

## An Interview With Gary Vaynerchuk, Wine Library Director of Operations and Host & Founder of Wine Library TV

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, published by John Wiley & Sons, the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of Social Media.

Today we are here with Gary Vaynerchuk, how cool is that, the *Wine Library* Director of Operations, and Host and Founder of *Wine Library TV*. We are going to be speaking about community building, Social Media, and of course, Wine Library; the conversation would not be complete without talking about Gary Vaynerchuk, as well.

So Gary, it's awesome to have you here today. Thank you.



**GV:** Thank you so much for having me.

**LS:** Yeah, this is cool. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about who you are, what your background is, what you're out there doing?

**GV:** Sure, so you know I host an online wine show called *Wine Library TV.com*, five days a week, Monday through Friday. I started that in February, 2006 and it's almost three years old now. So that's pretty well almost 600 episodes have been banged out.

I'm also Director of Operations/Co-Owner with my dad of a wine retail company in New Jersey, called *Wine Library*, which  I've been running the last 10 years. I launched *Wine Library* in 1997, and that is how I started getting into the online space. Because we were successful I had a couple of developers in house that were very, you know, tech savvy and "on the pulse" and knew what was going on. They started watching [01:30.2] Show and Rocket Boom, as soon as videoblogs started hitting the scene in 2005 and it became very obvious to me that that was going to be a platform that was going to be highly successful and important. I wanted to be a part of it, so I started *Wine Library TV* in February, 2006, and it's been a pretty big branding opportunity for me. It has built a big following, almost 80,000 people a day watch the show. It's lead to a lot.

And then in October, 2007 I decided to start video blogging under my name, Gary Vaynerchuk.com, to kind of talk about the business behind *Wine Library TV*, and just business in general; something I'm obviously very passionate about, as well. I wanted a platform for that, and so that's been quite successful for me and has lead to a lot of speaking engagements and consulting and opportunities on that level.

So being very entrepreneurial, that's been fun; being artistic with the wine stuff, that's been fun. So I've been, kind of, scratching multiple itches.

**LS:** (Laughter) Scratching multiple itches! So you started like most of us, kind of with a brick and mortar-type Company...is that correct?

**GV:** That is correct. You know, I come from a very traditional retail old school liquor store....as about as "old school" a background as you can get. So that's the world I come from.

But if you take it back further, I come from the lemonade-stand world, and the baseball-card world, and the snow-shoveling world....so I've been very, kind of, entrepreneurial my whole life. What's great about Social Media and where the world's at now is, you know, you have the ability to build much bigger brands much quicker and at much lower price points, and that's a very big change in the way business is done in America.

The gatekeepers are, kind of, out of control...have lost control actually. No more editor/producer telling you what you can or cannot be, or deciding whether you can speak to the American people or the people of the world actually. We now have tools that allow us to communicate our message, whatever that may be, with zero cost; just the time and effort we put into the community. That is the fundamental shift of what we're living through right now.

**LS:** And I'm so glad that you say that because I've made presentations on Social Media all over the country. I was just in Miami last week, and I always say that. That Social Media is changing the way that we do business and unless you are planning on retiring in the next two years, you really need to understand what Social Media is.

I am excited to hear that you've got the "bug" like I did two years ago. I'm not a Social Media person, per se. I'm a high-tech kind of a person trying to stay on the cutting edge of marketing. In my career I've build companies, but when I saw Social Media I got as excited as I think you did. This is because for the first time, as you said, there are no gatekeepers anymore. Media is opened wide to us, and it puts even the small (in your case a relatively small company)....

**GV:** ...sure.

**LS:** and the Fortune 500 on the same level playing field as the "big guys." The only thing that separates us, really, is creativity.

**GV:** And commitment to our community. I think that's really...that's the real equalizer to money for somebody small, like myself, compared to the Wine Spectator, or a comedian compared to a top-notch comedian that's on Comedy Central. Whoever leverages their community and whoever builds a community better is in a position to win, whatever that may be.

And so time, once again, continues to become important and valuable and time has become more valuable than ever, and important and I've already cited that people that care and give back are going to win. And I think that's a very powerful message, a very good message, and a very big opportunity for a lot of people.

**LS:** That really is powerful. People that care and are willing go give back are the ones that are going to win. That really is what Social Media is, I think.

**GV:** I think so, too.

**LS:** Can you tell us...you've had some phenomenal success with *Wine Library TV*. You'd mentioned 80,000 people a day look at your videos, and I've got to tell you, I love watching you videos. I think they are really awesome. But this is something that grew. Didn't you...when I mentioned at the conference that you had

mentioned you basically just set up a camera, you spill wine, you live in Jersey....there's police activity outside...(Laughter)

**GV:** (Laughter)

**LS:** I think it's great! Can you tell us a little bit about how you built that success?

**GV:** You know I think it's one step at a time. I think a lot of people ask me, "What was the tipping point; when you got on Conan, or you were on Leno, or Nightline, or Wall Street Journal?"

And I think when you don't focus on tipping points and just focus on pumping out good content, and you focus on hustling every day and answering your email and caring about your community, putting out good content...I think you start realizing that you don't need a tipping point and that that's not really what fundamentally separates a victory from a loss.

I think that for me it was just pumping out good shows every day and becoming part of the community; leaving comments and blogs and answering my email and creating accounts in things like FaceBook and Twitter; you know just "working it." And I think that that is the way to success, it's always been, and the only difference is, I think, that now you fans and your consumers and the people that care about you have the ability to build you quicker and easier and better because they have tools. Word-of-mouth has changed; not the way you build a brand.

**LS:** And you had mentioned that you pump out good shows...and getting back to just the quality, again. When I speak on my presentations I mention that quality is not what it use to be; is that sometimes you can just punch out as long as the content is good, you're passionate and you're dedicated to it, that just putting a camera in front of you is plenty enough if you meet the other criteria. In the old days when we produced television shows, or television commercials, there was always this corporate message behind them. Nowadays you really don't need that type of polished presentation Do you find that true?

**GV:** Yeah, I mean I think the message is the whole game. I think the less polished it is sometimes, the better. I think that the lighting or the mic or the camera you use is so irrelevant and just such a stumbling block by many producers; many people that want to get into the game spend so much time on trying to figure that part out and that part has no value...none! I really thing "zero." Some of them, you know I mean...it's got to be watchable, you've got to be able to hear it, but out side of that, that's the threshold.

**LS:** Yes, because if you're not spending \$50,000 there is no hidden agenda. It's just real and sincere; I think that's the word you used.

**GV:** Yeah, I think authenticity of the message is what really attaches people to the product, to the service, to the individual. And I think it's quality of message, not quality of the way we consume it, or the video or the sound. So I think it's very obvious what works.

You know people like tradition, and since commercials...listen, commercials didn't need to get into million-dollar budgets, they just did because they had the money and people weren't making smart decisions, really! I really believe that. So I think that, you know, you've got to really take a step back and understand what people react to; and people react to things that are authentic, real, transparent, and deliver.

And listen...some people really love watching something in HD; I get that! But I don't think that's going to be the differentiator from victory or defeat. I really don't!

**LS:** I totally agree! Social Media, really, is just a collection of digital tools that make this stuff available on the internet.

**GV:** Of course! All this is is the phone, the car, the fax machine, the pencil, the paper, they're tools. Nothing else! There's no magic bullet in this.

**LS:** And what it really gets back to, (I think is something that's key, and really what most of the people aren't understanding when they talk about Social Media) is using these tools to build community. And that is something that you've been phenomenally successful at. Can you just, kind of, encapsulate what the term "building community" means?

**GV:** Building community is about "giving a crap!" That's where I separated myself from everybody else, or whoever else....I mean, those other people do a great job, but to me it's about really caring about your user-base; listening to them, making them involved, letting them participate, caring about their thoughts, letting them have their say in molding the direction of what you do.

And so to me it's just about caring. It's about taking the extra effort to read your emails, to respond to them, to meet them in person, to send them little [10:05.7] gifts. To just care; I mean it's a very simple process. It's just one that's costly and of time and money and that's something people aren't willing to invest.

**LS:** Well, yeah, like in the old days when we built relationships with the local butcher. We would walk down the street and he would, every once in a while throw in a handful of extra meat, or give us a special cut....and

**GV:** Baker's dozen, right.

**LS:** Yeah, baker's dozen, perfect example. That's all we were talking about here. And you had mentioned emails. You get a lot of emails, but you also find a way to make sure that you answer every single one of them. Wow, how do you do that?

**GV:** It's tough, it's very tough. We might be a stumbling block, and it's not scalable, it's going to go away. But a...umm...people know it. I've been doing it for multiple years. I think a lot of people appreciate it. I really care, and to me it's also about research and development. It's not just about the community, it's about the R and D. I mean, when you read that many emails, you get a very quick pulse of what people care about and what they're into, and where things are going.

So instead of reading other people's blog posts about where things are going, I'm in the trenches with the community to figure out where things are going.

**LS:** I love that! So you are actually listening to your customers?

**GV:** Yeah, I don't need another marketing executive to write a book or write a blog post for me to know what's going on, because I'm in the trenches seeing it happen.

**LS:** And again, it's listening to the customers, hearing what they want. It's building that personal relationship.

**GV:** It's really not complicated stuff, it's just that, once again, I don't think people really want to step up and do it. It's hard! It takes a lot of time and a lot of times it's a very lonely job, you know! Answering emails at length is lonely and can be boring if you view it that way. But to me it's stimulating and exciting.

**LS:** And you had mentioned that your plane trips are kind of like a haven, because like you said, because it gives you the opportunity to actually address the hundreds of emails you get a day.

**GV:** Yes, no question, that's the whole game.

**LS:** And one of the things that I thought was interesting is when I sent you an email, you had even a video that said, "I've noticed that you sent me an email and I promise I'll get to you." Even that I thought was pretty classy; that you're telling people, "Just be patient, you are important to me." In addition you're doing it face-to-face through video. I thought that was very clever.

**GV:** I appreciate that. It's one of my few, little tricks that has a lot of value and I'm proud of it, you know.

**LS:** That's great. One of the other videos that I just have to mention here, (I think it's one of your best) where you are saying you get the same email over and over and over...and that is, "How do I monetize my blog?" And you start out with, "Seventeen times a day I get this email...now let me just show you..." And I love that hands-on approach.

You went into Google, you typed in "wine," you got a beer list, and you called the beer-glass company manufacturer..... (Laughter) it was wild.

**GV:** You know those were one of those great moments where you get lucky. You know they could have gotten an answering machine, you know.

**LS:** (Laughter) I thought it was terrific. I mean, you sold the guy. Now he's ready to hear, when you come back, he's ready to talk turkey with you.

**GV:** Yeah. I mean, one thing is I'm pretty lucky and the guy was pretty funny. Right. He was telling me, like, "Google is a premier place to advertise," you know he was a funny character. But at the end of the day I just wanted to show people that you can do it. You have to go out and take it. Nothing's going to be given to you. You've got to go out and grab it!

**LS:** And that's what a lot of people do. They set up a blog, they type a couple of articles in there, posts, and they think the world is going to beat a path to their door.

**GV:** It's really unbelievable!

**LS:** (Laughter) yeah. In one of my conferences I say, if you're familiar with the old term, "If you build a better mousetrap....." But no, it's, "If you build a better mousetrap you'll just have more dead mice."

**GV:** You're darn right!

**LS:** You've got to work it, man.

And some stats...I'd love to hear those. I mean, everybody wants to get an order of magnitude. You've actually done 600 videos! That's amazing!

**GV:** Yeah, as of right now, on November 24, we're at...let me just see...we are at, you know, last Friday was 582.

**LS:** Wow. That's absolutely amazing.

**GV:** So we'll hit 600 before the end of the year.

**LS:** That is absolutely amazing. Is there some other stats, like number of viewers, or number of hours...?

**GV:** You know hours would be a great one. I should compile that. You know 80,000 viewers a day through lot of platforms, especially iTunes; a lot of viewers through WhoLoo, which is a great distribution deal for me, as well.

You know, I guess the fact that I most care about is hundreds of emails answered every day, you know? To me all those stats are important and they mean something, but the fact that I interact with my fan base on a level that's never been really done before....I mean, I assume some of these 1950's rock stars, T.V. stars, did answer a lot of fan mail. That's kind of gone by the wayside. But, you know a lot of people just don't interact, and I get "why." They're very busy, they're all very bust but you make a choice. You make a choice.

I mean, I can be very busy doing other things but I feel like this has value; being very busy, to be in the trenches with my community I think is very important.

**LS:** Yes and I totally agree. With one of the companies that I have been running for about 10 years, *Paper Models Inc.*, we provide downloadable, three-dimensional architectural models for kids for school; and I got every single customer service email into my email. I'm the President and I don't have time, but yet I make the time. And what had happened, I noticed, is that over the last couple of years, by listening to the customers I was able to build a better inventory of what they were looking for. And I all but eliminated customer service by solving the problems and looking for systemic errors.

**GV:** No question!

**LS:** I wouldn't have known that.

**GV:** Yep, 1,000%. I mean, you've got to listen! The End! (Laughter)

**LS:** (Laughter)

**GV:** You know, it's not super hard.

**LS:** Yeah, it's not rocket science.

**GV:** No, it's not.

**LS:** And you have really built a huge, loyal customer base, or fan base. You're community building of this fan base lead to some other kinds of spin-offs, like books and acquisition offers...can you tell us....

**GV:** Yes, speaking fees and consulting. I mean it's opened so many opportunities for me and I think that people need to realize there is so much opportunity out there. You've just got to grab it and that's what has happened for me. I mean a lot of...two book deals, six-figure book deals from the wine side; tons of consulting and speaking gigs from the business side. Just a lot of different opportunities; lots of television offers. You know, just opportunities...and as long as you keep positioning yourself with opportunities I think that's very important.

**LS:** Well, yeah, you've got to be out there to be participating, to be playing. And you already wrote a book and you've got another deal on a second book.

**GV:** Yes. I've got a deal on a second book which I am going to start writing. There's a good chance in 2009 that I will probably strike a television deal, because I'm just getting bombarded with offers and dealers' merchandising opportunities once you build your niche. I mean, there's a lot of people out there that would buy Gary Vaynerchuk glassware or decanters. And so I just think it's about building your brand equity and leveraging it.

It's been done before, the only difference is there's new platforms to do it in, and that's all.

**LS:** Absolutely! And one of the things that you had mentioned in the conference is that this *Wine TV* has been very, wildly successful, and that really it gets back to some of the clever observations that you've made and implemented. You have actually set up a website, [www.GaryVaynerchuk.com](http://www.GaryVaynerchuk.com), because now you're building your own personal brand. Can you tell me what we can find on that website?

**GV:** That's where we really talk about business and marketing and the stuff we're, kind of, talking about today, in length; some of the videos you just talked about. You can't do a "pitching somebody cold on a phone" video in *Wine Library TV*, so I needed a platform to do that; to help the community, to show them what I know, and I just want to be a part of it that way. And that's been very exciting and really lead to a lot of my monetizing opportunities, because that's where Fortune 500 Companies have seen my videos and what a piece of that thought process, as well.

**LS:** So, you've actually had offers to join advisory boards on big companies?

**GV:** I wouldn't say Fortune 500 Companies have been giving opportunities to come in and speak and get paid to consult on an hourly rate. I've definitely been offered a lot of advisory board equity places in medium to small companies, and tons of start-ups. That's almost every day, so, yeah, it's lead to a lot of that kind of opportunity.

**LS:** That's cool. Do you ever think of doing a book just on this form of marketing?

**GV:** Absolutely! You know, I cannot wait to write a business book and it's going to be a lot of fun for me.

**LS:** Yeah, and some of them are really successful. I mean, David Meerman Scott just did *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*; how Social Media has changed that. And that's been on the New York Times best-seller for half a year. And he's had 250,000 downloads of one of his ebooks on the same subject. It just seems like a perfect match for you.

**GV:** It's definitely out there and the timing is right, so no question.

**LS:** And if someone was to get started...I mean obviously this is the next question...they come up and they say, "Gary, you've inspired me. What should I do? How do I start building my community?" What's the right approach here?

**GV:** First and foremost it starts with your content. You know, it's about doing what you love. Look yourself in the mirror and say, "What kind of content do I want to put out to the world; what kind of service, what kind of product do I want to sell, what kind of personal brand do I want to be?" Whatever that may be.

Once you love what you do, if you sell vacuum cleaners and you love it, then you're in the game. That's fine. But now we're in the game. But if it doesn't start there, you've already lost. So you've got to really believe in what you do within a business. Whether you're the personal brand, whether you sell product, whether you sell service...if you don't, nothing I tell you will work. And that is because the amount of hours that it takes to win this game is so great that if you don't love it, you're not going to be putting the hours in.

**LS:** So, we're talking about, again, passion.

**GV:** Passion! It starts there. Now, after that you've got to then throw yourself into the community. Sign up for the forums that do the things that you like, talk about the things you like. Put out content, leave comments on different blogs. Get out to the community; go to events around what you do. You've just got to network. You've got to network virtually and you've got to network in the real world. And that's it! A pure hustle of that.

You know, if you are into autos...if you're into tires, then you need to find every tire website on the internet and become part of that community; whether it's leaving a comment or starting threads in a forum, or contacting the person that owns that site if it's a one-way conversation and figuring out if you can guest-blog...anything that can give you a voice in that world.

**LS:** And again, I think everybody ought to look at that video about how to monetize, because you did just that. I mean, you just typed in whatever the key word for your industry was, you looked at the paid links because those are the people that are most aggressively participating in that industry, and you simply go to their website, go to the "About Us," pick up the phone and call them. Participate!

**GV:** Yep!

**LS:** So we've got "Passion" and we've got "Participate." Is there anything else that you'd like to add about community building, Wine Library....?

**GV:** I did a video and it's called *PHCC*, Passion, Hustle, Community, and Content; and that's it! And those are four cornerstones of building a brand, you know. So we've touched on them like you just said and that's it.

I mean, it's caring about your user base, it's about putting out good stuff, good service, good food...whatever the heck you do...it's about working your ass off, because that's the only option and it starts with the passion because you've got to love it because all the other things crumble if you don't.

**LS:** And that's why I love hearing you speak, because you do have that passion; not only for the *Wine Library*, but just for marketing, and people in general. I love that.

**GV:** Yeah, people in general. That's where I get really lucky, because really for me it starts with people; and people feel that. You cannot bullshit that and that gives me a big opportunity.

**LS:** I love it. How do people find out more about *Wine Library*, *Wine Library TV* and your personal brand?

**GV:** *WineLibraryTV.com* is the website. *GaryVaynerchuk.com*; you're going to have to link that up because nobody can spell "Vaynerchuk."

And that's it! Whatever people do...they watch my stuff/they don't watch my stuff...if they are listening to this or when they read this, if they leave with anything (it should be) "Do what you love." It starts there. That is the root of everything and if you can accomplish that, you're in the game!

**LS:** Awesome, and those are great words to live by. Gary, thank you.

I would really like to thank Gary Vaynerchuk of the *Wine Library*, Director of Operations and Host and Founder of *WineLibraryTV.com* for being with us here today, to talk about community building, Social Media; and, honestly Gary, thank you for taking the time, really!

**GV:** Thanks so much.

**LS:** This is great.

This has been Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out our other valuable Social Media tactics, tools, and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book and its companion website, [www.TheSocialMediaBible.com](http://www.TheSocialMediaBible.com).

For more information about me, Lon Safko, go on over to my website at [www.LonSafko.com](http://www.LonSafko.com).

And, Gary, truly thank you for sharing those incites with us today.

**GV:** Thanks so much!