I grew up and Florida of course is very hot so we had good sports all year round.

Host: Where in Florida?

Sam: West Palm Beach.

Host: West Palm Beach.

Sam: But you know like south Florida is all a fun place to be. West Palm, down in Miami, about an hour and a half drive in either direction but it's all one huge city. It doesn't stop, the development doesn't stop, the beach front's completely developed the entire way so.

Host: Yeah it's a beautiful area. My brother lived in Miami, actually playing golf, he got a, he was number three in Brazil in golf.

Sam: Get out of here, really?

Host: Yeah, and not that that means a lot because in Brazil golf is not really a big thing but for us it meant a lot and he got a scholarship to, to go to the US.

Sam: Well maybe if he could play golf in a bathing suit then it would become more popular in Brazil.

Host: Yeah

Sam: Yeah

Host: You would, you would.

Sam: It's like competing with volleyball.

Host: Have you ever been to Brazil?

Sam: No. I just got back from Argentina. Actually, I did a little bit of South America trip but I decided to keep Brazil as its own, its own trip because I just think it's too massive to try to take on...

Host: It is, it's huge

Sam: ...in a weeks time or something.

Host: It's huge. Yeah, so maybe you'll accept my invitation and come in July?

Sam: I think we have an agreement somewhere, somewhere, a few contingencies pending.

Host: Yeah, yeah we're gonna work on those. I'm thinking like a week in Sao-Paulo a week in Rio a week in Floripa and week in Bahia.

Sam: Okay.

Host: I think those are like the four ultimate spots in Brazil that people should maybe we should create, actually, we should go through coworker which is your business right now right?

Sam: Yeah

Host: One of the things I want you to talk a little bit about coworker and I was checking out coworker's website, its awesome, like you guys have so many interesting things listed even in Brazil.

Sam: Yeah absolutely. Brazil's actually becoming quite a hot market for it, south a lot of our traffic interacts from South America, I just, I assume because there's, we're one of the first listing platforms there but its an amazing, I mean we're sitting here in the co-working space right?

Host: Right

Sam: It's an amazing category how quickly its growing now. All the things we were talking about it. Digital nomad summit, like community aspect and stuff but we can talk about that later in the podcast.

Host: Yeah yeah sure. But since we mentioned coworker tell me how did you get involved with coworker and where is it going? One of the reasons I thought you know you had to be in this podcast was because of the story you told us at the nomad conference of your your business adventures and you're always hopping, in off of amazing businesses and making them grow and then normally selling them right?

Sam: Right

Host: That's what you're into.

Sam: Yeah

Host: So just tell us a little bit more about coworker?

Sam: Sure. Well I think all, like one thing all the businesses I've done have in common is it's something I felt I knew better than anyone at the time and then used whatever experience I had in that to try to build a business around it so going back to my first businesses with degree phases and college.com, it was, I knew college life as good as anybody. I didn't know how to build websites but I knew fraternity and sorority life and I knew like the college life as good as anyone in the world to build businesses around that and then with sky cig it was, not that I knew electronic cigarettes as good as anyone but I knew affiliate marketing as good as anybody in the world knew it. So we just found a product that we thought would fit in that model of marketing well and now with coworker it's fair much the same thing, for the last, I've really been a nomad for the last ten years but I've been working at coworking spaces for the last three and it's something I totally identify with. I think it's the future, it is a revolution of the workplace but it's the future for so many people that are starting to work remotely so...

Host: Why do you think that is?

Sam: Well I think that basically the trend is that as people start working remote, typical like remote worker isn't, quit your job, start a business it's something like you're, you start with a full time job you negotiate to be able to work from 2 or 3 days a week maybe that ends up to becoming a full time you know remote working situation or you have like all these remote workers all over the world that are working through platforms like odesk, or I'm sorry or upwork or freelancer and what happens is people take that freedom and they stay home and they like enjoy it for 3 months you wake up in your underwear and don't get out of bed and have a coffee in bed and work from home and that quickly becomes really like isolating and can actually cause you kinda to go into like these almost like depression right?

Host: Right

Sam: Because you, you just end up being isolated from the world you don't realize how important community is so then the trend is go and start working at coffee shops and then once you have done that for a few months it becomes more I need to get into a network each day and I need to get into an environment with productive people and the story is true for so many people I know that we've all worked from home or done the coffee shop thing for a year and then we all end up in coworking spaces but up until today it's been relatively hard to find but now the category is growing so fast. You have cities like New York, Boston, Chicago speaking of the US that'll have well over 150 legitimate professional coworking spaces and now you have in Asia, we're in Cheng Mai, there's 4 or 5 here in Bangkok, there's you know 10-15 and every single month you turn around there's new spots opening up. So it's a great eco system for the nomad network that's running around you know so many parts of the world. South America, South East Asia, instead of trying to find a decent coffee shop with wifi, they're going into coworking spaces for a day, a week, a month and it compliments, it compliments the lifestyle. So, that's we decided we were looking around online and couldn't find a reliable centralized directory or resource for finding coworking spaces so we decided to build that...

Host: Who's we?

Sam: I have an amazing co-founder Leanne, who's actually just down the hall and you know we have a little office here and Leanne and I have been working together on this and that, some of my angel investments she would come on board and do a lot of like marketing and media set up and she's just fantastic I mean she's been in the coworking scene for five years and just an amazingly talented person, so we decided to do it and we've been going now about 8 months, 9 months, launched about five months ago together and its been growing ever since.

Host: That's great, so where are you actually monetizing with coworker?

Sam: We're not, it'll probably be 12 months before we introduce some type of revenue channel.

Host: Service

Sam: ...yeah revenue channel, it's, it's, I think it's kind of like a land grab right now for just getting the inventory coworking spaces on and then we'll probably introduce some type of booking model or manage page subscription down the road but it's not a rush we have a low burn and yeah.

Host: Have fun while doing it.

Sam: Yeah...

Host: Why rush.

Sam: ...it's an excuse to go to different places and visit different coworking spaces and see what they're all about.

Host: And then everybody gets to, everybody probably gives you a free membership, like, come and try us out!

Sam: Yeah, we haven't started. Its, were early and not on, a lot of people still haven't understood they're like that we're doing so some coworking spaces are actually a little timid because they think that maybe we are a coworking space and we're coming in to...

Host: Compete

Sam: ...get information about their business how they operate, so most of the time we don't even announce it we'll just go in and say we're you know digital entrepreneurs, we're looking for a space for a month or something but it's really great to see like in Southeast Asia I mean coworking spaces are just amazing especially like Hong Kong, Singapore as you'd expect, just top top quality with like some many amenities it's really a fun place to be.

Host: Really, so how would you compare like the coworking from North America and the coworking from Asia for example?

Sam: Well, the spaces here are typically a lot smaller and we just got done in California, we're like all through San Diego and stuff and you know there's a lot of overlap, there's different amenities everywhere you go like some of the places in Hong Kong get free beer which I thought was really cool. A lot of places in San Diego have roof top decks where like you can go out and sunbathe or you know hang out, eat your lunch, have business meetings there. So it's kind of a cultural thing depending on where you go it's different things but yeah a lot of them there's kind of this hybrid that's emerging where like golf ranges where people hit golf balls and stuff...

Host: Really?

Sam: ...or introduce like a coworking aspect to it and share desk aspect to, you know you have a lot of like businesses in Florida for instance some small businesses that are running like these offices or coworking spaces that are on golf ranges. You have these...

Host: That's so cool.

Sam: ...groups of 4 or 5 guys that will go and you know every 30 minutes they're out hitting balls and doing their business thing so it's really cool how its evolved into you know kind of blurring the lines of business and personal life.

Host: Totally, like to be the ideal workspace. So if you were to create a coworking space for yourself in the future what would it be like?

Sam: Oh man! Is this co-working space for me personally or is this a business...?

Host: For you.

Sam: ...to make money?

Host: For you personally, for you personally.

Sam: Well I would have a lot of fun elements built into it of course it would have a real bar, build a coffee bar probably wine bar, probably at whiskey bar so that's 3 bars right there just for drinks. Got to have a sundeck gotta have some type of pool I think I'd make it more like a fraternity house than I would like a coworking space. Probably be on a beach somewhere with a sun deck access to the beach.

Host: So it would be at the beach?

Sam: It would have to be at the beach, yeah.

Host: Okay

Sam: Yeah, especially after being in Chiang Mai for so long you know the only thing that's running through my mind right now is getting to the beach pretty soon so.

Host: Yeah

Sam: Yeah

Host: Me too it's the only thing that Chiang Mai does not have for us.

Sam: That's true, it's true.

Host: Yeah would you What do you have some massage, Thai massage experts?

Sam: It sounds like a good idea in theory...

Host: Feet massage?

Sam: ...but then you just, then you might as well just leave the working aspect out of it because the mind is so distracted.

Host: Yeah. Cool, you mentioned the fraternity culture few times, there are many Brazilians that don't speak English so well so when these words come in can you explain whats a fraternity for them?

Sam: Absolutely so a fraternity and its counterpart a sorority are basically clubs on colleges, college campuses designed either exclusively for men which would be a fraternity or female which would be a sorority. So a typical college campus in the USA would have like a big college would have say 20 fraternities and 20 sororities. The fraternities will be all different types of guy groups so you might have 1 that are like the sports jocks and you might have one that are like the nerdy nerds and you might have 10 that are like kind of party guys and a few that are somewhere in between right.

Host: So it's like a club...

Sam: It's a club.

Host: ...of guys who

Sam: Yup...

Host: ...get along

Sam: ...get along. So it would be like 100 guys in each one and they try to do like everything together like party together, do sporting events together, hang out at you know whatever...

Host: Yeah

Sam: ...it's just you go through your college career kinda with those guys.

Host: Cool, yeah we don't have anything like that in Brazil.

Sam: Yeah it's good. Whenever you see like the typical American fraternity or like college parties...

Host: College culture.

Sam: ...it's always, you'll always see some element of fraternities or sororities in there.

Host: Okay

Sam: Usually the party scenes.

Host: Cool. Okay so I want you to tell me a little bit about your story. Like from the start. So you were born in Florida did you come from a wealthy family, poor family, just give us some background?

Sam: Yeah I was born in South Florida and I grew up pretty, pretty lower to middle class. Like, my parents had their own business but they didn't make any money but I think one of the main things that was always a driving part in my life growing up was that they had freedom and flexibility. So like where I went to school was a pretty bad school but whenever I got sick at school like my mom picked me up you know and whenever like, you know I had a baseball game they came to my baseball game. So I kind of understood like the freedom and flexibility of owning your own business at a young age even though that didn't necessarily meet my material value. We never had new cars or new sports equipment or you know stuff like that so.

Host: So both Your parents had the freedom.

Sam: Yeah

Host: They could work remotely.

Sam: Exact, well, sort of. They had like this, they weren't exactly in the start up scene they owned a small like wood and furniture store so it's a very limited you know scale business but.

Host: But they owned it, they were like entrepreneurs?

Sam: Yeah

Host: So do you think you got some of that from your parents?

Sam: Oh yeah, definitely. I mean that was the whole freedom thing right, so I could never, I never saw myself sitting in like a box working, you know in a very conservative fashion so and



then my dad kind of taught me how to think for opportunity and spot trends. So like he was always asking me like let me know if there's any cool new toys in school or what shoes everyone was wearing because my dad would try to like invest in stock markets, so he would have me like tell him every month like what shoes kids are wearing and if they're any new games out and stuff so he would kind of use that to understand what kids were...

Host: Interesting.

Sam: ...identifying with at the time.

Host: So he was also investing in the stock market?...

Sam: Well

Host: ..that's something you grew up seeing.

Sam: Yeah I don't think he ever made any money from it I think if anything he lost money but I guess the point was just to also get me looking for like opportunity in and homeless in a marketing sense.

Host: Right

Sam: So I went school in Florida developed a business in while I was in school that, I got, I basically long story short is I got arrested 5 times as, my first year in college.

Host: Doing what?

Sam: Stupid stuff, mostly drinking, fake ID, breaking a window, you know just like stupid college stuff but there was this state capital Tallahassee which is in Florida and so there's a lot of police out all the time trying to make quotas and they just arresting everyone for retarded things so my...

Host: So that's where you went to college?

Sam: That's where I went to college, Florida State and my advisor told me that I would be, I'd never get a job let alone a government job which I was at the time in criminology I wanted to like work for the police or whatever. So they're like okay you're, basically we're gonna have to kick you out of school and you're not gonna get a job so you better figure out how to do a business and I pleaded to let them like let me stay in school and my parents basically like you know said we're not going to give you any more money for school you got to do it yourself so I had to start just like totally re-change my life because of some really I still think they're just totally stupid mistakes I mean not their mistakes but it's part of being in college but for whatever reason I had you know

Host: How old were you back then?

Sam: I was 18.

Host: 18, just a kid.

Sam: Yeah

Host: Yeah

Sam: But for that reason I had to really reshape my life and my activities and so at that point I just basically got involved in everything I could in school got a job to pay for my tuition and realized I never was going to get a real job so I had to start putting my mind on a business track.

Host: So it's actually like a great thing that happened for you to get in so much trouble?

Sam: Yeah well yeah I guess if I had to look at where I'm at as a fortunate place to be then that was definitely the critical changing point in my life that kind of was like do or die.

Host: Yeah cool so then you went through the whole College you did not quit you graduated?

Sam: Did not quit graduated with very average grades and I came out of that with, I'd started a business in college it was a social network for fraternities and sororities and that was my first crack at business really and didn't make any money the entire time I was in college and then right when I was graduating I got a phone call from the guys that owned college.com they wanted me to come work for them and they wanted to use the members of our site to go, to basically launch their product. So their whole thing was to take college.com and turn it into what Facebook was when it was just for college students.

Host: Okay

Sam: Right about this time Facebook said we're expanding from college were going to open up the network to the world.

Host: Right

Sam: So yeah, did a deal with them and started to work for them while I was actually a senior in college and then right when I got out of college worked for them full-time...

Host: So so, just for me to understand the company that you said before the geek...

Sam: The Greek faces.

Host:...the Greek faces sorry. The Greek faces was something that came prior to college.com that you developed?

Sam: Yes that's right

Host: And then you got the team that you had or the people that you had and then you just kind of like transferred that to college.com?

Sam: Yup exactly.

Host: Okay and what was the geek, the Greek faces?

Sam: It was the social network for fraternities and sororities. So if, if you think of what Facebook is and then just knock it down to a tighter niche of just fraternities and sororities members. So you had to be in one of these memberships

Host: To be part of it.

Sam: To be part of it.

Host: In your specific College?

Sam: In any college in the US we had every College in the US and because greek life is really only relevant in the USA it's a little bit in Europe and stuff but so pretty much our whole community was in the USA but you had to be in one of these clubs to be on the site

Host: Okay

Sam: So it was kind of an exclusive thing it was very early on for social networking...

Host: And how did you manage to put this together like did you have any Online skills back then?

Sam: I had no idea but it was one of those things that I was in basically in trouble and I had to fight my way out so I didn't it was kind of like I got, I forced myself into figuring these things out and I contacted a guy that I'd gone to high school with and took an HTML web class and he was like the best person in the HTML web class and I contacted him and he's like well good timing because I just like started this company and we haven't done any work yet so he's was like okay I'll do I'll build this for you with these guys for X amount it was like a couple thousand dollars or something and that was like my life savings to that point but I'm like okay let's try it and it was their first project so they took it very seriously like, we can make, you know use this for long-term business and it was my first project so I was, I took it very seriously...

Host: Okay

Sam: ...and it ended up working out.

Host: And why did you do decide to pay him instead of invite him to be your partner for example?

Sam: If I'd done it like in hindsight I would've done it that way but I think they wanted to do you know they were launching a business they wanted a little bit of cash and for me you know it was all the money I had at that point but I realized like it's probably just a drop in the bucket in terms of money I could make in my life so.

Host: At this time you were like 20, 21?

Sam: Yeah 20.

Host: So this was like your first, first business you were 20, 21?

Sam: I wouldn't even call it a business you know, it was a project, it was something I was trying.

Host: Cause you weren't, you don't call it a business because you weren't making money out of it yet at that point?

Sam: Well yeah I wasn't of course I thought of it as a business then but really it was just we were just trying to build something on the internet with no idea how to make money or I mean it's what a lot of startups are doing right now even with like you know coworker we're not, we're not making money off of it we're just doing something so you know at some point you start calling yourself a business but looking back at that it was like a hobby or like a you know...

Host: Yeah

Sam: ...just testing something so whether it will work out you [unclear].

Host: No I think this is really interesting because a lot of clients that hire me as a career coach they have this dream that they're going to build something they're going to start making money like 2 months later...

Sam: Yes

Host: ...and it's nice to hear from you that most of, is that a pattern like most of the businesses that you start you just start taking total risk and not making any money in the beginning?

Sam: Oh well it's totally different, you know if you're doing a pure tech play I think you have to go at it with an, a plan of not making money for a while because often if you introduce revenue channels or try to monetize too early you scare away a lot of your business contacts and customers too early on without giving good value but with like Skycig we were selling product within 3 months that was a product business right...

Host: Right, so...

Sam: ...so you start trying to make money as quickly as possible as long as you're giving your customers good value.

Host: Right so, from college.com how long do you say you were at college.com?

Sam: After I graduated within 6 months they sold it.

Host: Okay, and then Skycig came along?

Sam: Yeah so that was, then there was about a 4 year window of, 3 to 4 year window, where the guy that owned college.com I kept in good contact with and we were kind of dabbling here and there and I was like I was pretty much like doing odd jobs just trying not to jump into anything too long term and learning how to do affiliate marketing so I realized like after, after college.com like there's some serious scale that was coming to the internet and I wanted to know more about it so I didn't know anything about like SEO I didn't really know how to do marketing online, I knew how to build web sites at a time but I didn't know how to run...

Host: You didn't you know?

Sam: Right I didn't know how to run like advertising or do media wise so I started researching that started researching SEO a lot.

Host: By yourself?

Sam: Yeah yeah. Just starting blogs and like trying to figure things out and then just got into the affiliate marketing game and that started becoming pretty lucrative and right around that time some of the people that I have done business with in the past we've been out at a conference an affiliate marketing conference in Las Vegas and we were approached by a guy that was selling E-cigarettes,

Host: Okay

Sam: ...he wasn't selling e-cigarettes I'm sorry he was like one of those first manufacturers of e-cigarettes.

Host: Okay I really want to talk about this but just before because you mentioned affiliate. Can you explain because affiliate is like this big monster that is a bunch of different things right, so when you say affiliate what are you talking about?

Sam: I'm talking specifically about someone who's selling a product online that they don't have anything to do with right they don't touch they're just, you have a manufacturer that owns a product and they want someone to sell it, so they find these people online that can sell it and that's the affiliate and they'll pay them out every time they sell it. The affiliate never has to actually touch a product.

Host: Right

Sam: The product's in someone else's warehouse all they're doing is selling it and then they trust that that shipment's gonna go out.

Host: So you're an intermediate person who's getting commission on top of this sale?

Sam: Right

Host: Right

Sam: Absolutely like another term for it's dropshipper but sometimes the models slightly different depending on if they need a warehouse, if they touch the product or do some level of customer service but definitely where affiliates evolved from was literally someone just a lot of it started in the gaming casinos and stuff and people were like ok I can bring you a player and then you're going to pay me for that player and then like dating was really big and then like bring a member to my site you know so I have the member and then I'll pay you for bringing the traffic and stuff so that's, it's affiliates have been on the internet basically as long as the internet has been around and I think they'll be around forever.

Host: Okay now the platforms that you used back then was it Amazon, Amazon I think Ebay this kind of platform?

Sam: Never, yeah, never. So there's affiliate networks that specialize just in affiliate offers so manufacturers that have products will go to them and say we want you to sell this and the affiliate network will say we'll put your product on our website and then we have contacts to say 1000 Affiliates around the web and now they can go and sell your product so there is actually platforms for Affiliates to meet and like basically offer suppliers.

Host: So do you have any to recommend to kids who are starting?

Sam: The ones that I used to work through was like Copiac I don't even know how to spell it anymore COPIAC, I think EAC, and then there was adds4dough, CX digital there's a bunch like if you just Google affiliate networks you know and what's around today might be different in a year you just have to stay on top of it and figure out who's got the best offers and is reliable for payment.

Host: When somebody asks me like I'm depressed with my job I don't know what to do what's the first thing you recommend I always recommend like learn how to do a website?

Sam: Yeah I think that's, was true probably 10 years ago it's true today. You, I never recommend anyone quit I think the smartest thing to always do is like when you're getting started is to have a reliable source of income and then work you know don't go home and watch TV or play around go home and learn how to do something on the internet and don't quit your job until you're confident that what you're doing can replace your revenue stream if not fully at least partially.

Host: Affiliate marketing is definitely one of the tools that they should learn to right?

Sam: I think that's probably number one because you can build websites so easily now it's like Word Press and stuff but first you have to build some type of website you might not have to do the code yourself or the HTML but you can find someone on the line to do it for fifty or a hundred bucks so you're the return on your time is probably better spent learning how to market something online so you're going to want to just try anything you know don't worry about getting it right because the chance of you making money the first time you try it are very very small but build a simple website put an affiliate offer on there and buy some traffic and see what happens.

Host: Great

Sam: If nothing else it will be a fun experience.

Host: Yeah it's a great tool. Okay so then you're in Las Vegas in this conference and then this producer the secret producer reaches out to you, I heard the story that he came to your room right knocked on your door?

Sam: Yeah, yeah that's it's funny looking back and connecting all the dots but at that point after he had introduced us to what an Ecigarette was we just kept our eye on the industry and within about a year we realized that it was starting to take off in the USA and there wasn't very good products around there, the products that were being sold didn't have good branding and were really unreliable products. So we thought it was a good opportunity to go in at that point and start really putting a lot of resources into building a brand.

Host: So you're talking about when you say e-cigarettes just so they understand it's just a cigarette that doesn't produce smoke doesn't have?

Sam: It's just vapor.

Host: It's just vapor. There's no tobacco...

Sam: Right.

Host: ...no nicotine?

Sam: Yes so it's sold as a healthier alternative you can also use it indoors wherever there's a smoking bin You can still use these indoors so in the UK it's cold most of the year people don't want to go outside to smoke so it works on that level it's cheaper than cigarettes so they're popular all over the world most people are familiar with the big tanks.

Host: But it's not the electronic one?

Sam: Yeah

Host: It's the electronic one?

Sam: The electronic one.

Host: Oh!

Sam: E-cigarettes, electronic cigarettes

Host: Yes stupid me.

Sam: So they're all shapes and sizes now when we were getting into it we the product we were selling tried to emulate a real cigarette and was much smaller.

Host: Okay I've tried those they are very cool. I have a few friends that are addicted to those.

Sam: Right, yeah, I mean It's got nicotine in it so

Host: Yeah

Sam: You got to know what you're getting yourself into.

Host: That's great. Okay so the guy that actually knocked on your door you didn't do business with?

Sam: No because every single month there's like a hundred new electronic cigarette manufacturers coming into the category and then 100 leaving...

Host: Okay

Sam: ...so by the time we got into it he was gone but we found great suppliers that we continue to work with.

Host: So you found out suppliers in China?

Sam: Right

Host: In China, okay so how did you find them was it like Google search or was it like calling agents and telling agents?

Sam: It was a bit of everything then like all of a sudden all the different resources that you've been looking at kind of overlap and identify a couple of ones that you might be interested in working with and then it just comes down to getting supplies building some type of digital relationship with them and then once we got some of our early product in and actually started getting some sales then it now it's time to go over and visit and figure out if you know you need to get redundant suppliers or secondary suppliers or change suppliers it's always a question that you know...

Host: Right

Sam: ...comes part of the business once you start growing.

Host: And I know you chose the UK right, can you tell me why you chose the UK?

Sam: It just goes back to what we were saying about the market there so it's cold all year round the consumers are English-speaking so we can get into it without any type of translation. The smoking ban had just got introduced, people were having to smoke outside, they're somewhat health-conscious. Cigarettes are extremely expensive they're almost as expensive there as anywhere in the world so it kind of sold on so many different levels and it was also there was less competition. So it was a smaller market, less competition a little bit of a foreign market to us but it was just a business decision and there is something inside me burning to get out of the US



and try business International, I was only 25 at the time so I still wanted to go kind of stretch out before I did any like settling back in the USA so it ended up being a really good decision.

Host: So that was the first time you actually left the US for a longer period of time?

Sam: Yeah yeah I had done a little bit of traveling to like Central America, Columbia, the Caribbean but that was it. So it was the first time overseas.

Host: And back then did you even know that there was this thing called digital Nomads or did you even think about becoming...?

Sam: Right around that time it was when Tim Ferriss put out the four hour work week. So it was kind of a stretch at that point you know people working online from remote locations was like not really, like people working online from home yeah that was just starting to get popular but like traveling and working from my computer it was not easy because you know the Macbooks were not really around [unclear] slim and fast at that point so you had like this kind of big clunky HP's, and there is very limited free Wi-Fi anywhere. So it was, the infrastructure globally wasn't there especially like in a lot of nomad popular nomad destinations that are today.

Host: Yeah cool and I remember from your presentation at the conference you showed pictures of like you and your partner at the time actually because a lot of people think maybe you were going like to the UK with a lot of money already and setting up an office and you guys were just like...

Sam: No. That is...

Host: ...the story that they stole your camera right?

Sam: Total misconception. So I basically had no money at the time. The money that I was able to get for, to start the business was, it was originally \$50,000 which was basically went into building a website, setting up fulfillment, and like our initial product order would be like 25 grand to get like you know fully, full on branded quality product so there wasn't that much left and so I was I rented a really cheap car put our product in it drove around the UK for three weeks and was literally slept in the car 1 night, slept in a hostel one night, slept in the the car one night slept in a hostel one night and just ate microwave food at you know local gas stations and stuff so it wasn't it was a humble like bootstrap beginning and...

Host: With your cell phone filming the people...

Sam: Yeah

Host: ...who were trying

Sam: Not even cell, I don't think they were cell phone cameras back then it was like a little \$60 point and shoot camera but you know it worked. Worked for what we needed to do so.

Host: And you would offer the cigarette because people didn't see this presentation I thought this was awesome idea like you would offer the cigarette in the streets and then film the people trying it out right?

Sam: Yeah

Host: And just record all this material?

Sam: Yeah back then you couldn't advertise electronic cigarettes because they were regarded as tobacco their class is tobacco. So we didn't have any way to advertise, so one of the only things we could do is literally hit the streets, put product in people's hands and hope they liked it, told their friends about it, came on our website bought re-orders and so with this we actually gave out probably 100 free packs and that started generating some early sales and also gave us some content to make a pretty cool little intro video to e-cigarettes and our brand.

Host: Right and then you guys worked on the online?

Sam: Yeah, yeah that was, we called it having a good ground game so we really, really worked on to leverage kind of our affiliate skills and some of the affiliate contacts we had and then search engine optimization because there was somewhat limited competition we knew if we got in early and did the right things that we could you know it wouldn't be something that would develop in six months but in two or three years we could probably dominant space, the online space for it.

Host: Right and then I remember you mentioned like the big distributors they weren't maybe so online as you were guys were because they were focused on other things right that's where you had the biggest difference there?

Sam: Yeah yeah definitely. Good memories, a lot of the, a lot of the people that came into the e-cigarette space were people that already had distribution set up like retail distribution and those, it's amazing how powerful distribution is because some of those people they're just traders, like they're almost like an offline affiliate right they just buy product that they have 5000 stores that they can put product into like a click, so that's a really really really powerful chain but because of that the people weren't branding that much they were just buying the cheapest product they could get and put it into stores because they needed that margin between them and retailer's. So while they were doing that we were busy really just like trying to take over the online space and building a really good brand.

Host: So when people actually search for something related to e-cigarettes on Google you guys always came up first.

Sam: Towards the end, yeah. That was the goal having a long-term vision and understanding it's not going to pay dividends the first six months and that you have to have a long-term vision for it and if you're trying to build a product and you're trying to build a brand that's the approach that you gotta take and understand it's not going start paying off for you for a couple years.

Host: Right

Sam: But then you have something very valuable.

Host: So what was the time that you noticed you had to go to China?

Sam: There was a lot of times I went to China one of the early, one of the most pressing times we actually had there was a factory fire and I had to, there was, it wasn't clear if there was a factory fire there was kinda rumors that there was and but we pretty much had all our eggs in that basket per se and I went over and there had been a factory fire but they were able to get a new factory set up literally the next day and that give me some, that gave me a little bit of a reason to spend more time over there and find secondary suppliers build redundancies into our supply chain and yeah it's an amazing place over there, it's, you'd be amazed by, by what they can build, their efficiency is it's crazy operations.

Host: So what did you learn in this adventure in time, like what were the lessons learned dealing with the Chinese people from beginning to end?

Sam: Well, there, I guess I got a lot of respect for them just you know I wanted, I thought I was going to go over there with essentially no manufacturing experience and tell them how to manufacture better and I was just amazed by the processes and practices they had in place and how thorough they were with every product they tested, so it gave me a lot of respect for them on that level. The cleanliness I mean of course you hear like horror stories of these factories in Asia and of course they exist but what I saw and my experience there was really high grade, high quality, high tech manufacturing and their ability to kind of adapt and shake off you know, troubles basically and but I think one of the biggest things I learned over there is you can't, you can't be dependent on a supplier because there's so many things that can disrupt your supply chain, you have to build redundancies both into the total supply chain including logistics because there's a couple times that when Chinese New Year would come up and say yeah we're going to ship all your product out this day and it doesn't get shipped and then Chinese New Year comes around and you can't ship for those 15 days and then after Chinese New Year there you know a 2 week backlog in shipments so you could go like you know 6 weeks without product and that's happened to us a couple times which was really really hard to overcome with customers.

Host: Wow and what about the story that I heard of the Chinese partner guy who came to help you at the hospital thing. That's kind of like a lucky, I believe in luck also do you?

Sam: Absolutely

Host: So meeting that, I didn't understand like the whole context like you met the guy the same day, and then?

Sam: The, that guy was an engineer at one of our old factories and when we talk about luck there's definitely always luck elements but you create all of your luck but that was a relationship I had got by poking my head around the factory and finding someone who spoke english. He was never supposed to meet me because he was this smart, like this smart amazing guy with the perfect English and like almost no one else at the factory spoke English and I was just like

running around shaking hands and you know I ended up meeting this guy and he gave me his number and that night I got really really sick like and I didn't know what to do and he was the only one I knew that spoke good English so like in the area so I called him up like dude I'm barfing everywhere and I'm like, he's like tell me your hotel I'll pick you up take you to the hospital. And he came, took me to the hospital, and they were short-staffed so he stayed with me all night and we talked about the e-cigarette industry while he held my IV liquids above my head and I was like this is just one of the most incredibly smart intuitive like forward thinking people I've ever met and look he's just like an engineer at a factory...

Host: Right

Sam: ...and I was like telling him my vision for e-cigarettes he told me his vision. I'm like dude we gotta do business together, like and he wanted to start his own factory so that's that's basically how he got into business. We said we would you know commit some of our supply to him to if he can produce and he said he would do it if we would do that so that's one thing led to another eventually we formed a joint venture.

Host: So the English thing in China is really true, like they don't speak English right because in Brazil it's I don't know if you know but 8% of Brazilians speak English Like a lot of Brazilians will understand, they can read...

Sam: Yeah

Host: ...but they don't speak it...

Sam: Sure

Host: ...so from your experience in China you felt that too?

Sam: Yeah it was, you know China has evolved so much in the last 20 years and they've evolved so much in the last 5 years on different levels and English is one of those levels. When I go to that pocket in Shenzhen that I used to go to now so many people speak English and that's a lot because people that could speak english came there because its so much opportunity for them.

Host: Right

Sam: But now everyone that's you know in schools learn English.

Host: And that was how long ago?

Sam: That was like three four years ago.

Host: Okay

Sam: But even that whole area is like so Westernized now you know but Chengzhen's a pretty incredible place if you ask anyone that's spent time there. They've seen the whole city transform and now it's like 40 million people it's unbelievable.

Host: Right, okay, so then you invested \$100,000 in this business and you sold it for a hundred million is that true?

Sam: Yeah

Host: And you're old now?

Sam: 30

Host: How does that feel?

Sam: Turning 30 wasn't funny if that's what you mean.

Host: Yeah, I can tell you about turning 40.

Sam: I heard turning 30 is the hardest one from a few people but.

Host: Oh no it's awesome.

Sam: Yeah

Host: Turning 40 is even better.

Sam: Okay good, you got that optimism. I've got that to look forward to. Yeah it's been good, it, I think like looking back you know I think probably the best times that I could say or were kind of being like getting into remote work and like running a business that you realize was sustaining your lifestyle and not having you kind of just stuck working for someone else. So you know people talk about the exit and you know the big office that we had and all the fun we had and stuff but really for me the coolest part was my big clunky Hewlett-Packard computer being like on a beach in Mexico and finding some, some random Wi-Fi signal that I could get onto and being able to operate my business like that that was that was the best and you know that's where I'm back now just with a computer in my bag and traveling light and staying pretty flexible and my lifestyle hasn't changed at all you know I still live pretty much on the same budget I was 5 years ago so I think that's that's something that some people overlook that they have to build this business and take venture capital money and do all these you know crazy growth things and that's certainly cool if that's what drives you but you know if you can build a lifestyle business that supports some type of work lifestyle and ability to be remote I think for most people that's, that's pretty much achieving the work dream.

Host: You're not even traveling first class yet?

Sam: I do. Yeah yeah. But I don't I don't stay at you know several hundred dollar hotel rooms but yeah when I fly I like to fly as comfortably as possible.

Host: You deserve that right?

Sam: I have spent, I spend many many flights probably 500 flights in the back row by the bathroom so.

Host: Okay but you're not close to buying a jet. That's one of my brothers dream he's 25 he's like oh my dream is to have my own jet I can't stand airports and these lines and stuff

Sam: Oh I agree with him on that for sure. It's getting better though there's airlines like Emirates and I mean they have done so much to bring the standard up for flying. It's, it's crazy. I would fly Emirates for fun and when I go back to the US and I have to get on those crappy old jets with like these seats smashed together and these old like grumpy stewardesses, it's it's literally like an anxiety attack I'm like I can't do this for 2 hours and then you go fly like I mean Emirates and their lounges it's it's a fun flying experience you know like they have like this great staffs, they have these on board bars that you don't even feel like you're in a plane and these massive A380 jets it's great I like it. I hope that you know in our lifetime that the standard of the air travel gets picked up by a few of these kind of winning airlines.

Host: Yeah so is that may be an area that you would like to go into because that's my next question like if you ok we talked about the coworking and the cigarettes but is there anything you're looking at that you're thinking like this is something I'd like to step into.

Sam: I'm actually, I love business, I like business more of like a sport than just trying to keeping my mind sharp but I would love to be able to spend the majority of my time in some type of charitable cause or philanthropy I just did a meeting this morning with an organization here called child stream that we'll be getting involved with but I would like to get involved with in, I think there's so many things that need to be fixed in like NGO's (non-governmental organizations) non-profit areas and I would like to get involved in some type of innovative like technical web, like building some type of platform to, to kind of build more efficiencies into these things because I think one thing that has been common with so many of the autobiographies that I've read and biographies about people that have led very full, successful, satisfied, lives is that at the end of their life and they're looking back it's always about giving back or helping or having some calls above your own self-interest that is the most fulfilling but a lot of people don't realize that until they're you know 75, 80 years old, so I think that earlier people can have exposure to to kind of helping people that are less fortunate the better it might not become your life mission but it'll certainly give you another aspect of life. So that's what kind of where I'm trying to focus my energies going forward and but.

Host: So we need to talk but I don't think I told you but I worked in the slums in Brazil for 10 years with disadvantaged kids and I started with these kids when they were like. Actually, it's interesting was when my American mother because I lived in the states when I was a child when my father went to do his MBA and then when I was an exchange student. I was exchange student in Indiana and my American family in Indiana was amazing I still visit them almost every year and when they came to visit me in Brazil imagine a couple from Indiana who never left the States before...

Sam: Right

Host: ...and they got to Brazil and this 3 year old little girl came to the car at the traffic light begging for money and my American mom was like so what have you done? You know you're driving to this cool car, you have your own company already, what have you done to help this girl? And nobody had ever like asked me that question and it was the first time, I was 20. It was the first time I realized how selfish we are in Brazil, because we see these kids, we grew up with these kids at the traffic lights. So we're kind of like numb and my American mom with that question made me so embarrassed, you know, and from that moment on I started asking everybody and then I found this guy who put me in the slum like a week later. And that's another thing in Brazil, it's like maybe I don't know 60, 70% of the population actually lives in a slum but nobody goes there to visit. So when I went there and I started teaching these kids I felt so good about myself. It was 2 hours a week every Thursday 11 a.m. I would go there inside one of their homes and I did this for 10 years and I quit. My dad died and then like last year when I finally built my website, I created a project on my website called one kid at a time, so because I'm a coach now and I did my coaches specialization, my plan is to do webinars where I'm gonna train volunteers to mentor kids between 12 and 24 and it's all done online...

Sam: Yeah

Host: ...so I have some institutions already that I'm partnering up with in Brazil so they have the kids there, they have internet there and I have a bunch of volunteers. It's much easier actually to find the volunteers than to find the kids...

Sam: Interesting

Host: ...and then I match up...

Sam: Yeah

Host: ...the volunteer and the kids and all the volunteer really needs to do is donate half an hour of his time every 2 weeks. So it's a 1 hour commitment per month. Plus another hour of training and I produce all the templates with the questions that they need to ask this kid, it's almost like a Big Brother Big Sister...

Sam: Straight! Yeah.

Host: ...type thing but it's all online and it doesn't take a lot of time and energy and they can change so many...

Sam: That's awesome.

Host: ...and it's scalable you know?

Sam: Yeah sounds like a great initiative. I'm glad you're doing that.

Host: Yeah, so it would be great for, if you were ever want to step in and help us out with your amazing ideas it would be great.

Sam: Yeah we should definitely chat

Host: Okay, okay so just a few more questions here before we finish because I know you have to go in like 10 minutes. 25 countries a year why do you move so fast?

Sam: I got in the habit of moving very fast for once the, once we actually centralized in the UK I was traveling all the time for business around Europe to Asia and back to see my parents in the US etc., visit investors and stuff so I never actually I looked back and I said I think I calculated and I never slept in the same bed for more than 5 nights in about 5 years.

Host: Oh my God!

Sam: And in my brain was used to racing so much you know when we are operating a business that I just could never really like slow down and then when I got out of the business then that just transitioned into my into my personal life so I would start getting really bored in a place after being there for a week you know, I would get to a place go so fast you know for 2 days like see the entire city try the best bars and restaurants and then be like okay let's go to a new place new city, new country so, and every place that I went it was new I learned something. I learned something about humanity, I learned something about business, currency etc. so I just chalked it up to being the best learning experience.

Host:What is that?

Sam: It's the ice-cream truck. It's about that time of the day.

Host: That's cool okay.

Sam: Yeah

Host: So they got to see the ice cream truck in Chiang Mai. So are you, are you slowing down now though or are you still?

Sam: No I'm slowing down my goal is to spend half the year in Cheng Mai this year and the other part probably like between Singapore and Hong Kong but not you know visiting like 4, 5 continents in the same year.

Host: If you were to choose like maybe one or two places that you really like repeating more often where would it be?

Sam: Right now it's somewhere in southeast Asia I like pretty much Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand the same but they're very interchangeable for me although they're vastly different. And I've start, grown quite a liking to the California Coast, Southern California.

Host: Right



Sam: So that's kind of my aim coming into the next couple years maybe half the year in each place.

Host: And then San Francisco or San Diego?

Sam: No more like San Diego, LA. San Diego LA that's it.

Host: Okay

Sam: Yeah

Host: And what do you like about Hong Kong, I was there for like 10 days you know it's just so...

Sam: Yeah it's, it's stacked

Host: ...such a huge place, drives me crazy.

Sam: I love the energy there I think there's there's just a lot of things going on there because you know all the, there's just so much money in China and a lot of that money ends up in Hong Kong and it's a magical place it's got incredible history of trading with like with the English coming over and engaging with the locals there and the opium trades and there's just so much going on it's like it's the type of place like if you're not in an office by 8 in the morning with a cup of coffee like already involved in some type of initiative like you feel like the world's passing you by and for me that's a great change-of-pace to Thailand where it's just a zillion distractions and easy living and you know its just, there's no pressure pressure to really perform I feel like so Singapore Hong Kong for me are a great blend.

Host: Okay I got it and so you're thinking of doing 6 months maybe 3, 4 months in each place now right?

Sam: Yeah, I think, this, like head south to Thai beaches next month then probably back to Chiang Mai and then maybe Hong Kong for a month then back to Chiang Mai then Singapore for a month and try something like that for a year.

Host: What about Florida?

Sam: Florida, great place to grow up my parents love it but for me I think like so many people you spend you know 30 years in a place and just it's not that exciting to go back to so and it's it's pretty far to get to at this point...

Host: Right

Sam: ...so yeah my sister's in California I like I like California.

Host: Okay cool.

Host: Now what about your routine like do you have any performance tools like I'm into meditation right now and exercise do you exercise on a regular basis?

Sam: Yes I get this question a lot and there's so many people talking about this right now and I have a little bit of a different view on it you and that is everyone is talking about morning routines and starting your day right and meditation, yoga and all this stuff and I definitely agree with that stuff but I agree with it as more of a balanced life there's some part of me that feels like if I did that for the last 5 years I might not have gotten to where I wanted to go because my life for three four years that we're building the business was a hundred percent work it wasn't worrying about going to the gym I was traveling but I was still working like 12 to 14 hours a day to roll out of bed smash some coffee smash more coffee and just be just tunnel vision on work, whatever it required and it wasn't until I got out of that and just realized how stressed I was during that time period that I started looking at more like you know hour to 2-hour morning routines including like stretching meditation, no cell phone, reading a book drinking tea, things like that but I don't necessarily think that's, that's required to be successful I think it's required to be more balanced and more aware in your day but if your only focus is building a business being successful I don't necessarily think that has to be part of it.

Host: So during those three years not even exercise?

Sam: Yeah I exercise every now and then when I got a chance my second thing to work but I wasn't taking 30 minutes out of my day to meditate or go to yoga class.

Host: And now you are?

Sam: I try to be yeah. I don't need, I haven't gotten fully into it yet, I still like roll out of bed and just being one track mind.

Host: Have you ever been to a silence retreat here?

Sam: No

Host: Oh my God you should definitely try I did that for 10 days it was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.

Sam: Well send me some information on it I'm always looking at doing like these kind of a committed types of...

Host: Yeah I think I'm going to do a 7 day one next month in Samui next month.

Sam: Cool

Host: They have a 7 day one there that, I didn't 10 day one with the same organization so that's how I knew.

Sam: Yeah sweet

Host: Great so what's for the future like how you see yourself 5 years from now like this perfect amazing future for you 5 years from now would be what?

Sam: I think I would like to be pretty settled by that point in a cool spot like that gives me lots of flexibility and somehow still involved in creating something I would like to be involved in charity much more at that time hopefully doing something that can kind of pave a better path to for that I mean there's so much going on it's disorganized I feel like in that space that could be put to better use and I don't know what the niche would be but hopefully I'll find a way to make things better.

Host: So you see yourself in one spot but you don't know which one yet?

Sam: Should be knocking on the baby year's time frame for me so I would probably have to be somewhat centralized.

Host: Or you can be a nomadic family.

Sam: You never know people will do it times will be changed by then.

Host: You can do crazy things like me I froze my eggs...

Sam: Yeah?

Host: ...because I wanted to buy some time I hate the biological pressure on women

Sam: There you go!

Host: Yeah So just two more questions to finish air you mentioned your partner how awesome she is like what kind of skills do you normally look for in people you hire to work with you or that you invite to partner up with?

Sam: Yeah I think it's always, number one is always the right attitude more businesses fail just because of people they have to answer to or people they work with or partnerships than, than not having the opportunity or the right game plan so that's number one just making sure that you are comfortable working with that person and that person's got the right attitude everyone we hired for Skycig like almost everyone was just out of college and we just looked for people with the right attitude and if they have the right attitude they can learn and they can be responsible, and they can be reliable, and accountable and all those good things so I think that's number one like if just not worry necessarily about the skill-sets just worry about people that are gung ho and want to go to battle with it.

Host: Do you or is your team today entirely remote?

Sam: Leanne are here in Chiang Mai but we consider ourselves remote and everyone else is remote we have writers in several different continents our developers are in Bolivia we have some admin people who help us from the Philippines so yeah until, you know we can probably

do that for a long time and at some point if it makes sense to centralize we'll centralize but there will always be a remote component.

Host: Right and what's your opinion about the whole digital movement thing do you think this is going to grow exponentially because I get mixed feelings about the digital Nomads sometimes I see a lot of back-packers calling themselves digital nomads...

Sam: Yeah

Host: ...but they're still trying to figure out a way to have your lifestyle...

Sam: Yeah

Host: ...do you think that it's from what you've seen in so many other countries is this part of the world where it's all happening is the states?

Sam: It's going to grow exponentially it has in the last few years and it will continue at this. There's a lot of people different people you talk to there's a hedge fund manager that I subscribe to that says he thinks there will be some like 60% of the world's Workforce will be remote by 2025. Like that's massive that's, that's 10 billion people. At the conference one of the guys said a billion digital know about by 2030 or 2035 and there's no doubt it will grow it's just because of the internet and you know all sides businesses are decentralizing, people are moving into co-working spaces everyone wants to travel and be more flexible including managers, including business owners so everything will continue to go in that direction yeah there are a lot of people out there figuring out how to make a living online but you know that just means people are trying to figure out it, humans are very smart, they'll try to figure out better ways to do it so I can expect it definitely to continue to grow and Southeast Asia, South America soon to be the hot spots, Europe's just too expensive typically for people just starting out to be "nomading" around but yeah but every place will continue to grow as long as there's Wi-Fi.

Host: That's right you know that in Brazil I think maybe 1% I don't even know any Brazilian company that has remote team, remote culture so I am trying to set up this conference that I invited you for that in July in Brazil to bring the message to start bringing the message to some of these people so if you were to sit and have a coffee with a CEO in Brazil and try to talk him into opening his eyes to letting his team go work wherever they want like how would you tell him like how would you convince him.

Sam: Well nothing's for free right you don't just do it because you're a benevolence like a great guy or a great woman you do it because there's some positive aspect to your business so typically when centralized businesses like either let centralized workers go remote or hire workers that are already remote its a cost savings. So a lot of places like I have friends in the US in negotiation with their bosses instead of taking whatever they are salary their taking 30% less to do the same work but they're working out of the office. That's less space the company needs so they can you know they can rent out desk space or they can have a smaller office. So it's a business decision you don't just do it just to be a nice guy and let everyone run around. So you can save a tremendous amount of costs in overhead to your business just by letting people go work remotely and typically I think you'll find that you get better output because people will

be so happy with their new, their new flexibility that they're going to want to put in the extra effort to make sure that they can maintain it.

Host: Right productivity normally goes up right?

Sam: For sure.

Host: Sam it was great talking to you and knowing a little bit more about you thank you so much I hope we see you in July.

Sam: I hope to see you in July as well.

Host : I will definitely put up an amazing schedule and send it to convince you.

Sam: I look forward to it I'll hold you to that now.

Host: Okay

Sam: Thanks for having me

Host: Thank you.