

Lenox: Welcome to Acceleration Partners second episode of our Outperform podcast, where we'll discuss topics ranging from performance marketing, affiliate marketing, and digital marketing to company culture, entrepreneurship, leadership and the like. On today's episode, we'll chat with our Global Director of Strategic Partnerships and Publishers, Alison Chew, about publisher development, what it is, why it's important for your performance marketing efforts, and how it's evolving. So welcome, Alison.

Alison: Hi, Lenox.

Lenox: To start us off, can you give us some background on who publishers are and what their role has been with performance marketing?

Alison: Sure. So publishers are really anyone. Anyone can be a publisher nowadays. Historically, publishers though have been primarily focused on coupons, deals, cash back. So these are some of the sites that you probably think of when you think of affiliate marketing. You might think of large sites like Retail Me Not, who focuses on coupon distribution, or an Ebates, which is a large loyalty or cash back publisher. And you might also think of affiliates as mommy bloggers, moms who are passionate about specific items like things for their children or babies. They'll blog about when there's a coupon for diapers or formula, things like that.

Alison: So anyone really can be a publisher. And nowadays, they come in all shapes and sizes, again, from those big coupon sites and loyalty site to mommy bloggers to social influencers are making a huge push into the performance marketing or affiliate world. We have affiliates who specialize in long tail search, who specialize in site abandonment. We also have new apps as well as schools and nonprofits. So really, the sky's the limit. Anyone with a following or with an audience or with certain technology can partner now with top brands and earn from referring traffic or referring sales or leads or really doing something that a brand finds beneficial.

Alison: So again, the sky's the limit. And anyone nowadays can partner with huge brands, which is pretty amazing.

Lenox: So would you say... Are affiliates and publishers synonymous?

Alison: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. And we talk about affiliates, and we call them publishers. We call them affiliates. And they're one and the same. They really are.

Lenox: So why are they so... Because there's so many buzz words in this industry. There's performance marketing, affiliate marketing. Why are publishers so important to performance marketing?

Alison: Well, without publishers we really wouldn't have performance marketing. So we need publishers, again, of all shapes and sizes to work with our clients, which are some of the top brands in the country, to distribute information, to talk about a brand, to talk about a product, to talk about a new launch, to really distribute content in such a way that an individual affiliate alone or an individual publisher alone wouldn't have a huge impact. But when you gather them together and you have now an affiliate program filled with publishers, filled with affiliates that are distributing your content, and you are paying them on a performance basis, it's something that's extremely powerful.

Alison: And for brands, they love it because they are paying on performance. So they are paying only when a sale happens or only when a lead happens. So they're paying on an action. And publishers love it because they have access to hundreds and thousands of great brands, and they can work closely with them in a partnership to push out new content, to get the inside scoop on maybe a new launch or a new release. So they benefit from having access to these brands and having access to this information that other people wouldn't necessarily have access to.

Alison: And they can build up their content. They can distribute it to their user base. And they get paid on performance. So if they feel passionate about a product or about a service, they can speak to that and really get paid doing something they love and talking about things that they enjoy.

Lenox: So what does a publisher development team do?

Alison: So specifically, the publisher development team at Acceleration Partners really focuses on building relationships. So building relationships with existing publishers that we are working with and our affiliate programs as well as building relationships with new publishers. Like I said before, publishers come in all shapes and sizes and really anyone these days can be a publisher. So the sky's the limit for who we can work with, which is really exciting.

Alison: So we're trying to build as many relationships as we can. We're working with publishers. And then we're going back and we're working very closely with the team of account managers at Acceleration Partners to make sure we're matching up the right publisher opportunities to the right affiliate program so that we can help both those affiliates, those publishers grow as well as support our affiliate programs and help them grow as well.

Alison: So the publisher development team here is, again, looking at new and existing publisher opportunities. We're talking to publishers. We're talking to them on the phone, via email, at events such as Affiliate Summit West that's coming up. And we're really developing those relationships and growing those relationships and helping those

affiliates grow. We're giving them the device. We are supporting them, answering questions, and then of course we're working closely with our team of account managers to help match up those publishers and grow their affiliate programs.

Lenox: So I know that we talk a lot about this internally, about how publishers and affiliates have a whole concept that's really changed over the past even five years. So initially, in its early stage with affiliate marketing, what did publishers look like? Has it always been... 'cause I know we're kind of looking at new types branching out. As you said, the sky's the limit. But what did publishers look like early on in the days of affiliate marketing?

Alison: Sure. A lot of the publishers were, again, the larger coupon sites such as our Retail Me Not or our large loyalty cash back sites like an Ebates and those mommy bloggers. They were kind of traditionally the affiliates in affiliate marketing five, ten years ago. And it really focused on them. There were a lot of lead generation partners as well out there.

Alison: And now, it's evolving again with Facebook, with Instagram, with Pinterest, with all of the new social media tools and channels out there. Then combine that with the world of mobile and apps. You really open up the spectrum of who can be an affiliate and who can be a publisher by leaps and bounds. So over the past five years, again, we definitely still have our major coupon and deal and cash back sites. We still have our mommy bloggers.

Alison: But now, we have so much more. We have schools. We have nonprofits. Again, apps and new technology that's coming about. Really anyone that you can think of can partner with a brand in this capacity through an affiliate program and work closely with a brand to drive whatever action that they seek, whether it's a lead or a sale. Really, they can drive anything and partner with a brand.

Alison: The future of publisher development here at Acceleration Partners and I'm sure a lot of other places, it's really a business development role. It's really thinking outside of the box and thinking outside of the traditional social channels and the traditional bloggers and coupon sites and loyalty sites to see who else can we work with, who else would be a good fit for these specific brands. And I don't know who it is off the top of my head, but there are certainly a lot of interesting opportunities, interesting people and sites that we can partner with and bring them into an affiliate program and work closely with them to build that partnership.

Alison: We see affiliate programs of the future as simply a way to track performance, to report, and to facilitate payment. So really, we're lifting kind of that, we'll call it a stigma, but we're lifting what people have traditionally thought of affiliate marketing as certain types of

affiliates as those mommy bloggers or those coupon sites or loyalty sites. We're really removing that and saying, "You know what? Anyone, anyone can be an affiliate and anyone can partner with these amazing brands, have access to unique content and information. And anyone can be an affiliate. Anyone can be a publisher. And let's make that happen."

Alison: And so we're really bringing that to the next level for our clients, for the brands that we work with because so many of them come to us. And they want new ideas. They want out-of-the-box ideas. They want new and interesting partnerships. They're really pushing the boundaries. And they really want to go outside the norm. And that's what we want to do as well. That's exciting.

Lenox: So that really segues into my next question is really where do you see publisher development headed in the next few years? We're headed into a new year, 2017. And you touched on some of those points. So if a company, let's say brand X is working with a group of publishers and it's really traditional. They might have a few coupon affiliates in there. And they might have some bloggers in there. So if it's a new type of a partnership, I know we've talked a little bit about influencer marketing and how influencer marketing is... Those influences are really publishers. They're really the exact same thing as affiliates.

Alison: Sure.

Lenox: It's just paid differently. So is that kind of where you see publisher development headed in the next few years?

Alison: Absolutely. And I think that influencers are just a piece of where that's going. Certainly influencers, they have an audience and they are listening to them. They obviously have some sort of influence obviously over their audience and, if done in the right way, they can certainly drive whatever that action is that a brand wants. Maybe it's traffic. Maybe it's leads. Maybe they want people to sign up for their emails. Or maybe they want sales. But influences can certainly do that. They can certainly act as affiliates. They already are acting as affiliates. So I definitely think they'll be an integral part of where affiliate marketing's going in the next several years.

Alison: In addition, mobile is huge. It is not going away. Mobile apps are certainly not going anywhere, and we're going to see more and more technology be developed to properly track and attribute sales in kind of that mobile web and app to app world, which is really exciting as well. And then we'll see those traditional affiliates continue to grow. We'll see them change with the times as they do, which is great. We'll see new technology come out, I'm sure new ways to target consumers, new ways to use data to target consumers, to segment more, which I think is going to be really exciting.

Alison: I don't know if we're going to see it but programmatic is growing as well, programmatic advertising. It has not made its way into affiliate. I don't know if and when it will. But that's another exciting one that I'm keeping my eyes and ears open to see if anything happens in the programmatic world in affiliate. We'll see if the ROI's there for those programmatic ad buyers.

Alison: And then for Acceleration Partners, for our publisher development team, we are focusing again on the traditional. We're focusing on building those relationships with our current publishers and new publishers. And we're also really explore new outside the box opportunities and vetting new opportunities to see if we can test them out, if there's something there, if it'll work for our clients. So it's certainly going to be an exciting 2017, filled with a lot of possibility.

Lenox: How do you define programmatic? You had mentioned that a few times. What does that mean?

Alison: Sure. So more and more people are buying ads programmatically so they're using cookie data to match with other data to display ads. For instance, you can buy cookie data on doctors. And if you are a pharmaceutical company and you want to serve an ad for a drug, maybe you want to serve an ad for a cancer drug to oncologists, there are companies out there that can have the data, have the cookie data. And they know here are the 5000 oncologists in the United States and we're going to be able to serve this very, very targeted ad to them.

Alison: That has not been something that has come into the affiliate space yet, probably because of the ROI. And they're trying to figure that out. But again, anything can be run through affiliate programs, so I can see that as a possibility if there's someone out there who would like to target a very specific consumer and you have a publisher that can access that sort of cookie data. Then it could happen. So we'll see. Programmatic is hot right now, and we'll see how that goes.

Lenox: That sounds fascinating and also...

Alison: A bit scary.

Lenox: Yeah, a little scary and creepy at the same time. But I'm sure brands would be all over that because that's obviously one of the biggest challenges that we know. That's one of the things that makes affiliate marketing, performance marketing so successful and attractive is that brands are able to reach very targeted audiences based on a relationship of trust between the publisher and their audience. So yeah, it just takes it to a whole new level. So it's fascinating.

Lenox: So what do you think are some misnomers about publisher development? Because we know internally, but our listening might not.

A lot of companies internally if they have an in-house team or even externally, they're working with a network or something, their challenge with publisher development, it always seems to be at the top of most brands' lists.

Alison: Sure. Publisher development is difficult. And it's difficult for a couple of reasons. Number one, if you think of the world of publishers or the world of affiliates, there's hundreds of thousands. The possibilities are really endless. And they really have... They can really pick from any brand that they want to work with, pretty much, if it's a good fit. You have the top influencers, the top bloggers, wanting to work with the same brands. And these bloggers, these influencers have a finite amount of space or social media. They have a finite amount of time. They can't spam their audiences or else they'll lose that respect. And they will only work with a handful of brands at any given time.

Alison: So there are a number of surveys that have gone out to thousands of affiliates out there. And most affiliates, most publishers, not talking about the big Retail Me Nots or Ebates of the world, but most other publishers, talking about content publishers, bloggers, social influencers are only working with between five and eight brands at any given time. And that really limits the number of brands that an affiliate will work with at a given time.

Alison: So if you're a brand, you really have to stand out. You really have to be special. You have to be doing something that's unique. And to attract to this top bloggers, those top influences, you either need to pay them more, you need to give them unique content or something special, maybe it's an exclusive code or something like that. And you need to build that relationship. You need to really put that time in to develop that relationship so that, when they're thinking of their next article or their next Instagram post, that they think of you because they really have unlimited number of brand opportunities.

Alison: So when I think about publisher development, it's very difficult. And recruitment in general is very difficult for these brands just because there's so many great publishers but there's, again, limited space and limited time. So it's really standing out. And I think for us, it's developing those relationships with these publishers so that, when they're thinking about putting together their 2016 gift guide, that they think about the Acceleration Partners brand. Or when they're thinking about putting together their New Years resolution post, they think about our brands. They think about the relationship that we have. They think about the unique content that we could possibly give them. And that's top of mind.

Alison: So I think it's a challenge for us. It's a challenge for any affiliate program for that matter to really stand out and to work with the affiliates that you really want to work with, those that have that audience, those that have that reach, those that have that specific

group of consumers that you're trying to reach. Maybe you have a very niche product and you want to reach a very, very specific type of consumer. So it's kind of putting your best foot forward and building those relationships and continuing to do that so that brands can partner with these amazing affiliates to grow their affiliate programs.

Lenox: I think those are really some impressive and important tips that anyone, any brand that has a performance marketing program needs to consider seriously as they go into this new year. So those are great.

Lenox: Alison, thank you so much for taking the time to share your knowledge about what publisher development is and does for performance marketers. I think this information, again, is especially relevant and valuable as we head into a new year.

Alison: Thank you.

Lenox: To our listeners out there, if you would like to learn more about Acceleration Partners, be sure to check out our website and blog at [www.accelerationpartners.com](http://www.accelerationpartners.com). We've got more insightful topics to share with you to help you elevate and accelerate your business in 2017. So stay tuned.