



**AD Chat With DASH TWO Ep 2:
Randall Smith of Martin Outdoor**

<https://dashtwo.com/ad-chat/>

Kim Pham: Thank you so much for hopping on a call today. The purpose of today is really just to learn more about yourself and how you got to where you are today and the background on Martin. I'd love to start off with a quick intro of yourself and how you fit into the company.

Randall Smith: My name is Randall Smith, co-founder and CEO of the company. My background is that I'm a small town guy from Idaho who went to Harvard. Wound up starting an investment firm and concentrating in media color com starting back in the 80s and entered into the cable television business with a gentleman named Craig McCob out of Seattle. And then eventually my group formed one of the early communication tower companies. Towers of the infrastructure that are necessary for cellphones. I was the CEO of that company for a while which we sold to American Tower Corporation which is now the largest tower company in the world on the New York Stock Exchange. Back in the dark ages, media and telecom were one space and there were a number of people who were involved in cable who transitioned into outdoor advertising, other forms of media and elements of the telecom business. We then formed InSite Mediacom and Martin Outdoor Media. After we sold our tower company, we always liked the profile of the out-of-home advertising business. We entered that business around the year 2001 and that's a very quick thumbnail sketch.

Kim Pham: OK. What made you choose outdoor media specifically? Bus benches?

Randall Smith: We thought that the digital revolution would do exactly what it has done to the other traditional or so-called "old" media; which was to reduce audience and to seriously challenge the model whereas we thought then and still believe that the out-of-home business is one in which the audience is not being decreased. In other words, the value of our medium of actually increased because the difficulty of obtaining eyeballs on the other media has actually increased exponentially and I think that's the underlying reason why the business is growing at a rate that is simply the second fastest growing media behind the Internet. We have 650 billboards with about 1800 faces in the southeast but we also have 9000 faces in Broward and Dade County [in Florida] and in Los Angeles. Our goal with bus bench advertising is to professionalize and create a whole new sense of quality around a medium that was traditionally run by Mom and Pop who didn't really have the right quality or understanding of what was needed in the industry.

We find that to be a lot of fun to take a business that is gaining the same eyeballs as the more traditional and understood outdoor media and be able to offer that a price point that is much more attractive.

Kim Pham: In terms of targeting, can you talk about how granular you can get with these placements? Can you look up household income? The cars people have or ethnicity? How does the targeting work?

Randall Smith: I'm not sure about what kind of cars they own [laughs]

Kim Pham: [Laughs] I don't know, I just threw that out there.

Randall Smith: You can really get into a complete analysis. We get all the demographic data that is available to the out of home industry and of course the company we have in Los Angeles is

the first bus bench company to be audited by the TAB. So whatever data is available we're in there trying to produce and to give that data to the advertiser so that they can make the decision that's right for them. We can get very granular with that many units in Los Angeles. We can hit just about any ethnic group, any income/status you want to concentrate on.

Kim Pham: Great. You mentioned you had over 6000 benches in LA?

Randall Smith: Yep. And we have another 3000 or so in the Broward and Dade counties in Florida. It's a very interesting medium for us because about half of our clients are national companies, they are the biggest advertisers in the world; and about half are the local businesses. We think that the sophisticated people understand that they're getting the product that is getting the message across at a very attractive price point; and the local people have found a medium for branding themselves as well. It's one of the things that so many of our competitors concentrate in one market or another and with this product we can really handle both.

Kim Pham: Are there any either any neighborhoods that are harder to penetrate?

Randall Smith: There is really no area in L.A. that we don't cover. It just depends on what someone is trying to accomplish, what their goals are, what kind of product they have, and we are very happy to work with folks like you to answer those questions for people so they really get the coverage, the reach, frequency, whatever it is we're trying to accomplish. We think that our medium can help them do it

Kim Pham: What is the biggest change around the way people are advertising? Whether it be through creative or have you seen any trends?

Randall Smith: I think that the whole nature of creative has improved so greatly. Instead of the Internet being a challenge to our business it's created the ability to pick the finest artwork in the world, get it digitally printed and up for people to see. So that's a major sea change from the old age of outdoor when the quality varied so much. I think that people want to see quality in an advertisement and I think that the way we can deliver those kinds of advertisements today is certainly radically different than it used to be.

Kim Pham: I agree with that. As for creative best practices, are there any that you can share?

Randall Smith: People get carried away with trying to put too much information in an ad and I think that's the single largest mistake. You have to keep the message simple and very few words because otherwise the message doesn't get across. There can always be exceptions but rarely.

Kim Pham: It seems you know less is more sometimes when it comes to creative at least.

Randall Smith: Yeah. The way the human mind works is you don't have that much time to get somebody's attention and if there's too much information it simply gets avoided.

Kim Pham: There is just so much clutter.

Randall Smith: Exactly.

Kim Pham: Going into some of the brands that you work with, what types of industries do you think is a good match for bus benches?

Randall Smith: One of the things we're doing is expanding the categories that have traditionally been interested in benches. The business used to be dominated by exclusively local advertisers and now the various forms of entertainment companies are using it to a very large extent. Whether it be a streaming product, a television series or whether it's a movie, or almost anything you can think up has found it to be a very attractive medium. But we're also expanding it in the consumer products such as Coco-Cola or AT&T to their various forms of companies that are now using it that didn't before.

Kim Pham: I feel like every time I drive around LA I see tons of fashion now and movies.

Randall Smith: Fashion has always been an interesting area. Also, I should mention the recorded music area which of course has been in complete turmoil but they use our media. I think anywhere that you want to target for a certain audience, this is one of the ways that should be considered, it's just that simple.

Kim Pham: As an ad agency to get this question all the time: what is the most effective strategy when it comes to outdoor advertising? Would you say it's more about frequency? Having a huge volume of benches? Or having less but more prime locations?

Randall Smith: It really depends on what it is you're trying to accomplish. If you've got a store that you're trying to brand or you're trying to drive traffic to then you can be much more geographically focused. Here in the real estate business and you're working in a particular area, then that's what you want to do is focus on that geography but of course this is one of the benefits of outdoor because we can reach every single element of the audience that you're trying to reach. So, I think that's just one of the advantages of outdoor and when you have as many units as we do, you can really play it either way as it works for you.

Kim Pham: Yea. I have never had any issues getting coverage in a location in LA

Randall Smith: Yea, I think that LA has such a vast market that people do pay a lot of attention to who they are trying to reach. But whatever that audience is, we typically have a good solution for.

Kim Pham: I've read a lot about how outdoor companies are starting to do geofencing around display ads with the outdoor piece. How do you feel about that and do you think it's going to be huge in the future?

Randall Smith: We came out of the wireless world and have a pretty good understanding of that and we actually have an experiment going on now where we have 300 beacon units on benches in the city of Los Angeles that involve the ability for a customer who has an app on their phone. This is all voluntary for a customer that has an app where they download it on the phone. If they're given permission to send an advertisement to someone who passes within a short distance of one of our locations, telling them about a special a store might have for a product that they're interested in because they've already signed up for the app. And I think that you'll see some convergence occur between the wireless industry and this is an evolving area that no one can give you exactly what this business model will look like but I

think that beacons have become very successful in private venues. And the question is how will they fare in a more public place for our general advertising. I think there will be a place for it but the question is how big will it get and no one knows the answer to that yet. There are a lot of people who think that beacon technology will become ubiquitous and it will be one of those things with a few early adopters and then all the sudden it catches fire, so we will just have to see.

Kim Pham: Yeah that's amazing. As we wrap this up I did want to ask you, of all the ads you've ever seen what has been the most memorable?

Randall Smith: That's pretty easy for me because some of the advertisements of movies that are aimed at people younger than I am [laughs], some of the artwork is so great that it's really fun to see those. For example, a movie like Deadpool; that was one of those ads that made you glad to be alive because advertisements should be entertaining and should make you feel good in my view.

Kim Pham: For our listeners today, what would be the best way to contact you for a proposal?

Randall Smith: We're in Los Angeles, Martin Outdoor Media. And the number is (310)-559-1600. That's probably the quickest, most direct way to call in and folks can ask for one of our customer representatives and be happy to see what we can do to help. If there is a specific person, I would ask for Keith Thompson, who runs our sales efforts in Los Angeles and with national customers as well that would probably be the easiest.

Kim Pham: Awesome. And also wanted to note that their website is <http://martinoutdoormedia.com/>