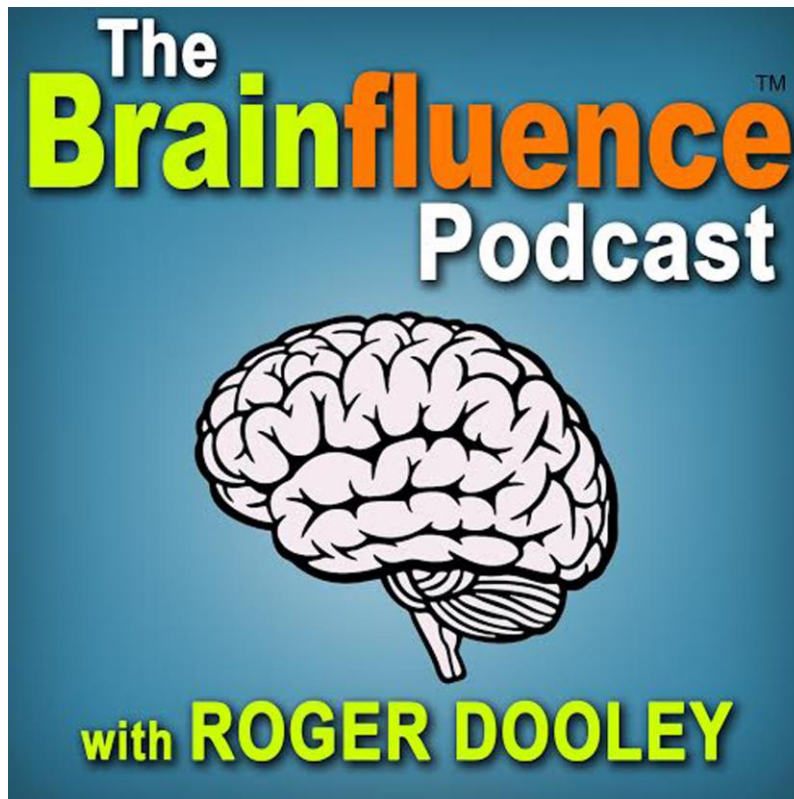


Ep #83 – Today’s Hottest Lead Gen and Subscription Techniques



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Roger Dooley

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

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Welcome to *The Brainfluence Podcast* with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to *The Brainfluence Podcast*. I’m Roger Dooley. Our guest today is someone I think will really appeal to this show’s audience. He calls himself a growth marketer and like me, frequently writes about the application of science and data to marketing. He’s currently part of a team at UserTesting, a platform that gives marketers very quick audio, video, and written feedback on websites and apps. By very quick, I mean it can be in less than an hour.

What caught my attention most recently was his enumeration of several techniques that were actually working today in the field of lead generation and list building. So today we’re going to hear some up-to-the-minute ideas with, I hope, a dose of psychology thrown in. Welcome to the show, Spencer Lanoue.

Spencer Lanoue: Hey, Roger, thanks for having me.

Roger Dooley: Spencer, a lot of my own writing focuses on applying academic research to real world marketing problems but the other kind of science I write about is a more practical kind of research, real world studies of user behavior. This can be A/B tests,

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multivariate tests, behavioral analytics. Really, there’s a whole range of user metrics that we can look at.

If we look at all of the experiments and data that is collected by businesses on the web and via apps, it’s really orders of magnitude larger than what you see coming out of academia. So being real world, you don’t really have the issue of, does this translate from the lab or the classroom to the real world? Because in fact, it’s measured in the real world. So explain how UserTesting fits into that picture.

Spencer Lanoue:

I would assume that most of your audience is familiar with A/B testing and they’re probably running a lot of A/B tests. They probably use Google Analytics or some sort of analytics package to look at what’s happening on their website or with their app. That can be really, really useful. We use it over at UserTesting ourselves. The problem with that that we’ve found is that it shows you what is happening but you don’t really know why. So that’s really what UserTesting seeks to do.

If you’re a marketer and you know that something is happening on your site but you’re not exactly sure why, we help you to run tests with real human beings, real users, who fit your target audience and who can help show you more of the reason why things are happening rather than just what’s going on.

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Roger Dooley: A few years ago, Steve Krug, the author of *Don't Make Me Think* and I spoke at the same conference. We chatted a bit afterwards. One big takeaway I got from Steve is that fast and frequent testing is a lot better than taking a completed website or app and then going into some kind of elaborate testing involving a lab and videos and one-way mirrors. All these sorts of things that you think about when you've got sort of this big, "Okay, we've done the website. We've put thousands of hours into this and now let's see how usable it is." Instead of doing it in a very quick fashion at multiple points during the process.

So maybe just you have sort of a wire frame for the homepage and you get some very basic functionality up. That's something that companies like UserTesting and others can help with, right? That do those relatively inexpensive compared to the giant corporate lab setup kinds of quick and dirty tests.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah and that's really why our product exists because the way that most companies and most people were building their products, they would spend thousands of hours or hundreds of hours building something in an echo chamber. Not getting feedback from the real people who are going to be using this thing.

Then after all of these hours of development and all the money put into development, they have this end product and when they actually put it into real people's hands, they find out that people really

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aren't that interested. So the whole point of our product is to test early, test often, and consistently be getting that feedback from real people so that you can make the changes you need to make before you've invested a ton of time and money into building something that nobody wants.

Roger Dooley:

Right, I think that's so smart. Whether using your platform or even just getting a couple of users in a room and looking over their shoulder while they try and use your website makes so much sense.

In fact, heard of a couple usability experts who will go into a bar and ask some people to try and do something on the website or an app they're in the middle of developing, figuring that the slightly impaired user in the bar is probably not that different than the sort of distracted user who has got perhaps their phone open and they're doing something while they're navigating their website.

That quick feedback is so important and can save you so much money because strangely enough, I've found that graphic designers and coders often don't resemble your real users very much. They have difficulty predicting how a real, normal human being is going to react to whatever it is on the screen.

Spencer Lanoue:

Yeah. When we're building something we spend so much time looking at it, the people who are actually going to be using this thing that we're building, they've probably never looked at it. So what happens is, I don't know if you're familiar with the curse of knowledge, but when we're staring at this

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thing and we’re working on this thing for months or weeks, we start to think that everybody gets it like we get it. But we’re just way too close to it and there’s really no way to get an unbiased opinion when you're the one critiquing it or your coworker is the one critiquing it.

So that’s why it’s really useful to get out of the office or to get it in front of other people. UserTesting isn’t even the only option to do that. If you just go to Starbucks and hand your app to somebody, hand your website to somebody, and just say, “Hey, use this, tell me what you think.” That can be really useful.

Roger Dooley:

Yeah, makes a lot of sense. Spencer, I consume a lot of blogs and podcasts for entrepreneurs and marketers and authors talking about what worked for them and what didn’t. When the question comes up, “If you could do it again, what would you do differently?”

By far, the most common answer I hear is, “Work on building my list from the start.” I know I made that error first by not having a list at all and then by finally, grudgingly adding a mail list option to my blog but with a truly minimal call to action that presumably almost nobody saw and definitely almost nobody acted on.

Then I look back at the probably hundreds of thousands, if not more than a million visits that I had before I got somewhat serious about adding names to my mailing list and I'm sure that I left thousands,

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maybe tens of thousands of names on the table. It's not like I've got a product that I'm selling. I don't sell to my list. But I like staying in touch with people who are interested in my stuff.

Without a list, you can't do that. You're really dependent on social media that is very difficult to reach people these days. You look at your statistics on the reach of a given tweet or Facebook post or whatever and you're really only getting a very tiny fraction of the people who are interested in your stuff.

I can encourage anybody in our audience who has not yet gotten serious about either building their list or if they have some kind of a business using their websites or app to generate leads for that business. Really the list building and lead generation process are kind of similar. You're asking somebody to give up their info for you so that you can contact them. Just the purposes are perhaps a little bit different.

As I start at the beginning, Spencer, the reason I wanted to chat with you was you are up to date on some of the latest techniques that are actually working to get people's names and email addresses. So what I want to do is give you a chance to explain a few of those ideas to our listeners.

Spencer Lanoue: Sure, I'd be happy to. Before I dive in though, I think it's really important to say that the world of digital marketing is changing so quickly. The amount of change that's happening is just getting more and

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more as we move forward. So today, I’ll share three tactics with you that are really working right now, but what I really don’t want your audience to do is to get married to these specific tactics because a year, or two years, three years from now, these tactics aren’t going to work like they are right now.

So really, tactics aren’t the answer. Having a process is the answer and really understanding who your audience is, who you’re trying to reach, and having a message or a product that really resonates with them, solves a problem that they’re having. That’s the key because if you don’t have that, it really doesn’t matter what tactics you use.

Roger Dooley:

Yeah, I think that having good analytics is part of that process because if you don’t have analytics across what you’re doing, like how many people visit this page, how many people fill out the form below the post, or click on a link, or whatever, as part of the conversion process and then even measuring the folks who sign up for your list who actually become activated members of your list.

If you don’t have that well-instrumented, you really don’t know what’s going on and you could be making some big mistakes. You just sort of assume things are working, you see some leads coming in, and you assume it’s okay.

Spencer Lanoue:

That’s a great point. If anybody listening right now doesn’t have analytics set up on their website or their app, I suggest doing that first before trying any of these tactics.

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Roger Dooley: Yeah. Okay, so what’s your first technique, Spencer?

Spencer Lanoue: All right. So the first technique is called the content upgrade. You may have seen this already. Basically, a content upgrade is when you land on a blog post and let’s say you’re reading a blog post about how to get up early in the morning because you’ve been trying to get up early and you’ve really been struggling with creating that habit.

So you’re reading through this blog post and maybe it’s sharing different tricks for forming new habits and ways that you can start getting up early. By the time you get towards the end of the blog post, there is a call to action at the bottom. Now a lot of articles have these call to actions at the end of them but most of them are universal, which means that it’s the same call to action on every single blog post across the entire website.

Now a content upgrade is a call to action to get someone to download a very specific bonus that is laser focused and insanely targeted on that exact topic that your blog post was just about. So in this example of an article about how to start getting up early in the morning, at the end, you would offer a free resource and it could be a number of things. It could be like, “The five point checklist to getting up early in the morning.” Or it could be a list of links to academic research about getting up early in the morning. It could be a video version of the post.

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There’s a whole number of things you could offer but the idea is that you want it to be something that is an upgrade from the article that you just read. It’s something that adds on to it and makes it more full and more rich.

Roger Dooley:

Well that makes a huge amount of sense and one of the simpler kinds of content upgrades is just a PDF copy of the article because some people like to save those PDFs either to print them out or perhaps to email them to somebody. They don’t have time to consume them.

I’m perhaps a poster child for content upgrades. Not that I have done very many of them but we had a great post from Jeremy Smith on the Neuromarketing site where it’s a huge article, probably 7,000 words, about 67 different cognitive biases that affect people and how to apply those to improving your conversion rates. So this was an absolutely enormous post. I looked at some analytics showing how far people were scrolling and a lot of people were getting part way into this. But, this article, I don’t know how many screens it would be, but trust me, it was massive.

So what I did there was create an e-book. The e-book alone was I think maybe 25 pages or 30 pages or something. I just turned it into a PDF without a lot of work. I mean, obviously, it takes a little bit of time to create a decent-looking document. Then both at the top and bottom, and then once or twice in the middle of the post, put in a call to action for that because I think what we were trying to address was

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the user behavior that they found it interesting but they didn’t have enough time to read through the whole thing all at once.

For the audience, I think one of the great things about these upgrades is they're kind of the gift that keeps on giving. If this post that you’ve selected for your content upgrade is getting some residual traffic from Google that will keep working for you every day 24/7. It may not generate, I mean unless it’s a wildly popular post that’s getting massive traffic, it may not generate a ton of leads or of names for your list but it’s just out there and it keeps working for you.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, I'd actually suggest taking a very specific approach on choosing which articles to create content upgrades for because they do take a little bit of time and you don’t necessarily want to just go out and create them for every single blog post you’ve ever published.

I would recommend going into your Google Analytics or whatever other analytics package you use and looking at your most popular posts over time, trying to identify a post that consistently is getting a ton of traffic month after month after month. Then figuring out a way to add a content upgrade to that post.

Roger Dooley: That makes a lot of sense, Spencer, because I know that once or twice I have done a content upgrade before I even published the post thinking, “Okay, this is going to be a good fit. The post is

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going to popular.” And it ended up that the post did okay but never really took off in a meaningful way. Did not generate much traffic after the first week or two.

So in that case, the time spent in preparing that upgrade was pretty much wasted because it may have generated a few names but not really the payback compared to, had I simply gone to my analytics and said, “Okay, here’s a post that is getting 25 views a day, day in, day out. Let’s do something for that.” That would be far more effective in the long run.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, that’s definitely the way to go about it, especially, you know, we have limited time and limited resources so we want to make sure that where we’re investing our time is something that’s going to have some sort of an advantage or a payoff to us.

I would also say that you should approach this as a test. When you go in and you find that popular post and you create a content upgrade for it, track that over the next couple of weeks, see how it’s performing. If you’re not getting a lot of signups, then that should be an interesting red flag. Why is that happening? Maybe it’s because the content upgrade that you created for them isn’t really relevant to what the topic was about. Maybe it’s not compelling enough. Maybe there’s a different format you can try.

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I would really suggest not looking at it as, “This is the tactic that I’m going to use and I’m just going to try it and we’ll see what happens and then I’m just going to do it over and over again.” I would say really think about it and approach it from a scientific point of view where you’re saying, “My hypothesis is that I’m going to get a certain number of leads each month from this blog post.” Then see if that’s true or not. Then based on the data that you’ve collected, try again. Or maybe you realize that this isn’t the best way to spend my time. I’m going to try something else instead.

Roger Dooley:

Right, yeah. Oftentimes too I think the work that goes in isn’t necessarily proportional to the results. I’ve heard, I haven’t tried that many tests myself, but from various other stuff I’ve read, oftentimes something as simple as a checklist that you could generate in very short time performs as well as some more elaborate piece of content where perhaps you’ve got three ways to do something and the content upgrade is eight ways in total, which is clearly a good upgrade but sometimes people don’t want to read more and more content. They just want something really simple that they can consume and use.

Spencer Lanoue:

Yeah, I actually think it’s a mistake a lot of people make, myself included. Where you think that in order to provide value, you need give more. I don’t know if your audience is familiar with the process that human beings go through when they’re trying to make a choice but when you give them a large number of options, they’re probably not going to

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even do one of them. So if you give them twelve different steps to do x, y, or z, that might overload them with information. When actually what you could have done is taken the most key points from your article and break it down into a really, really short checklist.

Roger Dooley: Right. Okay, let’s move on. What’s your second strategy or tactic, Spencer?

Spencer Lanoue: The second tactic is called the social squeeze page. We’re all familiar with the normal landing page. You come to this page and in order to download some piece of premium content like an e-book or a webinar, you have to give all of your information, your first name, your email address, maybe your company name. So the social squeeze page is like the converse of a landing page. You actually give a ton of really, really valuable information upfront. Then afterwards you give people the opportunity to subscribe or get more information.

Roger Dooley: There’s actually some research that shows that by invoking the reciprocity effect, you can convert better. Now I say that with a little bit of caution because I’ve looked at the personal websites of dozens of people who were at the absolute top of their conversion game and most of them use the strategy of offering a free e-book or free something after you sign up. So I would hesitate to say that, “Okay, this is going to work for everybody all the time.”

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But there is both academic research and what you're talking about too that shows that sometimes if you give somebody something first, they are more likely to then give something back to you. In this case, their contact information.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah. Again, I highly encourage anybody who's going to try this out to look at it as an experiment. Maybe it will work for you, maybe not. There's actually no way to tell before we test. But the way that you can make sure that you're getting the most effective results is to choose a topic that's currently in high demand and that means a topic where there's really not enough high quality information out there to satisfy that demand.

There's a number of ways that you can go about doing that. You can look through the comments on your blog. You can look through the comments on your competitor's blog. You can search through online forums and communities and you can also use the Ahrefs Content Explorer to find the topics and the articles that are being shared the most in your niche.

But basically you want to look for, what are the questions that are being asked over and over again? What are the questions that there's not enough really high quality information about that definitively covers that topic?

Roger Dooley: That's not a bad SEO strategy either.

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Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, it’s beautiful because you’re not hiding this content behind a gate and trying to incentivize people to sign up by saying, “You’ll get this if you sign up.” Instead you’re delivering extremely high value to your audience and to your visitors right up front. The point is that after they interact with that piece of content, whether it’s a video or it’s a beautifully designed landing page, you want them to think to themselves, “Holy crap. That was so good. I can’t believe he just gave that away to me. I’m definitely signing up.”

Roger Dooley: You call it a social squeeze page. I assume you’re driving traffic to that page through social media. Would that be, say, your profile link or would you actually push it out in other ways?

Spencer Lanoue: There’s a couple different ways you could get it out there. One way is sharing on your social networks. Another way is sharing it with your email list and you could even, if you have a sidebar on the side of your website, you could add a graphic that links to that page within your sidebar.

Roger Dooley: Right. Actually that’s kind of an interesting approach because what a lot of people put in their sidebar is a little call to action to subscribe with maybe even one field, or two field, little form there but in this case, rather than asking them for that up front, you’re driving them to this other great content that then you’ll hit them with the call to subscribe.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, Brian Dean from Backlinko does a really good job with this. In the sidebar of his blog, he has

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a little graphic and it says, “Click here to get my definitive guide to link building.” When you click on that you're taken to this page that is beautifully designed, full width page with a lot of incredible information about how to build links. It actually has nine chapters and what he's done is within each chapter, he has links to about five to ten articles that cover that topic.

So he doesn't even provide unique content about that but he's linking to others who have. Even just curating all of these links into a type of curriculum where your visitor can teach themselves about this topic, that can be extremely valuable. I think he has something like 1,300 shares on that page and it's a landing page.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, that's really fascinating. Like you said, a more typical strategy would be to say, “Give me your email address and you'll get my definitive guide to link building.” But by turning it on its head, you can get different results. Actually that would probably be perhaps an interesting content upgrade strategy too where you could combine both of them where as somebody gets through the second or third chapter in this, have a call to action, “Hey, get this in a PDF form so that you can save it.” That could be your content upgrade too.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, that would be a great way of implementing content upgrades into your social squeeze page. That's a great idea.

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Roger Dooley: Well, we’ve got one more that we want to go through here. Let’s do that and maybe we can do a triple header here. We can figure out how to combine all of them in one phenomenally successful page.

Spencer Lanoue: That would be cool. So the third technique is called the feature box. I first heard about this from Derek Halpern at Social Triggers.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, Derek is great.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, I've learned so much from that site and what I always thought was really interesting was when you go to his site, or at least when you used to go, I don't think it's like this anymore, there was a big box right at the top of his website, his homepage. It said, "Do you want to learn how to get more leads, get more subscribers, and drive more sales? If so, I can teach you how to use proven psychological principles to do that. Sign up to my newsletter."

So as soon as I landed on his site, I knew exactly what I was going to get. I knew exactly what this blog was about and I was able to say, "Yeah, this is for me." And I signed up. So that is what the feature box is all about. It's a large, lead capture box that sits on the top of your blog's homepage or even specific blog posts and it offers a unique value proposition. What your subscribers are going to get if they subscribe. Gives them a chance to sign up right there.

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Roger Dooley: Yeah, that was actually a feature, sounds kind of redundant, but the feature box was a feature in the Thesis theme that I don’t know if Derek still uses it but I know he was both using and promoting for a while.

But you know what I’m seeing lately is sort of a variation on that, where you come to a website and it almost looks like a landing page when you get there. There’s a very simple message. Maybe either a button with an appropriate call to action and invites you to subscribe, or perhaps a place for your email address and there is not a lot of content on that page. It’s basically just some kind of very simple value proposition.

Then what you have to do is either click perhaps a down arrow or something or click “read blog” or take some other action to get past that. Sometimes it’s just a case of scrolling down. But when you arrive at the site, you don’t see that usual sort of big navigation choices and “Hey, welcome. Here are the different things you can do on the website.” Instead it’s that very structured, rather plain but focused call to action to subscribe with offering some kind of value. Then if somebody wants to move on to the content, they can do that.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, I think that was first pioneered by Noah Kagan on his blog OkDork.

Roger Dooley: Yes, I was thinking of Noah’s site. AppSumo does that and I think he does that on his personal blog too.

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Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, that’s a really interesting way of collecting emails as well. I believe they call it the welcome mat. That really works as well. There’s a couple other techniques that I don’t include in here that work really well. One of which is the welcome mat and one of which is popups. So there’s kind of like a double-edged sword with these. On the one hand, they work really well for building your email list but on the other hand, they kind of piss people off and it creates a not-so-great user experience.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, that concerns me a little bit about arriving at a blog and not seeing any content, just seeing this full screen “subscribe now” type thing. So it’s a tradeoff.

Spencer Lanoue: It is. Something that I’m curious about is that I see this a lot on marketing blogs and it doesn’t bother me and I don’t think it bothers a lot of people in the marketing space because you’re familiar with what they’re doing. So you’re kind of like, “Oh yeah, I get it. They’re trying to build their list.”

But in my experience, in my limited personal experience, when it’s not on a marketing blog, it tends to piss people off more because they’re like, “What is this? Why are you doing this? Like, I don’t understand. Why are you trying to take something from me? I just want to read your blog.”

So I would, again, if anybody wants to try those out, I would test it out and see how does it resonate with my audience? Is it annoying people? Maybe it’s not. Maybe the gains are so large that I’m okay with a few people being a little annoyed because it’s so

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beneficial. So I would just say, take it case by case. Test it out and see if it works well for your blog, for your website, and for your audience.

Roger Dooley: Right and if anybody is ready to test putting a feature box at the top of your social squeeze page and offering a content upgrade as part of the whole deal, that would be a really interesting experiment to report on.

Spencer Lanoue: So I can report a little bit. I can’t give specific numbers unfortunately because it’s the company I’m working for and there’s legal stuff but on the UserTesting blog, when I first started working at UserTesting, I dug into our analytics and I found that our main call to action was a sidebar opt-in form and I pulled the analytics report and I found it was converting at .02% and on a good day it would be .05%. I just thought to myself, “This is crazy.” We’re getting a ton of traffic and we’re not capitalizing on it. That was actually the impetus for all this research that I did in the first place.

I thought to myself, “This is nuts.” We’re getting such low conversion rates on the quote/unquote best practices, so there’s got to be something that’s working better than this. So I kind of scoured the web and started talking to people to figure out what was working best for them. We ended up actually implementing a feature box on the UserTesting blog.

If you go to any one of our blog posts, you’ll see it at the top of our page and it’s a big, blue banner and it

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says, “Hey, welcome to the UX research and design blog. Enter your email address below to receive a complete guide to user testing your next project.” Then there’s a little opt-in form. Literally the day that we implemented that, our leads per day and per week skyrocketed. I think they went up by four times literally the next day.

Roger Dooley:

Well there’s a good lesson here for our listeners. The lesson isn’t just blindly copy these techniques but use them as a basis for an experiment testing and see if they produce a similar kind of lift in your case. So let me remind our listeners that we are speaking with Spencer Lanoue. He is part of a team at UserTesting and expert on lead generation and list building. Spencer, I understand that you have kind of a content upgrade for our listeners.

Spencer Lanoue:

Yeah, so if anybody wants to learn more because they found this to be an interesting topic, they can head over to my site. It’s GrowthNotes.co/Roger. I’ve actually put together a special page just for your audience that will give them all the details of what we just talked about, these three unconventional list building techniques.

I’ll also give them my personal swipe file which has 50 examples of proven websites that have implemented these techniques as well as a step-by-step formulas to implement each of them. I’m also going to be giving away ten copies of the book *Growth Hacker Marketing* by Ryan Holiday to ten of your audience members and there’s more details over there on the site.

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Roger Dooley: Wow, that’s great. Ryan is a fellow Austinite, in fact, so is Noah Kagan. There is a tremendous community here in Austin and hope you get down this way sometime Spencer.

Let me also say to our listeners that we will have links to both that page as well as any other resources that Spencer and I discussed during the course of the last thirty minutes on the show notes page at RogerDooley.com/Podcast and we’ll also have a text version of our conversation there as well. Spencer, thanks for being on the show.

Spencer Lanoue: Yeah, thanks for having me. This has been a blast.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of *The Brainfluence Podcast*. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.