



Selling Disruption™ Show

With Mark S. A. Smith

*Disrupting the Disruptive: Use Simplicity to
Disrupt Your Market*

Tom Antion

Mark S A Smith: I met Tom Antion decades ago when he was funny but not yet rich. I've invited him to be on the show because he's been disrupting the world of online sales for decades. He's been my go-to source of solid systems for selling through the internet, always good stuff, never any hyping, never anything the least bit scammy or spammy. Tom, welcome to the Selling Disruption Show.

Tom Antion: Hey, Mark! So glad to be here with you on your fabulous new podcast.

Mark S A Smith: Thank you! The thing you've taught me, Tom, is how to be smart about things. You always claim you're not that smart, but I find that you're one of the smartest people that I know. You just keep it simple, and you just disrupt anything you touch.

Tom Antion: Keeping it simple is smart because, the more complicated things are, the more they cost, the more they break down. Talk about disruption, it disrupts your life when you have complicated things that break down. When you have simple things, they are also easy to fix.

Mark S A Smith: The idea is let's make the approach to sales as simple as we possibly can and not confuse people.

Tom Antion: Are you aware of my one sentence business plan that I've been using since I was probably, I don't know, 10 years old?

Mark S A Smith: Let's go for it. What is it, Tom?

Tom Antion: I create quality products that people actually want at a reasonable price, and I service the customer after the sale. That's what's made me a multi-millionaire. I have never varied from that in 50 years, so talk about simple. One sentence, right?

Mark S A Smith: Yeah, I absolutely love it, the quality products that people actually want at reasonable prices, and then you service them well.

Tom Antion: That's it, as simple as that. If every company on earth would live by that, they'd all be crazy profitable.

Mark S A Smith: I love it. How do you figure out what people actually want? That's probably one of the best ways to disrupt the marketplace is give people what they want.

Tom Antion: When you're involved like I am, very in-depth in my business, there's people at my level that won't talk to anybody, won't talk to you. They think they're the greatest, and then I laugh because I take all of the money because I'm willing to talk to people. One thing is be accessible and listen. The one thing that kills lots of businesses is arrogance. They think they know what their customers want and need, and they don't. They don't listen. The first thing I do is listen because, for years, I've had as many as 150,000 subscribers in a niche market, and they ask me stuff all the time. If you pay attention, I mean virtually every product I've ever

come out with was in response to people asking me stuff. That's what they want to know.

Then, there's a book out by another guy, Ryan Levesque, called "Ask." The first half you can forget because he's just kind of bragging about how he got where he's at. But the second half about how to ask people stuff was really important because I used to give incentives to like do surveys and stuff, but he said, "Well, you just get people that want the incentives to fill a survey out." He says, "Don't give them anything. Just find your most gung-ho about the topic, and they're most likely to buy and spend more and give you real answers." I changed that over the years. Bottom line is I just listened to people and give time what they tell me they need.

Mark S A Smith: What a novel idea, isn't it?

Tom Antion: Yeah!

Mark S A Smith: Although I got to tell you, Tom, I've been doing business with you as a customer and also as a friend for many, many years, and, every time I spend you an email, you always answer within an hour or two. It's like you're awake 24/7, you monster!

Tom Antion: It's more that I'm awake to my core business thing. I service people after the sale. I'm in business, and I don't treat it like the people that contact me like they're a pain in the neck. A lot of people will say, "Well, businesses would be great if it wasn't for customers," but I don't look at it that way. With all of the technology we have today, it's easy to stay connected and not actually disrupt everything I'm doing to answer a customer. I mean you got your cell phones. The reason they call them smartphones is because they make us feel so stupid because we don't know how to operate them, but, if you figure it out, it's a pretty handy device! I was hunting last week, sitting in the woods, and then answering questions off of a replay webinar that was replaying, making me money, while I'm out in the woods hunting.

Mark S A Smith: That is so good. We booked this show last week then when you were out hunting.

Tom Antion: Yeah, that's exactly right! I was in the woods when you asked me about this. A lot of people in business are still in the woods, metaphorically, because they haven't figured out take care of your darn customers! Act like a business! Your topic is disruption. The biggest disruption I made probably close to I'd about 17 years ago now, around the turn of the century really, and my customers

Mark S A Smith: It makes you sound really old, doesn't it?

Tom Antion: I know, it does. My competitors still haven't figured it out, and this amazes me, but, back in the early day- See, I started selling on the commercial internet when there was a commercial internet. Around 1994 is when the commercial world

wide web came along, and I started selling right then. I said, "This is great. I can reach out around the world from my desktop. I'm in! I'm going to figure this out." I scratched and clawed, figured it out, started making money, and then people started begging me to teach them. I had never planned on being Mr. Big Internet Guru, but, when you're excellent at something, people notice, and then a lot of times you can just sell what you've learned. I've been doing that for a long time.

Now, I'm a small business advocate, and I know a lot of the people listening to this will be in big businesses, but there's a lot of lessons that can be learned from little guys in the big corporate world. As much as I was worth in helping people, none of the people in small business could afford it because a lot of people were charging at the time \$50,000 and \$100,000 upfront to teach them all of this stuff. No little company can afford that, so I thought, "How can I keep serving my market but make it affordable but still make it worth it to get the money that I'm worth because of all of this sweat and blood that I've put in learning this stuff?"

Mark S A Smith: What you just described though is a formula for disruption, and that is ...

Tom Antion: Exactly!

Mark S A Smith: ... to take something people are selling for a very expensive price point and doing it for a much less expensive price point and really disrupting the market.

Tom Antion: That's what I did! I didn't technically sell it for a lesser price. Here's how it worked. At the time, people at my level that could do what I can do online were charging anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000 to help a small business learn how to do it upfront. I said, "Hm, the people can barely afford that, so these gurus that are trying to get this money are, first of all, they don't have any incentive to really help you after they get their money upfront ..."

Mark S A Smith: That's right.

Tom Antion: "... and people are catching onto that." What I did to disrupt the whole industry, basically, was I said, "Okay, I'm going to charge a reasonable entry fee to get to work with me, and then I'm going to tie my success to your success," which was a percentage of profit which I capped at \$50,000. In other words, I get paid a good darn amount of money for helping you, but you're not stuck with me forever. Well, people just loved this idea, and then they said, "Well, he's not going to disappear. He'll never get his money if he just leaves us hanging."

This turned the world upside down of mentoring, but greedy people that were in this field just never got it. They just went out looking for more suckers, and then they get people that are unhappy, that don't refer them, that chase them around for losses, and everything where, with me, people know I'm not going to disappear on them because I can't get my big money unless they're successful. It's been one of the longest-running mentor programs, most successful ever, on the internet.

That was my major, major disruption in this field was to tie yourself to others' success, and you'll be referred- I mean I've got people that can't even afford my entry fee referring me because they see other people being successful, and they're trying to save up to have an entry fee because they know that I'm going to stick with them and not desert them. It's very difficult to find that these days when people want the quick buck. But, if you go for the long haul and the success of everybody around you, that's odd nowadays. You don't see that much anymore, but it can be very, very effective.

Mark S A Smith: The idea: Let's reverse the risk and share the reward is a very powerful disruptive strategy, and you've done this over and over again as I've been watching you and participating with how you help people bring things to market. Recently, you are about to get the accreditation of the first internet marketing school on the planet.

Tom Antion: That's correct. Yeah, there was another disruption. As time went on, more and more people, a lot of young people in fact, were coming up with no ethics. They're great copywriters, they're promising people the moon, and I'm just getting surrounded and drowning in all of these unethical people trying to suck you in on a quick buck. I'm thinking, "How am I going to set myself apart? Now that you've brought this term to life, how am I going to disrupt this?" Because I don't want to be lumped in after my whole life of taking care of great people and then everybody's skeptical because they're all getting ripped off around me, and it hurts me.

I thought, "What can I do to set myself apart?" I started the first licensed independent internet marketing school in the country. Now, I say that carefully because there are some internet marketing schools tied to big universities, but I can assure you they don't update their curriculum sometimes daily, and they're not run by people that are multi-millionaires that actually did this, and they're mostly theoretical. That was my disruption too, because nobody else in this field is going to go through the scrutiny that I went through: background checks and check the money in the bank and put the bonds up in case students aren't happy. Nobody's going to go through that scrutiny that I went through, so that totally sets me apart from the bulk of all of these supposed gurus out there.

Mark S A Smith: You're disrupting by bringing what has been sort of an underground, loose, wild, wild west approach to creating wealth and sales into a regulated system and completely disrupting how we're approaching the world of marketing online. I love it. It's so, so powerful.

Tom Antion: Yeah, because it's just so easy to open up, write a sales letter, and claim a bunch of stuff, and then there's no way to phone, the companies don't really even exist. It's just somebody at Starbucks on a laptop laughing because they just grabbed some money off you. It was a disruptive mechanism. That was a costly disruptive mechanism, but the money, again, I don't get greedy. I work for the long haul, and, when I get my accreditation, that opens up enormous new channels for potential students from around the world, so to pay off is down the road.

People that get greedy, they're flashing their [pans 11:57], and they disappear. I've been in business technically 50 years, that's when I was 10 years old, but formally since 40 years since before I graduated from college I was in business. Of course, it wasn't the internet back then, but I'm always in it for the long haul where everybody wins, I don't have lawsuits- I don't have one lawsuit. I know this one guru, you would know her name, who has over 200 lawsuits at any one time.

Mark S A Smith: That's just crazy.

Tom Antion: Now, who wants to live like that? Some people do, I guess, but not me.

Mark S A Smith: Yeah, me neither. I'd prefer not to give my money to lawyers.

Tom Antion: Exactly, or to even feel like that. I did a lot of work on the sociopathic mind because my anti-scam worked, and I have a television show in development called, "Scam Brigade." They're pitching it in Hollywood. The people have no feelings. They know how to get the money out of you, but then that was their whole goal in the first place, not to help you, not to do anything but get the money out of you. I can't live like that.

Mark S A Smith: Well, that's one of the reasons why your stuff is so good and so clean and one of the reasons why I can be your friend.

Tom Antion: Yeah, exactly!

Mark S A Smith: I love it. Now, one of the things that you did early on to get success stories for your internet academy ...

Tom Antion: It's actually considered vocational. It's a vocational school licensed by the state of Virginia, so it's a vocation nowadays. There's a new term out there. Instead of white collar or blue collar, it's called new collar. The companies are desperate for people. They could care less if you've been to college or not. They want you to have the skills to compete on into the future electronically, so it's the new collar worker.

Mark S A Smith: Yes. To do that successfully, you have to understand how to market, and you have to understand how to sell. Of course ...

Tom Antion: Exactly.

Mark S A Smith: ... that's the business you and I are in.

Tom Antion: And to operate these online tools and use them to your advantage and see the connections and the social- I mean look how Trump won the election basically with Twitter. Using these things is the new way.

Mark S A Smith: No doubt about this. One of the things that you did is build credibility as you were putting together this online and physical school is you offered people to go through it and then refund them their tuition once they completed the course.

Tom Antion: Another total disruption. To get accredited, at the time, I'm sure they changed the rules recently, but I needed 100 graduates that were willing to talk to the accrediting agency about their experience with the school. Did they get what they wanted? Were the people accessible? All of the stuff to have a high quality school. When I was giving scholarships away to try to get those 100 people, as soon as people would run into a hard class, they would kind of fizzle, and then a week would go by, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks. Pretty soon, they dropped out. I thought, "I can't do this because they're also monitoring my graduation rate."

What I found was is, when people don't have any skin in the game, it's too easy to just blow it off. They didn't put any value on it. If it got tough, they just blew it off. I thought, "I got to turn this around, but I still need those 100 people pretty quick." At \$19,000 tuition, you don't just run across 100 people all overnight that will give you 19 grand for the tuition.

I thought, "Okay, I'm going to give this scholarship away, but you're going to put up a \$1,000 completion deposit. When you graduate, you get your \$1,000 back." It's the skin in the game. It's a free education, but, when times get tough, you'll stick to it because you don't want to lose your \$1,000. Well, that's just worked beautifully. Not one person has dropped out since then.

We got our 100 people, they're all almost all of the way through to graduate, they get their \$1,000 back, and my graduation percentage looks great, and they're all happy because we actually teach them and do a good job for them. This is the basis of the accreditation. I needed to get those people fast, but the whole thing, just in anything in life, if people don't have skin in the game, they just frequently don't value what they've got.

Mark S A Smith: Absolutely true. You got to have that emotional connection and some financial skin in the game to motivate people to take the next step.

Tom Antion: Yeah. That's why, even with my mentor program the way it's structured that I have a significant entry fee, because, if I opened this up just on a percentage basis to the world, they'd be lined up from here to the sun to get in, but most of them would be wasting my time because they're not serious. I do charge a substantial entry fee, but it's affordable by just about anybody that's either working or has a little bit of money in the bank so that it weeds out the people that are just tire kickers that'll never do anything.

Mark S A Smith: In the world of selling, if they're just kicking tires, we have to disrupt the whole sales process.

Tom Antion: They are filled with tire kickers, for sure.

Mark S A Smith: No, we can't. I love it, Tom. Your ideas are always so simple, so elegant in how you approach the process. I love it. What do you have to offer to our listener?

Tom Antion: The way to deal with me is either a mentor program, which you deal one-on-one with me and my entire subject matter crew around here, so we have video people, we have web people, social media people, that you have one-on-one access to us unlimited for a year plus a visit to my retreat center, which is an immersion weekend, which is another disruptive thing that we didn't talk about. 16 years ago, I started this place where people actually come in and are immersed in internet marketing and live in my house. I have this big estate in Virginia Beach, and that's part of the deal too. That's the mentor program, and they can check that out at greatinternetmarketingtraining.com, greatinternetmarketingtraining.com, and they can see a video about the place, and they can download a learning brochure and see all of the perks that they get for being in the program.

Then the other thing would be the school, which is Internet Marketing Training Center of Virginia, imtcva.org, imtcva.org, and that's a- If you work at it hard, really hard, you could graduate in six months, but, most people that want to take advantage of everything, it's six months to a year. They could be pretty much expert level in internet marketing for small business and know how to either work for themselves or they could consult with somebody else or work for a big company or all of the above. Those are the two major things I have for you.

Mark S A Smith: Awesome, that's terrific. You really do great stuff, Tom. It's such a delight to hang out with you. Always learning new things when I am with you. I sure appreciate you being part of the Selling Disruption Show.

Tom Antion: My pleasure, man. It's good to hear from you, and hope the family's well.

Mark S A Smith: That's a little insider joke because that was the first thing Tom asked me was, "How was the family?" when I first met him decades ago. You are hilarious, my friend. Always a delight. Thank you for disrupting the world.