

## Podcast With Saul Fleischman



Saul Fleischman



### Today's Podcast Highlights

- [02.32 - We help you find the best hashtags and give you the ranking for them.]
- [03.02 - We integrated many social networks, right now we are going very deep with Twitter.]
- [03.45 - We learned all kinds of things about APIs.]
- [04.03 - RiteTag helps you find the right hashtags and provides a feedback loop where you can test, and we'll show you the results.]
- [04.26 - We give people three exclusive ways to get hashtags for a tweet.]
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## Podcast Transcript:

Paul: Hi there, software entrepreneurs, and welcome to the [Disruptware](#) podcast. This is the show for entrepreneurs who are either just starting out or those who already have a software company and are looking for techniques and ideas for massively scaling their business. The way we do that is to interview experts in the market who are already running their software company. And whatever level they are at, they have great content to share. And we dig deep to get factual experiences that you can put into action right now. So let's get on with our guest today.

So, on today's show I'm delighted to welcome someone called Saul Fleishman. And Saul is the founder of a company called [RiteTag](#). And RiteTag is a company that optimizes your social traffic all around hashtags. But before I dig into that, I'm going to get Saul on the line.

Paul: Welcome to the show.

Saul: Hi.

Paul: Welcome. Thanks for spending the time with us, Saul. You know, I wanted to get you on the show because I came across your product, RiteTag, and I thought, "Wow, this is really unique. And I haven't seen anyone else doing this." Especially when it comes to Twitter and social optimization, one of the challenges is really just getting more traffic

without having loads and loads of followers. So, tell me a bit about your product.

Saul: It was the big tsunami, tidal wave in Japan about three-and-a-half years ago, almost four years ago that put me onto a trend where people really didn't know which hashtag is going to reach topic-interested audiences. They would try things. And at that time it was best to look at Twitter rather than TV because there was cover up about the Fukushima nuclear reactors and such. And so I thought, "What if we devised a tool that would only assume you knew what you were talking about in your own words?" And this is a given, right? But we would help you find the best hashtags, and give you like a ranking for them, for the hashtags most associated with your topic. And you get your topic -- you might want to change your words to get a better list of hashtags. You do that a couple times, and you're on to the right tag. So, this is what we started with. We actually, initially integrated many social networks. Right now we're going very deep with Twitter, and then we'll expand out to other social networks. But, initially we were within the first two months of launching the site. We expanded from Twitter, Google Plus and YouTube out to Flickr, Instagram, deviantArt, Slide Share, eBay, Tumblr, Amazon, eCommerce, Instagram. Am I forgetting anybody?

Paul: I don't know, but it sounds like a lot.

Saul: And we learned all kinds of things about APIs. I imagine you're chuckling inside, dealing with a small staff and that many APIs and how they change and such. We've learned a lot where we want to go deep with Twitter.

Paul: Yeah.

Saul: So it's a thing for helping you find the right hashtags and then also providing a feedback loop where you can test, and we'll show people the results. And we'll push their best-performing hashtags right prominent for them so that they can go back to them. We actually now give people three exclusive ways to get hashtags for a tweet -- a Twitter update, yeah? One of them is based on actual solid results. And then another one is based on the user looking at their stats on stuff they've sent from RiteTag or from our browser extensions and then making their own sets, tag sets that are also available to them in our tweet composer.

Paul: I guess that a way to kind of illustrate that to people listening -- and as you're talking now I'm just thinking when I had a look at the tool the way

I kind of thought it's like, you mentioned Google suggests, you know when you type in something into Google and it pops up and shows you what people are actually searching for. So you can actually see where the traffic is almost, you know which keywords are the most people searching for? Well, if you can imagine that in the hashtag world. So, as you're doing a tweet, and putting a hashtag, then what it's kind of doing is suggesting the right hashtag to use for your word, or what word you started with, so that you can get the deepest reach.

Saul: Yes, and since you used the word "illustrate," I need to mention we just launched something, the RiteScore, where with either our Firefox or [Chrome extension](#), any of your listeners can just search RiteTag, or search hashtags, in the Chrome store or in Mozilla's extension gallery. And you get that free, and then in Twitter, start typing a tweet. Start typing a hashtag with the pound sign, the hashtag mark, and we color grade it – change it a little bit, like plural to singular, or break up social media to social and media, and watch as the grading changes. So, before you even send a tweet, you can optimize it. So, we do that, and that's free in Twitter. And then for paying users, we also ride in TweetDeck, HootSuite, SocialOomph, Sprout Social and Buffer.

Paul: That's really cool.

Saul: That's a start. We think it's a start.

Paul: So, as a Twitter user, so with Disruptware, my Twitter account is very new.

Saul: Yeah.

Paul: Obviously I've used Twitter for years, but the Disruptware one is very, very small. So it's got a very small number of followers. And what I really hate is increasing the number of followers in any artificial way because you get the wrong sort of people. And so it is a bit of a slow process, but at least you know that your audience is really targeted. And, of course, the downside of that is that when you do tweet, you don't necessarily get a lot of traffic. But of course using hashtags and picking up hashtags which people are using a lot, then you actually penetrate a much larger volume of traffic. And that was quite an eye-opener to me using your app.

- Saul: Thank you. Yeah, what I like to tell people is you have on your Twitter account perhaps just in the tens or hundreds of followers, right? So, my main account, my personal account is [OsakaSaul](#), it's 25 thousand and change followers. And the way you beat me is with a good hashtag.
- Paul: Got it.
- Saul: Because, yeah, because you're going to reach a topic-interested audience. You reach, I would say from experience, I eat my own dog food, I use RiteTag as all our staff do, and I'd say you get a little bit more on nearly every tweet. I wouldn't say it's exponential, but you get a little bit more. And for people who are looking to optimize, they understand that's where it is. It's a little more this way, a little more that way. Yeah?
- Paul: All right, got it, cool. So tell me a bit now, moving away from the product itself, obviously things haven't always been smelling of roses, you know.
- Saul: Oh, no.
- Paul: It's been a bit of a battle, hasn't it? You know, getting your product to where it is now.
- Saul: Oh, sure. Let's start with the suicidal days.
- Paul: Yeah.
- Saul: Sure. Is that where we're going, Paul?
- Paul: Well, you brought it up.
- Saul: Yes, right, so after the earthquake and actually the first iteration of RiteTag – this is a heck of a story. A guy, John Waller, an English young man, who was one of the ones who were – he was quite shaken, no pun intended. He was living a lot closer to the epicenter. And he ran down to Osaka, and I just met him at a Meetup, and he wound up doing the first iteration, which was called Tag Bag. And this was quite disruptive. You didn't need to begin with a hashtag. You just needed to begin with a topic or a word. So, he did that in a couple weeks -- wound up being a real changer for his career, though. He promptly got hired in Tokyo, where he still is. Of course, we're still friends. But that was the end of my staff for Tag Bag.

Paul: Yeah.

Saul: It was another two months of going to Meetups and searching high and low in LinkedIn, and developers who are well-paid – as they should be. And, I didn't have the funds to pay them. Our startup has never been funded. Right now we're 26 months, not from Tag Bag, but from the launch of RiteTag. Just over 26 months of history, and we're still bootstrapped, self-funded.

Paul: Right.

Saul: And on very, very little. So, finding people was real tough.

Paul: So, you're looking for, you went out to all these Meetups and things to find developers who wanted to come in and work as an equity share or something like that?

Saul: Yes, for equity, that's correct.

Paul: Ok, and how did that go?

Saul: Oh, really bad because I'm not an engineer myself. My B.A. is in film. In graduate school, I didn't finish my MBA I started. So, really, among technical people, the hustler, the marketing type gets very little respect, you know. If you want to boot-strap software application, I tell you, if you're an engineer, it's the easiest. Second easiest would be a really great designer. For example, if you're not very visual yourself, but you're a great coder, then you probably respect the guy who can do the user interface, who can design that, who can wire frame it, right?

Paul: Right.

Saul: Ok, and maybe at least do or lead the staff who do your logos and things. You respect that person, right? But the guy, the product designer, that's me in this case -- what RiteTag does and such comes from me.

Paul: So you found it quite difficult finding the right sort of engineer because you're coming at it from a product perspective. You know, you've got the ideas in your head.

Saul: Oh, right. And you know what they say? Ideas are a dime a dozen. You've got an idea, Saul.

Paul: Sure.

Saul: Ideas are a dime a dozen. What's the value of an idea? Look it up in [Quora](#).

Paul: You know the notion of ideas a dime a dozen is because it's not the idea that necessarily creates the product. It's the execution of it.

Saul: Oh, yes.

Paul: You know, and the reason why many people might be in jobs even though they've got the great ideas is that it's actually getting out of that job and actually driving forward and getting it implemented and having that momentum, that focus, to keep it pushing forward. I mean, even look at yourself, case in point. You wanted to get RiteTag up and running, and you had problems finding the right people, and yet you still pushed on.

Saul: Yes.

Paul: And now you've got – what's your team look like now?

Saul: 15 people?

Paul: Ok.

Saul: But we're a bit PR/Marketing heavy right now. We need two more people in engineering. So, coordinating with all these people is a pain.

Paul: Yeah, well, that's all the fun of a virtual staff. You know, the modern economy. I actually quite enjoy it, you know. The issue, I think, is the time scales, especially with yourself being in Osaka, I think that might make it quite difficult for people perhaps being on the West Coast.

Saul: You think?

Paul: Yeah.

Saul: And anywhere in America would be better for me, sure.

Paul: Sure. So, you've got your team together now, and you've had some growth issues, like you said early when we got started in the interview.

You applied this methodology to all these other social networks, and all of a sudden you realized that you had masses of API. And more importantly, masses of data coming in which you then needed to collate, sort, and everything like that, which brought upon itself, I'd imagine, a huge technical challenge. And so you kind of took a step back, then, didn't you? Then sort of really chopped out all of that and said, "Right, we need to just focus on this one thing, and get this one thing working really, really well" -- which was Twitter. Yeah?

Saul: Yes.

Paul: Ok, so, and from what I've seen the product's up and running now. You've got users coming on board, and now you're at the stage where you're just, you know, testing different monetization strategies to build the actual revenue.

Saul: We're doing better with that. We've got three tiers for users, and we're about to launch an API. So, for example, what I suggested to our listeners is to take our Firefox or Chrome extension, and see what we do to Twitter, see what we do to HootSuite. This'll be available within days to other web apps, software, tablet apps and, of course, mobile apps with our API. And with that people start actually free. Developers start free, and as they hit certain levels of API calls, then it starts costing a little. So that is probably going to be quite strong. We've got, right now, we have 11 – it's still in soft launch. We've done no PR for that yet. We have 11 social apps who are saying, "Me first, me first on the API. I'll take it before the documentation is ready. Saul, give it to me." So, we think that's going to go well.

But as you were saying, testing different monetization strategies for user accounts for RiteTag, it's been a slow grow. But we're seeing more people convert to paying, and I think it's... I would just say a word on that, it's really the visual thing, the hashtag grading. When they see it, when they can stop guessing, when they can see their hashtags graded as they type them. Buffer, TweetDeck, HootSuite, or even just in Twitter, then they see the light. Then they say, "Ok, I want more of this. I want this everywhere that I'm tweeting from.

Paul: Got it.

Saul: So this is helping with conversion.



Paul: Well, and it's interesting though, you know, looking at how it's also your customer acquisition strategy, and how you're converting those. Because "freemium" style products are quite a challenge to get right. And you're going after a large volume of market with a sort of free product, which potentially is going to generate a ton of data and server costs and everything, which you're going to have to fund before you really get a lot of revenue from paying customers, right?

Saul: Our queries that are cached, so that we can give people results, and so that we can grade hashtags, are in the low millions right now. And to give people even better accuracy, we need to cache over 10 million. So, yeah, we need to scale up servers. So, yeah, we need money for that, for infrastructure. For sure. And it's all the time that startups that are "freemium" fold. They go out of business. They fail to convert. It happens all the time. There are things that my wife and I have loved using that have shuttered because they just couldn't make money. So, it happens. But we have good people on it for strategy and good advisors, so we're confident.

Paul: I know that you're a proponent of Lean Startup and things like that. Did you go through the product, or an MVP, a product of market fit exercise at the beginning? You know, to really nail down whether this thing's going to sell?

Saul: No, we made all the mistakes, every possible mistake in the beginning. And, briefly on them, we listened to the wrong people, listened to people who wouldn't be our customers. We learned later, we took a step back and read [The Lean Startup](#). Our first validation boards we did, oh, well after a year of pivoting. But we developed features, listening to the wrong people, we developed features that no one would use, let alone pay for. Some things were technical where, I mean, even Steve Blank will say, at the end of the day every startup is its own thing. And not all the rules apply.

So, for example, to be able to build, to draw a sketch, or wire frame something. For listeners, a wire frame is a mock up. Buttons look like buttons, search fields look like search fields. But you search and nothing happens because there are no databases behind it. But, to let people touch something and see if it makes sense to them. Let them test. And also for developers, to understand what's going to do what and where. And how things are going to interact in a site or a mobile or a tablet app.

But for us, because no one had seen anything like RiteTag, a hashtags from words, names, brands, products or hashtags, right? They had seen things that were hashtags connected to other hashtags that they knew, but we were going about it a different way. We just figure you know what you're talking about. So, I'm just going to say, it took us a long time to build something that people would even use. For months, as we iterated, people would trickle in, take one look at it and never come back. And we would launch events. I did hang outs on air where I'd want to talk to users, and people wouldn't come. It took a real long time before we iterated far enough where people got enough value from it that they would give us worthwhile feedback. It took a long time, Paul.

Paul: Right, right. That's really interesting. And I guess the ROI, though, is on the traffic, right? So, if you can show that your system gives them more traffic, then that's where it becomes a no-brainer.

Saul: Traffic, interaction in our stats, and top-performing tags. We were following how many times someone's used a hashtag if there's a link in a tweet, a URL, then the average number of click-throughs on links. We're also tracking favorites and re-tweets. So, we're looking to show where people got not just traffic, but also interaction. If they're re-tweeting your tweet. You say you have a small number of followers on one of your Twitter accounts, and I've got 25,700. So, if I re-tweet one of your tweets, and it's something that you really want to get out there, we're going fishing in another pond for you. Right? So, things that are generating those are important. It's not just traffic, but it's also beneficial things. We're tracking every possible beneficial thing that can come out of using a hashtag.

Paul: Brilliant. How are you getting the word out? Obviously there's a podcast like this. But how are you doing the marketing to increase your awareness for the product?

Saul: We have the [Hashtag Academy](#) blog on our site. It's quite active. Right now it's five to six articles a week. And they're all – I do one of them. And then our other PR marketing managers are doing the others. So you have different voices with ideas on what people are doing, interesting things people are doing with hashtags, as well as covering pro tips. Things you can do with RiteTag.

And then we've got a pretty active social presence for RiteTag in Google Plus, Facebook, Medium, Instagram, Pinterest. So, we're bringing people

in this way. Another thing is our hashtag scans are embeddable, and they make for a great infographic. It's dynamic.

People like to do – you'll see every single day there are articles. I have alerts -- two types of alerts going -- and every single day people are writing articles "Best Hashtags for Travel Agents," "Best Hashtags for Marketing." And the problem I often have with them is, number-one, what's your source? Why are they best? Why is one better than another? "Because I found them in Mashable." Ah, ok, all right.

Another problem is they're static. You are providing a list, and if someone comes back two years later, they're looking at the same list. So, instead of that, if someone embeds one of our hashtag scans for free -- and free users can do this, as a matter of fact you don't even have to sign up for RiteTag. You just search hashtags for a topic, you'll find one of our hashtag scans. Take the embed code, you stick that in any blog or page that you've got access to HTML edit mode, and what you're providing is a dynamic changing list, which we're watching 24 hours a day as they change, then the associated hashtags change in that embed. So, something that you wrote today is going to still be current three years later.

Paul: Cool. Now that's really interesting. So, look, we're coming to the end of the interview. I think the product's really amazing. You know I've been playing with it.

Saul: Thank you.

Paul: And, I'm sure our listeners will get a lot out of it. Any parting words or advice for people who are looking to start up or people to scale. You know, what have you learned over the last two years in building this app?

Saul: You're going to meet a lot of people that you want to tell to go to hell. I like what Warren Buffet says on the topic, the billionaire-millionaire – the billionaire investor Warren Buffet, where not telling someone to go to hell today doesn't relieve you of the ability to tell them that in the future. So, if you're not a great developer or developer at all, or a designer, it'll be tough. It's possible. You need a great idea. Execute as far as you can, for example with the plan, with sketches and stuff like that. Be relentless. Make sure you have an idea that you love yourself because people will sense your love for it, your enthusiasm, your belief in the value in what you're going to put out will draw people. Because often, Paul, as you

were saying you have people who don't execute on their own ideas because maybe they don't believe in them enough to.

Paul: Brilliant. Saul, I really appreciate you coming on the show. I found that very insightful. And I think for anyone listening, you know, go to RiteTag and try it out. You can just try it out right now. You can install it as an extension in your browser, and you'll get it straightaway. You'll see how this can increase your traffic, increase your followers. And it's literally like Google suggests on the social networks. So, Saul, thanks again, and I really appreciate you coming on the show.

Saul: Thank you. It's a lot of fun

Paul: If you enjoyed the show you can get the show notes from [disruptware.com](http://disruptware.com) and if you are not a subscriber and you're listening to this in the iTunes store then please visit [disruptware.com](http://disruptware.com) and sign up. That's it for this episode. Look out for next week's show. I'm Paul Clifford and thanks for listening.

Recommended Resources:

1. RiteTag - [click here](#)
2. Quora - [click here](#)
3. Saul Fleischman's Twitter - [click here](#)
4. RiteTag Chrome Extension - [click here](#)
5. Book - The Lean Start Up by Eric Ries - [click here](#)
6. Hashtag Academy - [click here](#)

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