

Filling the 'Niche' Niche

NicheBucks cleans up by offering authentic niche content.

It's a muggy day in July in the middle of a heat wave of record highs in Los Angeles. It's the kind of weather that makes gentle-spirited people turn curmudgeonly and the elderly keel over from heat exhaustion. At The Standard in West Hollywood, Calif., however, NicheBucks Chief Executive Officer Gavin Lloyd and his right-hand man, General Manager Clark Chambers, are keeping cool as they enjoy a relaxing lunch by the pool.

"We like to come here and 'girl watch,'" Chambers tells me as I order an iced tea. "It's a great place to come for a break from the office."

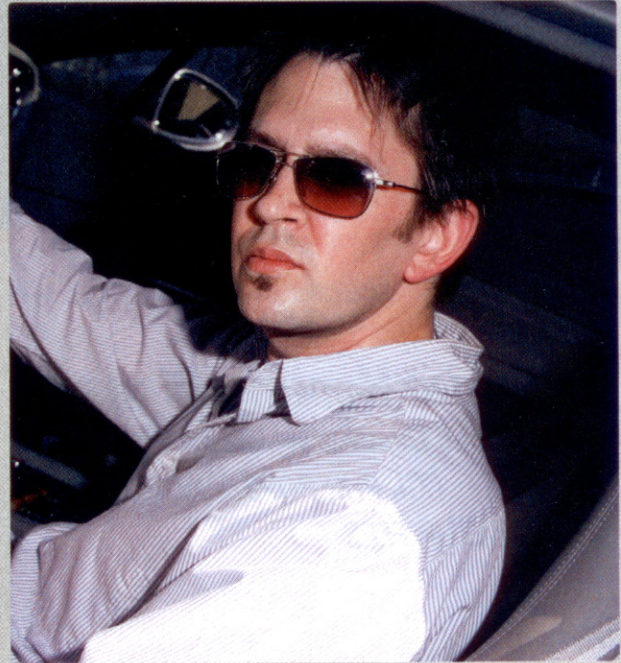
Indeed. The pool at The Standard has become a sort of meeting ground for the up-and-coming executives of Young Hollywood. A cursory glance around the patio reveals a shirtless, tanned-to-perfection, 20-something stud in Abercrombie swim trunks reading through a copy of *For the Actor* while sipping on a Diet Coke, a personal trainer displaying proper leg-lunging technique to a stunning beauty in a string bikini, and a pool full of frolicking young men and women soaking up the rays in between auditions. It's obviously a hot spot for locals. One begins to wonder just how many of the people lounging poolside actually are staying at the hotel.

It was Chambers' suggestion to meet at the hotel, which—according to him—is rather ironic. "One of the things I had a hard time with when I started in the adult Internet business was that so much of it is conducted informally," he says. "You meet people at a show, you have drinks with someone, and you have a great time together, and that can lead to something that can make both parties thousands of dollars.

"My background is much more formal," Chambers continues. "Most of the people who know me in the business see me as the guy who's wearing the tie or the suit, even though it isn't necessary. Now, I see that's what is so neat about the business. It's great that you can sit here at the pool at The Standard doing business while drinking Bloody Marys and watching broads."

It's all about the content, baby

"As a marketer, the adult Internet is such a great thing," Lloyd offers after we've completed our très-L.A. lunch, effectively refo-



Gavin Lloyd

ocusing the conversation toward business. "There's really no better business where you have so much information at your fingertips; where you can try new marketing strategies and see the results of them so quickly. You have so much data that it really makes the job of pleasing your customers an easy one. If you use all that data, it really helps accomplish the end goal of customer satisfaction [and of] exceeding the expectation."

Employing more than 30 photographers who shoot original content exclusively for NicheBucks sites, the company has built a name for itself as one that delivers authentic content in each niche it covers. Whether the mature women found on flagship site AuntJudys.com (or its brand extensions OlderWomen.com and BigOlderWomen.com), the barely legal men that populate Twinks.com (formerly BoyBoy.com), or the Nair-phobic ladies of FullBush.com, content takes precedence in the NicheBucks program.

"I put all my money into content rather than into webmaster programs and advertising," Lloyd says. "Then I reinvested the money into buying a lot of exclusive content to become the market leader in each segment that I was vested in as quickly as possible."

He's not kidding. Some of the sites in the NicheBucks program were pioneers in their respective niches. As the NicheBucks site states, "Where we were the first, we became the best."

"There's a limited amount of niche content out there that is true niche content," Lloyd expands. "When you see the licensed content that's available in some niches, you see a lot of stuff that just really doesn't fit the bill. Niche consumers know what they want. They're going to jump around from site to site until they find the niche leader. That type of consumer is the kind that's going to respond to good content. They're harder to please, but if you do please them, your return on investment is excellent over the long run, because the person who loves niche content is going to know that you're the best, and they're going to stick with you forever."

Lloyd happily reports that NicheBucks receives letters "from



Clark Chambers

webmaster cred quotient, yet he kept the focus on the authenticity of the content. "Pretty simply, we do the things that every program does; we just try to do them with better results and better content," Chambers asserts. "Being that our business method is about the content and providing real sites for the consumers, it makes it sort of a no-brainer for webmasters [to promote our sites]. If you're going to have mature traffic, if you're going to have gay twink traffic, if you're going to have hairy women traffic, you'd be insane not to include our sites in there among your top outlets."

Chambers had assistance from Quentin Boyer, who was brought on as NicheBucks' affiliate manager. Boyer immediately set about bringing the program up to date and establishing a strong brand identity that resonated with affiliates. "It all comes down to niche marketing," Boyer says later. "A brand like OlderWomen.com, for example, has a certain 'definitive' ring to it; it simply is what the name says it is. Once you've targeted your niche market—be it a consumer market or B2B—you must establish yourself as consistent within the marketplace. Just focus on what you do well, as opposed to trying to be all things to all people."

Protecting the rep

As the interview winds down, the talk turns to lessons gleaned from doing business in the adult industry. "In this business, the only thing you really have to stand on is your reputation," Chambers

"There's no shortage of people trying to take away our customers and our webmasters, so it's a matter of standing behind what we've spent years doing. That's why we're still here."

—Clark Chambers, general manager, NicheBucks

customers from 2001 who are still with us." In fact, Lloyd says he was so focused on pleasing customers that he nearly forgot about how he also could please webmasters. "I never really pushed NicheBucks to the webmaster community all that much," he admits. "It was just kind of there for people who were fans of the sites [and who] were also webmasters that set up accounts. We didn't do a lot of advertising; we didn't exhibit at the conventions. We were just kind of a small company that was just really good at pleasing our customers that had highly targeted, specific interests in the concept of [niches]. It really didn't change until about two years ago, when Clark came on board."

An easy revamp

For Chambers, the president of his own website services company (the Nevada-based Paysite Services Inc.), taking the contract job of whipping NicheBucks into shape for affiliates was pretty much smooth sailing. "The goal was to make NicheBucks competitive with other programs, and that didn't take a lot," he says. "It was a matter of the technical stuff. The sites were all there; they were the leaders in their niches. They had followings and were very easy things for webmasters to sell, so it was just a matter of giving the webmasters the tools to do so."

With the usual array of banners, hosted galleries, exclusive content sets, and full- and half-page ads—plus 50-percent revshare and \$30-pay-per-sign-up payouts—Chambers amplified NicheBucks'

says as he sips his third Bloody Mary. "If a webmaster comes to us with a problem, we try to solve it. Whether we think we're right or wrong, we try to work it out with them. Because the thing is, tomorrow there's going to be the next BlahBlahBlahCash or the next WhateverBucks. There's no shortage of people trying to take away our customers and our webmasters, so it's a matter of standing behind what we've spent years doing. That's why we're still here. That's why we keep doing the same thing year after year."

Lloyd chimes in. "I've learned the same thing that you could apply to any industry: Work hard, provide an excellent service, and exceed your customers' expectations, and you're going to come out ahead no matter what," he says. "Knowing that we provide an excellent service and a good value for the customers that are out there is what keeps us in this business."

"Yeah, that and he drives a Bentley!" Chambers adds with a laugh.

Lloyd shrugs, and says, "I've got a weakness for cars."

Just then, a stunning young beauty in a red bikini saunters by on her way to join some friends by the pool. Both men follow her with their gazes. Although we're probably all thinking the same thing, Chambers is the first to speak anything out loud. "Ahhh," he says while flagging down the waiter to order one more Bloody Mary. "It's great to be in the adult business."

We couldn't agree more. ☺

—KEN KNOX