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Voiceover: This is Ad Lab Performance Marketing Dissected, Decoded, and Delivered.

Gavin: Hello. We are back in the Ad Lab. I'm your host, Gavin Flynn, and we've got a fun episode lined up for you today. For our deep dive, I'm going to be joined by Max Ponte, Director of Marketing at Foam Order. Max is awesome to have on. We dove into everything from SEO in the AI era, some Google Shopping workarounds for customized e-commerce businesses, and we also talked about how Foam Order is using customer-generated content in a really smart way.

He's worked agency side and brand side, so it was great getting his perspective on both sides of the industry. And trust me, you're going to want to stick around because Foam Order is a really sweet product. If you have a couch that's dying and you're feeling that lumbar support start to leave, I would check out their site. We'll link it in the episode description. Might save you a few thousand dollars instead of buying an entirely brand new couch.

In that conversation with Max, I'm also going to be joined by LP Senior Account Manager Jack Meyer, and he's been working directly with Max and that Foam Order team for the last 18 months. I can tell pretty quickly during the convo, and even prior to the cameras going on, that they're a dynamic duo. Great rapport, and they're definitely lockstep when it comes to marketing ideas and implementation. It was fun having them both on. But first, we're going to jump into our Hot Headline with LP Email Marketing Specialist Rachel Cahill with some interesting news about Klaviyo.

Gavin: Rachel, welcome to the show.

Rachel: Hi, Gavin. Thank you so much for having me.

Gavin: Yeah, thanks for coming on. We're going to be talking about some of the new tools that Klaviyo has been rolling out for reporting in the platform. Before we dive into it, it sounds like you actually had a little bit of a heads up and you've been aware of this update now for a while. When did you first hear about this new marketing workflow update that Klaviyo has been implementing?

Rachel: Actually, last September, a couple of us LP-ers were at K-boss, which is this incredible conference that Klaviyo hosts. During the conference, they brought up their cloud MCP and some of the potential use cases. They're going to announce some really, really, really big things a few months from now. But there are things we can do with it right now, and we need to do it right now. We've been in this space since September of last year, and it's a very important part of our workflow.

Gavin: What was your first initial reaction when you actually hopped into the platform yourself?

Rachel: It very much was an oh my goodness. It used to take me four hours to build a report, and I would want to take four hours to build a report. Now, the first three hours of that report building—which was just busywork—is gone. The first three hours wasn't the actually being creative, being a specialist, coming up with the action plan. It's just the collecting pieces, and that's done for us. We get to start now. What was previously three fourths of the way into reporting, we're getting to the good stuff. We're spending more of that time on actually developing the brands and the action plans for them.

Gavin: Talk to me a little bit on where you see this being most useful for brands versus agencies.

Rachel: I think a lot of brands are going to be utilizing it for automating the development of the strategy and getting those results back. For them, it's going to be more of letting some of those pieces be a little bit more out of sight, out of mind, but knowing that they're still happening. From the agency side, like I said, it cuts out all that busy work, but also provides more in terms of shared insights. I'm not just looking at these ten segments in this one account, but these 100 segments against these ten accounts. What do they have in common? What do they not have in common? What are those sorts of insights that the human brain may or may not see? The agencies will be using it for cutting down on the busy work and having more of that shared data.

Gavin: The shared data piece, for any agency listening to this, is going to resonate as you're scaling. Whenever there's a new tool launched or a new feature launched within any of these ad platforms, the first place my brain goes is: where does this actually create separation between brands and agencies? From your perspective, having worked within this new update, is that competitive advantage flattened or is it actually going to accentuate the smart strategic thinkers that can analyze that data?

Rachel: It's definitely going to accentuate it. There are a couple pieces there. The first piece is that if I'm a brand and I'm setting this up—like I absolutely should, do it now—I still just have access to my own account. We have access to hundreds of accounts. We already connect the dots in between them, but now we get to do that at a much bigger scale. That scale has increased enormously. That competitive advantage of just the access piece is a part of it.

The other piece of it is that anyone can know how to use it at a basic level, but an expert is still going to know how to dig into it deeply. Any brand can absolutely set up the MCP and learn how to use the chatbot and get wonderful automated insights and content. But there's still an extra layer that you need to be able to use to its full extent. I'm prompting in a very specific way, and I'm double prompting then and triple prompting. That's a learning curve that takes as much practice as anything else does.

Gavin: With this Klaviyo cloud integration, what would be your recommendation for brands as their next step if they want to start using these new tools? What's the ground level foundation that you would recommend for brands looking to get on this?

Rachel: That first step is as simple as clicking the button to authorize integration and just giving the introduction and saying, "give me the insights." The beautiful thing about it is that's all you have to do for it to then say, "this is your insights. We can do A, B, or C from here, which are you going to click?"

Gavin: Seems like an easy first step. You're calling from the rooftops right now. If you're on the platform, get working on this.

Rachel: If I talked to you on the phone four years ago about email marketing and you were against doing it because not everyone's doing it yet, I would say to you: you should do it because your competitor is already doing it. That's how I feel about this. There's a good opportunity that a lot of brands' competitors have clicked that button. You need to click that button now. If your brand hasn't yet, you get to be the competitor that I'm talking about.

Gavin: Good call to action there to close this out, Rachel. That was perfect. Thank you for coming on. You're always my go-to when it comes to questions about email marketing. I appreciate having you on and hope to see you soon.

Rachel: Yes, of course. Thank you very much.

DEEP DIVE: FOAM ORDER MARKETING STRATEGY

Gavin: That was great. Really interesting discussion there with Rachel. It's clear that we're already in a world where AI is becoming a bigger part of the day-to-day marketing workflows, and that particular cloud Klaviyo integration is just another example of where things are headed. I'm actually happy that we've set these two conversations up, because it's a perfect segue into our deep dive with Max Ponte.

Currently, Max oversees SEO, paid media, and email marketing strategy for one of the more interesting niche E-com brands that we've had on the show: Foam Order. For a little context, before Foam Order, Max built his career across six different agencies and multiple in-house roles. In my conversation with Max, we cover a bunch of different topics. We talk about how Foam Order has scaled Google Ads, specifically Google Shopping in a customized product category, which presents some challenges. We also covered new and innovative creative strategies for SEO, how search intent is changing, and why clear marketing goals make an agency partnership dramatically more successful.

Let's head into the lab with Max Ponte, Director of Marketing at Foam Order. I'm also joined here by my friend and colleague Jack. Him and Max have worked together now for how long?

Jack: Little over, maybe. I'll say about 18 months, I think. September 20th, 2024.

Max: Yep.

Gavin: Old friends now at this point. 18 months. Max, tell us a little bit about yourself, your career, how you got to Foam Order, and what you're currently managing over there.

Max: I've worked at six digital agencies and worked in-house twice, usually in the role of an SEO director or an SEO manager. I worked with Foam Order at an agency and did the classic "get poached." I cut my teeth on SEO, and that broadened into paid marketing, email marketing, and eventually I became qualified to run marketing in-house. I took this job when it was presented to me, and I've been here for now a little over two years.

Gavin: With the amount of agency experience you've had, what have you brought from those experiences to your current role?

Max: I've taken a wealth of experience from different people. It's been fun to see different tactics, approaches, and philosophical styles toward digital marketing and squish them into a single amalgamation.

Gavin: You have a feel for what the landscape looks like. I know you've been able to dive into SEO and email marketing specifically as your areas of specialty. But first, just explain for the listeners what Foam Order does.

Max: Foam Order is one of those companies that when you hear about it you go, "oh, I could probably use that." We replace the foam in your couch cushions and your outdoor cushions. You don't need to go buy new furniture; you can just replace the innards of your couch and save anywhere from 60% to 90% of the cost of your couch. That's what Ikea doesn't want you to know. They'd rather just have you buy new. Hopefully they're not listening.

Gavin: And what marketing channels are you overseeing currently?

Max: Everything. I'll start with paid since that is bringing in the golden goose right now. You guys deserve that. We're doing SEO and email marketing, but that's really the trinity of what we're doing. In terms of an enterprise-level business—which I wouldn't classify us as—we have yet to put our tentacles into so many different channels. We have not hit our head on the ceiling of what we can do together, Jack.

Jack: And Mike, the owner at Foam Order, brings us up often. We're really just hitting the lowest hanging fruit at this point with a lot of what we're doing on PPC and it's working really

well. But he loves to talk about how much opportunity there is to grow the pie itself, just getting in front of folks through different methods—YouTube ads, Facebook ads. Those are untapped potential for us right now. We have not hit the ceiling yet.

Gavin: Who is the Foam Order customer?

Max: I think Margaret, who's 56 years old, who plays mahjong with her friends on the weekend and gets a discount at IHOP. Those folks are normal buyers. It's about 60% female, 40% male. The "savvy grandmother" is what I would say.

Gavin: I want to be a savvy grandmother.

Jack: This sounds like an awesome audience segment.

Gavin: Knowing that customer profile, how is that being implemented within the strategies?

Jack: The best way of taking advantage of it is a lot of the videos that Max has put together. You did a great program where folks would get discounts if they did a video recorded review. That really resonates with that demographic. People who have had this couch for 20 plus years, they like the look of it, but it just doesn't have the same oomph that it did when they first bought it.

Gavin: Max, tell me a little bit about the creative development side.

Max: That's a fun nugget for the people listening at home. Don't go buy UGC content. There's a lot of vendors out there selling people who are basically paid actors who will get your product and go, "wow," and it just never feels authentic. As long as you have your own customer base, I just created a marketing flow in Klaviyo and basically said: if they purchase this particular item, send them this very personalized looking email that says, "hey, we'll give you a 50% refund on your order if you'll put together some videos, hopefully with your dog or your wife, and have some interactive banter with each other." Get authentic with it. What we get is pretty fun, actually.

Gavin: There's a custom nature to the products you sell, which presents some challenges when it comes to Google Shopping and product feeds. I'm curious what those challenges have been and if you found any solutions.

Max: Hopefully our competitors don't catch wind of this podcast, because we definitely stuck a circle peg into a square hole when it comes to Google Shopping. It's probably gray area, approved by Google. For Google Merchant Center, you have to have a sticky static price for your product. That's the last thing a custom cushion could be. We sell items from \$10 to \$10,000, and it could be one single product with that much variation.

What we've done is we've put a little module on the bottom of our pages, right above the footer where nobody goes—the Mariana Trench of our web page. It's a module where they can add an "out of the box" cushion to the cart. Does anyone use that? No. Does it permit us to be in Google Merchant Center? Yes. So if you have a custom item that you need to sell and you're not in Merchant Center, this works. With an asterisk that maybe one day Google is going to come after us, Jack, and say we're done.

Jack: Well, we'll see. When we've talked directly with Google, they've always said there's nothing wrong with the setup. It's an out-of-the-box setup, but they're saying it works and it is working. Who cares.

Max: Yeah, I mean that is a Google rep, and I think they are commissioned on how much we make. Fair enough. If there was a higher chair who came on that call, like an engineer, they might say something different.

Jack: But, hey, for now.

Gavin: That's actually a great takeaway, Max. I was curious how you guys had structured that.

Gavin: Speaking of the trench of a product page, I wanted to speak briefly about SEO. There's been so much change in SEO strategies over the last 18 months. Give me your big picture thoughts on how SEO strategies are integrating with AI overviews.

Max: I will say a really productive strategy we've found is creating a number of landing pages that are use-case driven. It's all foam, it's all cushions, but the way people search is they want a dining chair cushion, a couch replacement cushion, a chaise replacement cushion, or an L-shaped cushion. Google wants to serve up a page that is a Cinderella shoe for that query, whether it's a blue link or an LLM response.

I don't see a lot of companies doing that. If you're selling water bottles, get specific about who they are for—marathon runners, bikers? Does it have a spout? Is it a twist off? Create a page about that. Make sure you're talking to the degree, because that's the new world we live in. That's how people are searching. They want a 30-ounce water bottle with a twist off and a straw they can wash in the dishwasher. Millennials and Gen Z are searching with microbiological strings of text. Boomers might not have caught up to that yet, but hopefully they don't get too privy to it soon because we're winning in Google blue link search.

Gavin: It speaks to both SEO and to pay-per-click, because you guys are also driving pay-per-click traffic to those specific pages.

Jack: One of the early experiments we did was the brand campaign where we went after terms like "Ikea" and stuff like that. People are making these searches and they may not think to get a replacement rather than going to Ikea for a brand new piece of furniture. It's an immediate cost saver they didn't even think existed.

Max: That one was honestly an instant success, a box office hit. We created six pages for things like Pottery Barn and Ikea replacement cushions. We immediately shot right below them. The truth is, these big furniture manufacturers don't want to replace foam or individual cushions. They could come to us with a cease and desist, and even if we were in the right legally, we'd just run and hide because we don't have Ikea money to fight their lawyers. Anyway, very successful tactic.

Gavin: Jack, what were your first impressions of Max on the initial scoping call? Was there anything about Foam Order that raised hesitations or concerns?

Jack: The intake call was great. It's the first time we meet a client, and that sets the stage. A couple of big takeaways: Max gave me very clearly defined goals. They've changed depending on the season, but it was very clear: "Jack, this is what we need to hit in order to have success. If you can do this return on ad spend, I will give you as much runway as you need." Max and Mike put a lot of trust in myself and our whole team to just handle this part of the business. I know Max wears a lot of hats, so being able to take this off his plate has definitely helped.

Gavin: Max, what are your thoughts on that goal setting side? Oftentimes that's a missing piece for brands.

Max: Those came by virtue of our CEO, Mike, being a numbers guy with a Type-A personality. He said we could spend as much as we wanted at a 4 ROAS. There was no ceiling. Then you guys did so well that we realized we needed a ceiling because we weren't operationally prepared to double our spending and fulfill all those orders over six months. So it became "hit a 4 ROAS or spend \$100,000."

I have empathy for agency guys because people can come in as moving targets. Their goals are ethereal; you give them one good thing and they want to reach for a new shiny object. I like to think we made that relatively easy for Jack. We haven't been this fickle mover. You guys have crushed finding the bullseye, and we've never moved it more than an inch or two from where it originally started. If you put smart people at a goal like Jack, they hit it. But if you move that target, you're just making it harder on yourself. Have you seen that Instagram reel of someone sweeping sand into the ocean while waves are crashing? That's what it feels like when you do what the client asks instead of sticking to the strategy.

Gavin: What has been the biggest change in the paid ad strategy since you both started working together?

Jack: For a long time we were looking year-over-year compared to the previous agency. I would always report based on how the brand was doing—folks specifically looking for Foam Order. That's the lowest hanging fruit. A lot of the non-branded campaigns they had set up previously were bringing in branded traffic. As a result, we made that a lot cleaner, and that gave us more opportunity to grow. We want to spend the majority of our budget getting in front of folks who do not know who Foam Order is. That was a big win.

Max: I'm just going to vent for a second. The previous agency was award-winning, they had the credentials, but I could not get them to set up single keyword ad groups. It was insane. I know one tenth of what they did and they would not do the best hygiene practices. That's ultimately why we fired them. We were getting a 3 ROAS on our branded campaign when you started; you guys took that to a 16 almost immediately just because of traffic cleanliness.

I have goosebumps guys, just thinking about it. It was so potent and so fast. It validated that I wasn't crazy. For three months I was banging my head against the wall. I'm looking at the account and it feels like it could be better. Don't bring the mud into the shower and pour it on yourself while you're trying to get it off. There was so much muck in their campaigns.

Gavin: The brand and non-brand traffic split happens all the time. It's the biggest thing I see in big-spending accounts—traffic bleed makes it so hard to scale. Max, your passion for this, getting goosebumps talking about paid search traffic, is incredible.

Max: The thing that came to mind, and maybe the reason I got goosebumps, is our name is "Foam Order." Can you get more like a 1999 domain than that? It could, in theory, be a non-branded term. For Jack, I know it's been hard for him to build an awkward-shaped fence around the boundaries of this, but he's done a great job.

Gavin: Jack, for brands that have a name that could double as a non-branded search, what is the strategy?

Jack: You have to be willing to do the grunt work. You need to be consistently in the search terms report, seeing what terms are coming through and traffic sculpting them. That means adding negative keywords: "I don't want this term to come through this campaign, I do want it to come through that campaign." It takes a lot of time. We've been doing this for 18 months and we still do it consistently, but over time, Google seems to get the idea. I wish there was a magic button, but the reality is you just have to do the grunt work.

Max: And Jack, I imagine the amount of hard calls you have to make because I call them alligator teeth. There's one purchase and then there's another. How fast out do they have to be for me to say, like, we're getting a 1.9 ROAS on this one individual—is that good enough? Do we wait? Do we? So, hats off.

Gavin: To close us out, Max, if you were going to give a piece of advice to a digital marketing manager at any brand, what would you tell them?

Max: I would say suppress the imposter syndrome. Push it down because you are an expert. You're probably way better at your job than you think you are. What causes doubt is having so many clients who have their life in your hands; that makes them feel vulnerable, and they take it out on you. That is a hard place to be. It makes you feel anxious and

nervous, and you've probably lost some sleep over it. That does not mean you're not qualified. You're probably way better at your job than you think you are.

Jack: I love that.

Gavin: What a good note to end on. Max, thank you so very much for joining in.

Max: Fun.

Gavin: Awesome. Thank you, Max, and thank you, Jack, for being so game during that conversation. It was great seeing you guys interact and getting a peek behind the scenes on the day-to-day workflow. Don't forget to subscribe on Apple and Spotify, and we're also on YouTube. Just visit the Logical Position channel and look for the Ad Lab playlist. Also, follow us on Instagram at AdLabPod. I'll see you guys next week in the lab. Thanks for joining.