

**Matthew:** Hello and welcome to Marketing Smarts, a podcast brought to you by MarketingProfs. I'm your host Matthew Grant, Managing Editor here at MarketingProfs. Thank you for listening.

If your company's ears are burning it's probably because someone is talking about it on the internet, or not. Therein lies the rub. The internet contains a mindboggling amount of data, some of which is relevant to your company and what it's trying to accomplish, and much of it that is, from one perspective or another, complete noise.

For this reason there are folks out there working day and night to create and perfect tools which will allow you to both gather potentially relevant data from the web and then, more importantly, sift through it to find the stuff that really matters to you and your customers.

To talk about the process of extracting business intelligence from the web we've invited Aaron Weber of Spiral16 to Marketing Smarts. Aaron has spent more than a decade creating and curating content on the web. Along the way he's learned some important lessons about how content spreads and what companies can learn from the many conversations that are happening (or not) about their products.

So, Aaron, welcome to Marketing Smarts.

**Aaron:** Thank you for having me. It's good to be here.

**Matthew:** And you're out in Kansas, you're in the heartland right?

**Aaron:** The heartland, beautiful Overland Park, Kansas, located just across the state line.

**Matthew:** Across the state line from Missouri?

**Aaron:** Kansas City, Missouri, yes. We live in this weird space, we have one foot in Kansas and one foot in Missouri. No matter what they tell you, the border war never really ended. It's still going strong.

**Matthew:** The border conflict that happened back then and the sort of invasion of Lawrence, Kansas, it was almost like an ethnic cleansing that they Union Army did. All those counties on the Missouri side, they just cleared them out, "Get people out of here and we won't have to deal with these yahoos killing abolitionists."

**Aaron:** Oddly enough, the effect of that, I think, lasted into the culture for quite some time. There's still very much that fiercely independent minded streak that's out here. When you say Kansas City, I grew up in a town called Pray Village, which from the sound of it is very parochial, but in reality it's a suburb next to a huge metropolitan area. Growing up people were like, "Pray Village, did you have a cow?" For dinner, yes.

**Matthew:** Nice. So you're in Kansas. Apparently you work for this company called Spiral16, I hear.

**Aaron:** I do indeed. I've been here for four years now.

**Matthew:** Nice. Of course, I met you through MarketingProfs event that we did down in Austin last February. We were talking about social media monitoring and business intelligence on the web, which is kind of Spiral16's bailiwick. Could you tell us a little bit about the company and then let's get into kind of how you ended up there and the circuitous path that has taken you into the marketing software tool space, so to speak?

**Aaron:** Are we doing those words? Can I use austeur?

**Matthew:** You can use any word that you think of and could defend if I call you on it and say, "No way, B.S. that's not a word."

**Aaron:** I'm really good at Words with Friends, so don't push me. My undefeated streak continues.

Spiral16, we've actually been around since March 2007. The idea was at this point monitoring solutions online were really limited to server side analytics, such as crawling your own server logs and looking at referral logs and things like that. The other approach was something like Google, which was just this kind of shut gun cannon approach to monitoring online.

The toolset that was designed in this house was designed off of two principles. One, having control over what comes in is imperative, because as we all know, most of the internet is noise. For every one good thing that you want to find there's probably 150 or 200 wholly irrelative pieces that will come back of the same keyword. So precision and control is a big piece of that.

The second piece of that was looking beyond just, at the time, the burgeoning social media space, because the blogosphere has been pretty exploded for I'd say about seven or eight years now. But, looking at that specifically and then the advent of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter really hadn't come into play yet, we already knew that while social media is important it's not the end all be all.

If I hear about a new product, a new movie, a new TV show, anything at all that I want to find out about, chances are I'm not going right to Facebook or I'm not going right to Twitter. I can kind of guarantee most people aren't doing that. They're going to Google and Google is not going to direct you to a blog or Twitter or Facebook, Google is going to direct you to Wikipedia or Yellow Pages or a corporate landing page, or some dry information piece or a company portal.

So then we knew if we looked just at social media and we left that other side of the equation out then we'd be missing a big part of the narrative because the impetuous is, "Hey, let's find out what people are saying." Yes, that's important. It's just as important to know why are they saying that and where did they get the information that they based that opinion off in the first place.

So our goal from the toolset perspective is to look at everything all at once. So to be able to put things in perspective to say, "Here's what's being said on the blogs, here's what's being said on the reference pages, here's what the corporate site is saying," so that you can analyze the language all at once and understand if I go online and search for X topic, Coca-Cola, what language am I going to encounter and is that language being out by consumers, is it being put out by my competitors, is it being put out by myself.

That was the understanding behind the toolset. The second side of that was that we understood very early that you needed a human brain. As smart as an algorithm is, which is pretty smart, computational power only gets you so far because the human brain when we hear a word we know how to put it into context. Software just doesn't.

So the toolset was built to look at everything and then the other side of that was to enable human beings to A) have part of the vetting process and B) be able to crawl through this data to make real decisions based off of the understanding that we bring to a topic. So that's kind of the spiel there.

**Matthew:** Right. So then do the humans – because I always think about this and like you said, an algorithm can only be so smart and, of course, it seems like when they're trying to work on things like artificial intelligence the one key is trying to get these algorithms to learn and evolve and adapt to new input and that's where having humans in the loop really helps them get them smarter. Is that how things work with the Spiral16 toolset, by having human vetting, human input, human review, ultimately it's a feedback loop, right? That makes the algorithm smarter over time.

**Aaron:** Yes. So because we can't just put in a couple of terms and let an algorithm go to town, so the way our process typically works is once we come up with the term sets to figure out what concepts do we want to find, what are the words that we really want to look for, that first round of data that comes back, a human being goes through it.

Somebody on my team goes through that data and says, "This is a good example. This is a bad example. This is a great example." By pinpointing those good examples we're training the system, "This is the language composition that you're looking for. These are the types of posts that you're looking for." So everything that comes in after that fact gets scored against an example chosen by a human being. That allows us to have what we call a relevancy score.

So on a topic that's really specific, you know, if my brand name is Widget it's going to be a little noisy no matter what, but we have a relevancy score to say that this post picked by the computer is 80% semantically similar to this post picked by a human being, so we're going to call that good. That allows us to have a slider to say, "accept anything from 20% up," or only accept 99% and higher. So that's that piece.

Then the other side of it is that toolset is designed to spit out reports and automate. We've got every chart you could possibly want, but at the end of the day a chart only tells you so much, it doesn't tell you the story behind it. So the toolset is designed to encourage you to actually walk through the posts to try to understand where the narrative really comes from.

**Matthew:** But, it also seemed that with the 3D visualization capabilities, I mean I was just checking out your website and looking at the videos and they were sweet.

**Aaron:** Oh, yes.

**Matthew:** There's a lot of data, so that's the first issue. Then of course you can collect a lot of data. You start combing through it, you narrow it down, you use the algorithm and relevancy to get closer and closer. But, I like the idea with the visualization tool it helps give you a kind of meta-context to the data that you're collecting.

You could be collecting a lot of data and you say, "There's these conversations and these people talking about us online," but I liked how you had this kind of, at least in the one example I saw, Company A and Company B and even if you could talk about similar volumes of data and conversation happening you could kind of map one to the other and show that just in terms of the connections and the relationship, like the position that influencers that had in the one conversation meant that Company A's data was really more meaningful and Company B's data was just too disconnected.

That's something, even as you're looking through the raw data you need some tool or some way to visualize the connections, because the connections aren't in the data, they're always out there and around it.

**Aaron:** Yes. And we collect the information on who is linking to who and how connected everybody is, but it's one thing to look at a list of, let's say 5,000 pages, and to browse through 5,000 pages and you can come up with a narrative in your own head. But, when you've got it displayed in front of you saying, "Here are the relationships between all of these sites. Here are where the communities are and here are these clusters of sites that are just kind of talking out in the wild without any connection to anyone." It really helps gel that picture together.

That's kind of one of the ideas is that everybody gets to that eureka moment from a slightly different perspective. Some people are list driven, some people are chart driven, some people need to have it in a more visual kinetic format.

So the toolset is designed to just kind of cut this data up as finely and coarsely as you'd like and give you all these different options of display to get you to that ah-ha moment faster, because at the end of the day analysis takes time and that can be an expensive process. So anything we can do to speed that up a little bit and get you to those ah-ha moments a little faster then everybody wins.

**Matthew:** Right, exactly. At a certain point you bubble things up and if you're either trying to translate this into a message that you want to get out to your customers or even just some information that you want to get into the proverbial C-suite, you have to have the eureka moment so that you can communicate all these 5,000 lines of data into one sentence, or else it is pointless.

I'm wondering, so you're at Spiral16, how did you end up there? What are you?

**Aaron:** I am the proverbial Jack of all trades, I have to admit. My educational background is in Philosophy and film. A side effect of that was logic and statistics, just because they interest me and because I'm a nerd. You couldn't get your Pop Culture degree back then, I would have been a static going to school now, like "I can get a degree in Star Wars? Yes." But, thankfully that route was not available to me.

I came to this because I had worked with bands a long time, I had gone into IT, got sick of it, dropped out, became a musician, worked with bands, and one of the things I fell into was being the website manager and community manager. So since about 1997 onward I was the guy who was in there keeping forums going and keeping sites going. That bled over into blogging.

I had a site called **Trans Buddha** that built with a couple other guys that we ran for about seven years. Out of seven of those, five of them we were in Technorati's top 150. So I became this guy who was, the nicest way to put it is like a content meat shield. Our job was to go through the crap on the internet and only show you the good stuff.

Over the course of that I learned a lot about how sites work in relation to one another and how content spreads through different channels. I learned a lot about how to interact with people online, because it's a fundamentally different process than interacting with people in real life. I don't care what anybody says. At the same time, people online are more honest and more dishonest than they are in person, as contradictory as that may seem.

So I had some expertise in doing that and I had been tapped by a couple of different agencies here in town to help seed content and help come up with contests and social pushes. Then an outreach of that was getting into looking at the data being put out by one of the first social media monitoring systems that had ever been built by one of these agencies.

So I got into that as a tester to come in and go, "Okay, this data is total crap. You can't use this, this is useless." That bled into getting in touch with the Spiral guys when they formed this company. They tapped me and said, "You, come over here. You know more about this than anybody."

So I came at it from basically I'm a content guy that jumped on the other side of the fence.

**Matthew:** Right. Or, as you said, the content meat shield. It's interesting. I looked at Trans Buddha, but I also think of a site like Boing Boing or something, which seems to be one of the last of the great kind of aggregators combing the web, "Hey, check out this weird stuff," that has been bought up or absorbed into some other borg-like entity.

So I'm curious though, when you say you learned about or know a lot about how content spreads. I have my own ideas about how that happens, but how does content spread? What I mean is everyone, I think, assumes they know it spreads, but what's the thing that people miss about it or don't really get about how content really spreads around the interpipes or the tubewebs?

**Aaron:** The dump trucks. The one element that I think everyone I've ever spoken to that's in the content business that they consistently skip over when they're talking about how do you get content to get out there, the element they always forget, or I don't know if it's a conscious disregarding or not, is luck.

A lot of it is pure luck. If you could catch lightning in a bottle every day then everything would be viral and nothing would be viral. There are things that you could do to make it better. One, good content is better than bad content. I don't care what your marketing arm looks like, if it's bad content it's going to fail.

That's a subjective measure, but having the right broadcast channel has a lot to do with it. Getting something on Boing Boing obviously is a lot better for you than getting it on some 13 year old kid's in Lubbock, Texas LiveJournal, no matter how many followers he has. Exposure has a lot to do with it.

At the end of the day what it comes down to is how genuine does this feel. I don't mean that by does it feel like marketing or not, but does the content generate a genuine reaction, whether emotive or intellectually. Without that then it's just not going to work.

If there was anybody listening to this going, “He’s going to give me the secret,” I’m sure they’re going to be sorely disappointed. There isn’t one.

But, through my own experience and through the toolset we can watch the pathways of how content hits the tipping point and spreads, where did it go to get to the tipping point and then what happened afterward. We even tried running models on this, but there are just simply too many statistical anomalies that you can’t account for. So that’s not something that you can predict modeling on. Anybody who tells you differently is lying to you.

**Matthew:** So it is chaotic and that’s the luck and happenstance component of it. Of course, what do people say? Luck is when preparation meets opportunity, or something like that. That’s why I think people focus on blogger relations or influencer relations and things like that, because you’re at least trying to prime the pump a little bit.

Again, the content is not going to go viral, as you say, or really spread in a meaningful way if there isn’t something inherently good about it. What that inherent goodness might look like or how do you determine that, that’s a whole other topic of discussion.

**Aaron:** So the difference between me going to a blogger and saying, “I like your blog, I like your audience, I’ve got this piece of content I want you to put it up there.” Even if that blogger says yes, when they post about it they’re going to write about it slightly differently.

It’s not going to feel the same because they didn’t just come across it, it was handed to them. A part of their brain is going to be like, “Well, I’m kind of advertising this, whether I’m getting anything for it or not.” So they’re going to push it a little bit differently.

Now, if you can find sites that they typically get their content from and put it there where it’s more likely to be seen organically, you’re going to have a much better chance of getting a more enthusiastic write up. That’s just the way people work.

**Matthew:** Right. It’s the difference between writing about something that you found as opposed to something that was handed to you or something that you were asked to talk about. I think you’re right, I hadn’t thought about that exactly in what’s going to be different in the tone of the way they talk about things.

I know if someone asks me to pass something along on Twitter I feel about weird about as opposed to when I found something and said, “Hey, check this out. This is weird,” or cool or whatever.

**Aaron:** It’s one step away from, “Why don’t you get your cousin Oliver a job?”

**Matthew:** Exactly. But, also for me it gets to the point where I can barely even promote my own stuff. It's hard enough for me to say, "Hey, check out what I did." But, if someone asks me, "Tell people about this," I'm like, "I'm happy to do you a favor," but it's not genuine, as you say.

It's funny, when you were just talking about this idea that if you could capture lightning in a bottle then everything would be viral, but then if everything were viral nothing would be viral. Of course, I'm old, I love the dialectic, I sleep with a copy of *Phenomenology of Mind* under my pillow and I'm really into the dialectic. I love that notion, obviously. Virality depends on the fact that 100 – 0.0001% of everything is not viral, it's just sitting out there.

I've been reading *Gravity's Rainbow*. Did you ever read that book?

**Aaron:** I actually just put it on my Zoom to read again. I haven't read it in about six years and that's one of the only books that took me like six tries to get through.

**Matthew:** Same thing with me. I read it right as I was graduating college and it was something, I remember a TA my freshman year said, "You've got to read this book, *Gravity's Rainbow*. You'll read about 100 pages and then you'll put it down. Then about three years later you'll come back and read it and you'll really like it." Which was almost exactly what happened.

Then I hadn't read it in 20-some years now and so I've just got back to it. I have to say it stands up, reading it again it stands up over time. It was as worthy of my idolatrous adulation back then as it is now.

But, it's funny because he talks about this. I think it's like a Calvinist idea of the prederate, the people who are going to be saved and get into heaven, and then there's everyone else. There's this theological notion that someone the chosen actually depend on this remainder, there's a weird symbiotic dialectical relationship.

The only reason I'm saying this, Aaron, is that when you talked about virality that's what it made me think of. We always forget how much the viral depends on the huge mass of non-viral content to really stand out. I don't know if anyone can take that to the bank or do anything with it, but it's just an insight that I just had thanks to you.

**Aaron:** That's insight you can actually do something with though, because the idea being that every content producer is going to be proud of their baby. Nobody ever shows you a baby picture and goes, "My baby looks like a troll." No one ever does that.

But, if you approach that side of things as the idea of 99.9% of the stuff that's out there is just crap and if I find a site that posts good stuff and go, "Okay, they post good stuff, but also they post a lot of chaff," then you can kind of figure out how to work your way into the cycle.

Some of it is timing. If you try to throw something out the door when, say summer movie season, that's a tough time to get anything done because you've got people going nuts over trailers, people going nuts over movie news, you've got Comicon going on and all those things. So that's a hard space to break into. But, February, what happens in February? Nothing happens in February. Even the movie studios themselves, that's a cinematic graveyard.

So aim for the doldrums when everything is crap and then yours looks a lot better in comparison. I don't know how practical that is as advice.

**Matthew:** Well, actually I think that it is practical and I was impressed that you did that. You said aim for the doldrums. There is a sense too that there are ebbs and flows, there's a seasonality of content. The kind of high yield content or really, like you were saying, summer movie season where there's going to be a lot of content out there that's clamoring for attention, why do you want to compete with that, especially given the fact that 99.9% of stuff no one is going to look at, except some friends or the kid in Lubbock, Texas followers.

When you're trying to release stuff or you're trying to get noticed, and again hopefully it's good stuff, because that's really the price of admission, but there are going to be better and worse times to release it into the wild. So I think there's a lesson there.

**Aaron:** I think so.

**Matthew:** From now on I'm going to release my magnum opus in February. You heard it here first.

**Aaron:** If you're Cheetos and you want to get your viral content out the door, 3:30 in the morning on a Thursday, because your audience is online and they're going to go, "Oh my god, this is awesome."

**Matthew:** And they're hungry.

**Aaron:** They're hungry and they're ready for your content to be fed to them. These things tie together. Monitoring, from my perspective, is a lot more than just put in a term in and see what comes back. There are these narratives out there. That's why I'm so fascinated by this space even after all these years of being in it is that every day I get to look at new communities and figure out, "Here's this little pocket of reality that I didn't know existed." They have rich, vibrant lives and communities and relationships going on about concepts that on any other day I couldn't possibly care about in the least. But, to discover these things is really interesting.

The other side of that is everybody wants to believe that there are hundreds of thousands of people out there blogging and tweeting about your brand or your product or your topic at any

given moment. And that's not true. It's just not true. But, there is a lot out there that can be found. You can do some neat stuff with that information.

**Matthew:** That is reminding me of something that has long fascinated me about the web's what I can only call a kind of fractal dimension that any kind of topic you pick up, any kind of niche subject – for me it was underground black metal bands, you know what I mean?

**Aaron:** Celtic Frost or go home, huh?

**Matthew:** I'm talking like Moon Blood, Wooden Temple, things you've never heard of that some guy in some Norwegian basement or some LA basement who is just pumping this super noisy stuff out and how you never heard about it, you never heard about it. This is so far outside the mainstream. Although, I did notice The New Yorker just had an article about black metal and the U.S. black metal scene, which was funny to me because it's about 15 years after it started, at least.

What I always found is almost anything you've never heard of you just start scratching the surface and then you discover this whole world, like you were saying, these communities with their own narratives that you didn't even know existed.

This happened to me the other day just off Twitter. Someone was talking about Occupy Wall Street and they said, "If you want to know what WORL looks like, it's happening right there on Wall Street." I'm like, "What is WORL?" Have you heard of that before?

**Aaron:** No. War on real life?

**Matthew:** No, but I like that one. I can't believe. This is something you'd be into. It's called without rule of law. If you go to Google and type in WORL suddenly you find all these survivalist blogs.

**Aaron:** No?

**Matthew:** Yes. And it's all without rule of law and what you're going to need and what kind of firearm do you want to have, what's the best way to store food and water when we move into this post-apocalypse when the shit hits the fan what's going to happen. That was the other term that you find with WORL, is SHTF.

**Aaron:** That's funny.

**Matthew:** There was this whole world and then I found these videos like, Who Will Die First. This woman, PatriotNurse, talking about who will die first. Well, of course it's the elderly and people, as soon as there's no electricity who do you think is going to die. It's crazy.

This was a world I didn't know anything about, but that's what I love about the web and even Twitter. You just see this little tiny thread sticking out and you pull on it and suddenly there's a whole world out there.

**Aaron:** I've long held that the beautiful thing about life is think about the worst painting, worst TV show, worst song you've ever heard in your life, somewhere out there that's someone favorite thing ever and they've probably got 20 people they know that feel the exact same way. That's fascinating to me.

I do the same thing, I'll watch random threads on Twitter and just start following to see "Where does this go?" And sometimes I find presents that were best left wrapped, to say the least. But, for the most part it's a fascinating look at how we carve up the world for ourselves.

**Matthew:** Right, which I think also is an important reminder that almost anyone we meet online or people we meet in the so-called real world that we're only seeing this teeny bit and we're seeing their surface, we're seeing whatever face or persona that they're putting on for us. We really have no idea how many of these little weird worlds and narratives that they're part of that actually makes up who they are.

It's something that I think on this podcast I haven't been hitting so far, but I want to get more into, which is kind of teasing out from folks parts of them, like we're talking about data analytics and we're talking about monitoring business intelligence and all this other stuff. For example, I know one of your big passions is comic books.

**Aaron:** Yes.

**Matthew:** So I'm just wondering is that just your comic book, I'll call it an obsession...

**Aaron:** That's the right word for it, I have to say.

**Matthew:** Is it just a boxed off compartmentalized part of your life or does it actually feed into this work that you're doing?

**Aaron:** I think, for me, all my various little obsessions all go into one hopper at the end of the day. My obsession with reading, music, film, science and comic books, they all kind of come together. The idea of just "this is how I got here." I wouldn't know X if not for Y.

With the comic book thing, I've been reading comics my entire life and it's only really recently that a grown man could admit to that and not be, "Oh, and when are your parents kicking you out?" You know?

A couple months back, we had been talking about comics on my current website, [Dad's Big Plan](#), we talk about them all the time, so why don't we do a podcast? That was a big step, that

really strange for me to sit in front of a mic and start talking about comic books. But, I look at that and I realize that's a natural extension of what I do for a living, because I know the audience is out there, I know there are people that want to talk about this and want to have discussions around these topics that don't sound like they're coming straight from Comic Preview Monthly.

So, yeah, I think it does inform my work to some degree, because it allows me to think about these subcultures that exist out there and how to reach them.

One of the things that drives me nuts is from my position I deal with a lot of marketing and PR agency type folks, who for the most part I have a lot of respect for. But, the thing that's driven me nuts time and time again is this perspective that when somebody comes in and they want to monitor a subculture, they want to monitor a niche so that they can reach out for engagement or brand evangelism. The idea that to the suit who wants to push their product, that voice on the internet is just a distribution method.

I think it would behoove everyone to step back and go, "I know we think of the internet as this big faceless mass," but at the end of every post and at the end of every comment or tweet or like, for that matter, is somebody sitting in front of a machine carving out their piece of the world. This is their life, these are the things they care about, these are the things they're passionate about.

To assume that you can just subvert them to become your own personal army is kind of destined to fail for the most part. It's supremely arrogant to not take that into account. I think campaigns that put their foot down wrong or fail spectacularly do so because of that very reason, that they don't accept and embrace the humanity of all those individual likes or tweets or posts that they're trying to subvert for their own end.

**Matthew:** Right. So when you're talking to the proverbial suit there, what are your tactics that you use to get them to start humanizing these otherwise just search results or data points or blog posts to them?

**Aaron:** The biggest ones for me would be listen first and step in later. Make sure that you have an understanding of if it's a forum community what are the rules, who are these people, what are the relationships, and can you introduce yourself in a manner that's honest and upfront. Because if you don't take that step then you're just that guy who comes in and start shilling and everybody is going to go, "How realistic is this guy? Is this a troll? Is this a paid shill?" That's a big piece.

**Matthew:** Sorry about that, I'm being attacked by suburban lawnmower people over here. They've already got my legs and my hands pretty soon. All that will be left is my voice crying into the wildness of the internet.

So basically what you're saying is you recommend to people that they actually are human first and then it helps them humanize the whole rest of all this mounds of data that they're trying to extract meaning from.

**Aaron:** Yes. At the end of the day that's the big piece is that these are all human beings on the other side of these screens. And to be fair, no one would be online liking or tweeting or blogging about subjects if there wasn't an ego component involved. Ultimately, we go online and we state our opinions and stake our flag in the ground to say, "I exist. I am here. I have an opinion." It's incredibly gratifying to have that opinion or statement officially recognized.

That can be a dangerous thing, but figuring out what's the balance between that, "Am I just appealing to their ego? Can I treat them like human beings instead of just a faceless foot soldier?" you're going to get a lot more long term traction. It's really easy to bring people on for a short term campaign to just kind of churn and burn, it's a lot more difficult to build a longstanding network.

Let's say Dove comes to me and wants to push something on my blog. Well, that's one thing. But, if I had a relationship with the person that was doing the pushing in the first place then they could come to me from six or seven different things and I'd be a lot more receptive than just Dove or Axe or whatever. Well, never Axe, it wouldn't be Axe.

**Matthew:** Actually, I saw you in those Axe ads and I thought you were good.

**Aaron:** Well, I needed the money. Comics are expensive.

**Matthew:** Tell me about it. That's old technology. I think when you're talking about building this network and actually cultivating relationships that's what can help temper or swing the luck component that you mentioned before in your favor. That's when preparation meets opportunity. It's like if you've actually done the time and put in the effort to build relationships with people when you didn't need them, then when you do need their help or at least want to see if they'll help you, that's when you get that payoff.

I think we have a few more minutes here. Since you did mention reading, we were talking about *Gravity's Rainbow*, one of the greatest marketing books every written.

**Aaron:** Right up there with *Infinite Jest*. Those two books, everything you need to know about marketing right there.

**Matthew:** It's all in there. I guess for my last question that I'd like to ask you, what are you reading right now?

**Aaron:** I'm going through a glut right now. I just got a tablet so I'm kind of diving back into reading. I've got 4 year old daughters, so I don't have a lot of free time. But, now that I have this tablet and I can kind of pull it out and read wherever I am at any point, I just finished reading Neil Stephenson's *Reamde*, which is kind of a techno-thriller.

It's kind of a straightforward genre exercise for Neil Stephenson, but he's so good at juxtaposing these really clever ideas of what technology can do and ultimately what human being will do with them. I've long held the idea that technology doesn't rise us up, we drag it down to our level. His work really illustrates that point.

Then I'm getting ready to start up *Cutting for Stone*. I can't remember the author's name right off the top of my head (side note: Abraham Verghese), but that was given to me as a gift and I'm excited to read it.

**Matthew:** I think I was looking at that book in Pandemonium Books when I was buying Magic the Gathering cards the other day.

**Aaron:** Now that is tipping your nerd hat right there.

**Matthew:** Sorry, sorry. There's at least one other guy here at MarketingProfs whose into Magic, so I've been psyched with that. He actually had a picture on his phone of a Black Lotus, it's like a \$1,500 card or something. Anyway. I like the Diamond Age especially and Snow Crash going back a ways.

I think what you were talking about with technology, we bring technology down, that was kind of what Martin Heidegger was arguing in his essay, from an opposite angle, a question concerning technology. He was sort of implying that in this world without gods, kind of post-eliminated, post-enchanted world of modernity the new god to us is technology. And he was posing it as a question, like we needed to figure out what's our relationship going to be to it.

It seems like that's at least what I heard in what you were saying, that in a way we rob technology of its divinity rather than allowing it to raise us up to a more sublime plane of existence. That's what I heard you saying.

**Aaron:** I think that's the case. That sounds so much more cynical. Saying it out loud it sounds very cynical compared to how I view that in my head, because I think of at the same time we drag Twitter down to our level, or Facebook or whatever. At the same time it's slowly inching us back up kicking and screaming.

Twitter for how many years was, “Hey, what’s Kim Kardashian doing today?” And then this spring we see it being used to change the face of North Africa. That’s impressive and that’s the ideal we have for it when we create that technology in the first place, but that’s always going to be a long tail effect. That’s never going to happen in the short term, it’s going to have to drag us there kicking and screaming.

**Matthew:** And when technology appears we often first apply it to the problems we already have, so we are bringing it down very much to our level. “How can I apply this to what I’ve been doing all along?” as opposed to allowing it to kind of flower and find out what other things does this actually allow me to do, and I guess also what sort of problems does it bring with it.

**Aaron:** The best thing when you get someone who argues that, the two things you get to bring up what was the first industry to adopt CD-Rom and what was the first industry to adopt VHS and DVD. Pornography. And that’s why those things are standard, because of pornography. So you tell me that was raising us up to our highest potential.

**Matthew:** That reminds me. There’s that Seinfeld episode where George starts selling computers and no one wants to buy one. It’s funny to see the episode now, because he’s trying to say, “You want to buy a computer,” and Jerry and everyone is like, “Why do I need a computer?” His stock response is, “Porn.”

**Aaron:** Yeah. Have you seen how much is out there?

**Matthew:** Exactly. Well, on that note, Aaron Weber.

**Aaron:** On that high note.

**Matthew:** Aaron Weber of Spiral16. So you guys are at [Spiral16.com](http://Spiral16.com)?

**Aaron:** We are.

**Matthew:** And also you’re writing about comics and movies at DadsBigPlan.com?

**Aaron:** Yes. [DadsBigPlan.com](http://DadsBigPlan.com), which is an old band name of mine. Then if you really want the full dip there’s our Four Color Freak Out Podcast, which you can find on iTunes.

**Matthew:** Definitely. I can’t recommend that highly enough, folks. All right, Aaron. Thank you very much for being on MarketingSmarts.

**Aaron:** My pleasure. Happy to talk to you again.

**Matthew:** Thank you, Aaron. And thank you, listener, for listening here to the very end. This has been Marketing Smarts, a podcast brought to you by MarketingProfs. I've been your host Matthew Grant. Talk to you next week.