

# TOP OF HIS GAME

SUCCESS  
STORY

**FORMER  
PRO SOCCER  
PLAYER NICK  
SHACKELFORD  
USED HIS  
KNACK FOR  
SCALING TO  
ACHIEVE  
SEVEN-FIGURE  
SUCCESS IN  
THE ONLINE AD  
SPACE.**

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*Editor's Note: Nick Shackelford is an instructor for Foundr's course, Ecommerce Masters*

Soccer fans may know Nick Shackelford as a former goalie for the American pro team LA Galaxy II, but since he left the league at the end of 2015, he's developed a new reputation—as a bang-up ad man.

"Nick is the go-to guy when it comes to paid ads," Zach Benson, founder of marketing agency Assistagram, writes on LinkedIn.

Having made a name for himself in the advertising space, Shackelford is now Managing Partner at Structured Social, Facebook's premier growth partner. He's also co-founder of Geek Out Education, which curates educational events focused on business growth.

So how did Shackelford go from the soccer field to the ad game? "When you play pro soccer, you have two job choices," he says. "You either train people or you play on a very low division and make no money."

Shackelford shares that he grew up in an upscale part of Orange County, California, and he says he wasn't thrilled about the latter option. He began to think that some sort of commission-based sales job would be his best bet toward earning the kind of income he wanted. While training a student in goal-keeping, he met the student's mother, an executive at PepsiCo. She offered Shackelford an internship at the company, encouraging him to listen constantly and speak up when opportunities presented themselves.

Pepsi was just beginning to focus on its social media presence. Hampered by mostly older and homogenous leadership, the company was having a tough time figuring out how to reach its intended market, millennials. That is, until Shackelford—a true Millennial, born in 1990—spoke up in a meeting.

**"I was, for whatever reason, a respected individual in this room, who had no business being there," he says now. Faced with an opportunity to speak about marketing the product and believing he possessed a strong understanding of his own generation, Shackelford spoke up. "I got lucky in speaking and that led me to discussing marketing tactics."**

He went on to join digital marketing agency Resolution Media, and became part of an out-sourced team at Apple working on digital media marketing worldwide. He worked on paid social media campaigns for the iPhone 7, iPad Pro, and the Apple Watch.

But Shackelford quickly came to understand that his value was limited as a hired gun. He wasn't a decision-maker, he wasn't important enough to really drive revenue, and he had no ownership over his work.

**"This enters me into direct response world," he says, "which is what led to the fidget spinner trip."**

## FIDGET SPINNERS REVEAL A SUPERPOWER

In 2017, Shackelford joined with Jake Schmidt, the business partner he still has today, to pounce on an unexpected business opportunity—the fidget spinner.

Schmidt had come across the unique toy on Chinese ecommerce platform Alibaba.

In case you've lived under a rock since 2017, a fidget spinner is a handheld toy, usually with two or three arms extending out from a spinning ball bearing at the center. You hold it at the center and spin, creating an oddly soothing sensation that antsy tweens and anxiety sufferers alike came to adore.

Demand for the doohickey skyrocketed, seemingly overnight. Soon everyone wanted one, and in the early days, they weren't widely available. The partners drilled down, learning more about the toy and who was making it, and ultimately launching worldwide brand, Fidgetly.

"The bearings were the true difference in understanding how much volume could be pushed," Shackelford says. Schmidt found a company that made the bearings inexpensively and quickly. This let the duo scale up quickly and at low cost. And that, in turn, made it possible for Shackelford to apply his marketing know-how and move millions of the toys.

And so, it was the fidget spinner that uncovered Shackelford's true superpower: scaling.



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**“When someone has discovered that, ‘Hey, something is working here, I have some smoke,’ That is when I get to it and I can solve the next step and next problem to scale.”**

If you're doing 1 million, Shackelford believes there's nothing preventing you from getting to 10 million or 50 million. He knows how to introduce paid traffic, email initiatives, influencer tie-ins and more to take sales from good to great.

## AVERAGE ORDER VALUE SWEET SPOT

Since closing Fidgetly, Shackelford has worked with various brands, including DIFF Eyewear and PupSocks. In 2017, he helped PupSocks clear \$10.7 million in sales in 35 days. With just a Facebook marketing initiative in place, over \$275,000 in DIFF Eyewear frames sold in two-and-a-half days in 2018.

Shackelford has identified the average order value (AOV) sweet spot for his initiatives, between \$45 and \$60. This typically gives the media buyer (the person tasked with linking advertising to its intended audience) a high enough margin to spend online to acquire the customer. It's important to keep in mind your own margins and ROI expectations, though. "Scale is relative," Shackelford says.

For the PupSocks initiative, the margin was incredible, seeing a return four times the investment, but the company had to manage a flood of customer communications and order processing for the three months following those sales.

### SUCCESS STORY

## HOW TO BUILD ON EARLY SUCCESS

For businesses with current revenues in the high six figures or heading into seven figures, Shackelford recommends two strategies to accelerate growth into that next level:

**1. Consider creating a secondary or complementary product.**

**2. Consider new angles in order to sell the existing product in new markets.**

**"You have to build out the product suite because it isn't practical to go into the high millions with just one product," Shackelford says. He notes an exception here and there, but there is often a clear, identifiable secondary or complementary product to the initial product.**

He also recommends building out new markets for the existing successful product, and says Miracle Sheets are a good example of this. They're sheets whose value proposition includes staying fresh longer (requiring less laundering). An obvious initial market for the product was moms who handle the laundry in their homes.

But what about students moving into dorm rooms? Grandparents, parents, and the students themselves could be motivated to purchase the sheets, assuming a student isn't going to do laundry very often in college.



**IT'S NOT ABOUT TRYING TO SQUEEZE MORE DOLLARS OUT OF THE PRODUCT AT THAT POINT, IT'S ABOUT TRYING TO SQUEEZE DOLLARS OUT OF THE ANGLE," SHACKELFORD SAYS. "AND THE ANGLE IS JUST LIMITED BY HOW CREATIVE YOU CAN BE."**

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## WHAT MAKES A GOOD MEDIA BUYER

# A

purpose (Z).

good media buyer should be able to tell the client, “I’m running X to Y to understand Z.” That means the buyer should know what ad is running (X) to which audience (Y) to achieve what

Shackelford believes there are two main kinds of media buyers: brand buyers and performance buyers. Brand buyers have a deep, almost intuitive understanding of how to position the product for success (purchase). Performance buyers are focused on using gimmicky, aggressive tactics to create immediate sales.

Shackelford considers himself a hybrid of the two. He tends to find strong positioning that equates to immediate sales, and he tests those initiatives out with a strategy he calls the 2xAOV formula. This means product owners should spend twice their average order value to find out if a

marketing initiative is working.

For example, if your AOV is \$60, prepare to spend \$120 to get that clear understanding. Do not mistake “clear understanding” for “sale,” though.

“There are clear indicators of pre-success (success being a purchase), that you can be making decisions upon if you’re on the right track to get that purchase.” Shackelford believes you can reliably get those clear indicators with this formula.

From there, growth is all about spending strategically to uncover the information you need to improve.

**“The best buyers are unafraid to spend money,” Shackelford says. “Facebook is how you buy the data. It’s not free. You have to pay for data and the smart buyers know how to apply that purchased learning for their next test. It’s never perfection. It’s iteration. The life of iteration vs. the life of perfection.”**



**Author:** *Rebeca Seitz is a writer, producer, and founding President & CEO of two businesses. Her books have been published by HarperCollins and B&H Group and her last screenplay was produced with Out of Order Studios and written with Disney veteran Bob Burris. She has appeared on NPR, CNN, Huffington Post Live, and more regarding responsible use of mass media. Connect with Rebeca on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn. See her writing, listen to her podcast, and find out more at [rebecaseitz.com](http://rebecaseitz.com).*

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