

Three messages before we get started. First, copy this Facebook idea for your business today. See how they make it super easy for their users to import their contact from AOL, Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.? Well, you can add that functionality to your site today using CloudSponge. By using CloudSponge, your users can easily import their address books into your service and invite their contacts to use your site, and if you use the discount code "Mixergy," you will get a couple of months free. CloudSponge.com.

Next, if your friends want to set up a store online, would you please tell them I said Shopify is the easiest way to set up a full featured store? Then you can show them who created a Shopify store. Companies like Tesla Motors, Pixar, Amnesty International, Foo Fighters, and others. Shopify stores look great and generate sales. Shopify.com.

Finally, who is the lawyer that tech entrepreneurs trust? Scott Edward Walker of Walker Corporate Law. Neil Patel, founder of KISSmetrics said, "Scott is a great lawyer. He is affordable, responds fast, does not charge you for five minute phone calls, and always gives great advice. WalkerCorporateLaw.com.

Here's your program.

Andrew: Hi, everyone. My name is Andrew Warner. I am the founder of Mixergy.com, home of the ambitious upstart. Imagine having a fire-hose of customers aimed right at your company, sending you business. That is what happened to Gary Brooks, today's guest and founder of CloudAccess.net.

CloudAccess.net provides hosting for websites that run on Joomla!, the content management system which enables you to build websites and online applications. I invited him here to find out how he bootstrapped his company, and how he is handling all of these customers that are coming to his site. Gary, welcome to Mixergy. Thanks for doing the interview.

Gary: Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Andrew: How many new customers are coming to your site every day?

Gary: We have to provision on our clusters about a thousand new Joomla! sites a day.

Andrew: A thousand Joomla! sites a day are created. How did this happen? How are you getting 1,000 new Joomla! sites running on your servers every day?

Gary: I am part of this wonderful community called Joomla!, and the community, they built this awesome content management system. It is an open source project. The community had a demo site for the organization. They had people coming into the original demo site. They were coming into the site and they were messing it up. Then the site would recycle itself after 30 minutes. I had this really cool idea, where I visited some events where the Joomla! people get together. They meet each other and talk and share and exchange. It happened to be a developer conference and some Joomla! days. I met some of the open source matters leaders. I threw them an idea. I said, "How about we come up with this idea

where we give people their own instances of the Joomla! site?" They said, "Wow, great idea, Gary Brooks." I said, "Thanks, I appreciate it. How can we get the deal done?" They said, "Write a proposal and we'll look at it." So I wrote the proposal, and they said, "Well, Gary, it is a great idea, but since we are an open source community, we can't just give it you." I'm like, "Oh goodness."

They had to release an RFP to the community. Some of the companies that applied for the RFP are SiteGround and a company called GoDaddy, which we are probably all aware of. My heart was pounding for the 30-day period that they actually released the RFP out to the community to bid on the contract. Luckily, at the end of the day, Joomla!.org selected CloudAccess.net and magically, you can see if you go to Joomla!.org and you click on demo, you will see a landing page. You will see that CloudAccess.net is a logo there, and we provision all the Joomla! instances for the community.

Andrew: That is incredible. If I, in the past, wanted to play around with Joomla!, I heard that a friend has a website running on Joomla!, and I wanted to try it out for myself and see what this Joomla! is in the past, I had to go and play with the same site that other people are playing with, at the same time. I could not really see what it would look like with my content. I had to see what it looked like with my content and a bunch of other people's content. You said, "No. Andrew should be able to have his own version of Joomla!. He should be able to play with it. He should be able to do whatever he wants, and then if he wants to keep it, he could pay and keep it going. If he doesn't, no harm, no foul, no credit card given up. He just gets to move on with his life."

Gary: That's right and a great service for the community because it helps Joomla! grow. That instantaneous ability to get your own instance and play for 30 days, it is amazing for some people. Some people, non-profits use it for 30 days and that's all they need it for. It is perfect for them. I also share-back money with the organization. When people do pay, I give back money to the non-profit group.

Andrew: I would imagine that most people who go through that process would say I am playing with it, and now 30 days is over, I have to dump it and move on. But when you and I talked before the interview, you seemed to say that no, a lot of people are holding on to it. Can you give me a sense of how many are holding on to their sites after the 30 days?

Gary: We provision about 22,000 sites, and I can tell you that we have over 2% of the people that are sticking with us.

Andrew: Over 2% of the people who create a site, end up staying and becoming full-time customers and full-time Joomla! users.

Gary: Yeah. Now that is just of the 22,000 that sign up per month coming into us. We have our own streams of people signing up also. People that find us organically through the search engines or the word of mouth is huge right now. We are the first people to actually pick up the phone and talk Joomla!. We actually, hello, Joomla! , we talk Joomla!. That is something new to the community that I don't think any company is doing right now.

Andrew: No. I don't think so either. You and I agreed before the interview that it didn't make sense for you to reveal revenue right now. Are you profitable?

Gary: No.

Andrew: You're not. Were you profitable before this?

Gary: Yes. Very much so.

Andrew: Okay. So this is new growth. You have to staff up and grow the business in order to absorb it. This has not been going on for months, right? It is just since the beginning of the year?

Gary: Yes. We have had the contract. When you spoke about the fire hose, we come back to that. That is what it is. I was a miniature company, working out of my basement. All of a sudden, I win this awesome contract with the Joomla! organization, and now it is time to figure out how to do everything. The technology, the servers, the data center, DNS servers, the humans, the offices, the people, I could speak forever about that whole thing. But, yeah, it was a lot and it is a lot of money all at once. It is a chunk of money to run us every month. It's a big chunk of money.

It had to be instant. For a little company that really was just nothing but one server as a hosting company, to go to the point where we need big clusters and our own data center, in eight months period of time, I had to build this thing. Including in the contract, they had me build cPpanel. I don't know if you know, in the hosting industry, cPpanel is a huge thing. With CloudAccess, we had to physically in those eight months, we had to remake cPpanel and connect it back to the stack and screw it into our Joomla! site.

So when you get a Joomla! instance from CloudAccess, you truly get an open source system. There is no cPpanel or anything in it. The control panel is inside of the system. All that, we had all kinds of stuff to do. It was just a crazy amount of effort.

Andrew: Wow. From what I hear, it could not have happened to a nicer guy. Can we talk a little bit about your background? We are going to get into the business and how you built this company up. I'm also curious about your previous company, bootstrap, sold, profitable, all the good stuff. Your background before this, before you got into business, could talk a little bit about that?

Gary: Like down to my childhood or what?

Andrew: Yeah, if you don't mind? I'm not getting into specifics with my question because I want to give you room to say what you feel comfortable talking about.

Gary: I am fortunate in lots of ways. One of the things that happened in my life when I was a child is I'm adopted. I was born in Texas. A nice family up here in Michigan, called the Brooks family,

decided to take on three children and I am lucky for that. They brought me up here to Michigan and they taught me a lot of cool things -- a lot of things with participation, and big in teams, whether I was on basketball team, cross country team, or I was in Odyssey of the Mind which they changed the name of that now. I was on teams. That happened and other things happened in my life. I did not end up going to college. When I left high school, I started an Internet service provider. I was terminating dial-up customers when I was 19 years old.

I was putting together PCMCIA adapters to wireless connections and running . . .

Andrew: No, let's slow it down. I want to understand everything very slowly.

Gary: Very slowly?

Andrew: Very slowly and lots of details, especially how you built your company. But before we get into that, how old were you when you were adopted?

Gary: There was a period of time where I was just with the family. I think the actual adoption was when I was 13 years of age.

Andrew: Really? How old were you when you got with the family?

Gary: I was about eight years old when they hauled me up from Texas and put me in a Michigan family.

Andrew: What do you know about your family before them, before the Brooks?

Gary: I don't know who my dad is to be honest with you. The guy is a Mexican and he is somewhere in Mexico. My mother did some things that made her end up in some not-so-good places. She ended up in prison and that's the fact. I had two little sisters too that were involved in this dilemma, and they had to take us away from that situation.

Andrew: They split you up?

Gary: They split us up for a period of time. During the time when the state of Texas decides to take you away from your family, they put you in the safest scenario. They split me and my sisters up for a while, but again, luckily the Brooks family brought us together . . .

Andrew: The Brooks family adopted all three of you?

Gary: Yes. They brought all three of us in.

Andrew: Wow. Is it hard to get adopted at eight and to keep the family intact like that?

Gary: This guy, and I'll be honest with you, this guy worked at a factory, and he worked in

front of a machine for 25 years and they had a trailer. That's all they had. They put us all in a trailer, seven kids. They had kids too, already.

Andrew: Wow.

Gary: Nancy and Richard. They put us in a trailer and their goal to add on to the house, he worked his butt off to make sure that we were treated well and that we got a good education.

Andrew: That's inspiring. What made them want to adopt more kids, or adopt kids when they had kids already?

Gary: MaryAnn and Katie, who are my little sisters, they have a different father than I do. Their father is the brother of Richard. Strangely enough, my family didn't have anyone to take three kids.

Andrew: Wow.

Gary: It just wasn't that scenario. This family was the only one that stepped up to the plate.

Andrew: Did I understand right, that is was the Brooks family, your adopted father, do you consider him your adopted father?

Gary: Yes. I consider him my father actually.

Andrew: Your father. Okay. Your father is the one who introduced you to computers?

Gary: Yeah.

Andrew: How?

Gary: Not a lot of money, trip down the road picked up a 386 computer, one of the AMD processors. Brought it home and it was in pieces. We screwed it together. We installed DOS and Window 3.1. He taught me everything. Just from that standpoint, that was when I fell in love with computers.

Andrew: How did he know it well enough to teach you?

Gary: During the time that he adopted us, he knew he needed to make more money. He started to take classes online to teach himself how to program. He taught himself how to program on Basic first, and then he went on . . . he worked at East Jordan Iron Works. If you see the Ninja Turtles caps on the ground, I forget what you call them. He's the one that helped engineer some of those things. At the end of his education, he did the CNC programming for those things . . .

Andrew: Manholes.

Gary: The manholes, so they could cut them up and get them out to the world. That's where he ended up getting, from being on a machine, a machine-man, to teaching himself. I watched this whole process. I watched him train himself how to be an engineer. It is pretty inspiring for me.

Andrew: Wow. Wow. What an inspiring . . . when I hear that, it makes feel there is so much more that I could do, so much more that I could be. I'm in awe. All right. He introduces you to computers, he teaches you. You decide at some point, as you said, to start an Internet service provider, to get people connected to the Internet. What got you to decide that you were going to start this business?

Gary: Job shadow at school. They sent me to Boyne City, Michigan to set up at a ISP that was pre-setup. When I got in there, I fell in love with seeing the lines come in and how they connected. They had Lucent Technology back then. That's what it was. It was 56k connections, 28 connections and modems that you would wire to your computer, all lined up. I got excited by it and I started to learn about the ISP business. Then I got interested in telco stuff, and it all kind of fell together in my brain.

Andrew: It was called job shadowing? It was a structured program?

Gary: Yes. It was part of graduating in East Jordan High School. You had to do a job shadow with some career that you wanted to be involved in.

Andrew: Was it 2001?

Gary: Eek. You're going to ask me to remember years. I'm not so good with years. I'm the worst at years. It was my senior year. It was 17 going on 18, something like that.

Andrew: What is the first thing that you do to start this business up?

Gary: An ISP?

Andrew: Yes. This company is Northern Michigan Online that you launched. If I have my information right, January 2001, you launch it. June 2008 was when you left the company after the sale.

Gary: A lot of studying. Back then it wasn't perfected technology, that is when 28.8 modems were kicking.

Andrew: Really? I thought by 2001 a lot people were already in broadband. No?

Gary: No. Not where we're at. Not in northern Michigan.

Andrew: I see.

Gary: Not in Cheboygan, Michigan. That's what I started out with, 28.8 modems. Actually, at that point, I got in contact with U.S. Robotics, which at that time was building chassis for dial-up internet connections. I got the equipment. I got some servers and luckily, the ISP that I had got my training at, one of the guys there helped me a little bit. I found some other people that were interested in the business, and all of a sudden, I was up and cooking. Ordering lines from Ameritech. That's where I was buying circuits from, and they connected us up and I was terminated in 28.8 connections.

Andrew: How are you getting customers?

Gary: I was big into partnerships. I build my business on partnerships. What I feel is most important is partnerships, and if you can leverage a partnership and not actually have to get capital or cash-in-hand that you have, you take a partnership and you can leverage that rather. I partnered with a newspaper. They needed an Internet connection, a broadband Internet connection, they didn't have. I sent them over a wireless connection over from my building to them, and I made a deal where they would advertise every day for me in the newspaper. I started gaining 100 customers a month from that relationship.

Andrew: Just by letting the local newspaper tap into your wireless router?

Gary: Yes. Yes. Just by building a partnership.

Andrew: Really? How did you find them, how did you know that they needed this?

Gary: I'm that type of person actually. I don't wait for opportunity at come me. I actually go find opportunity. I had thoughts, I knew people needed broadband. I knew I had the connection. I paid a whole bunch of money for that connection at that time. A point-to-point connection at that time was very expensive. Those are T-1 days, when 1.544 megabits was popular. [laughs] I had that connection and I was in Cheboygan Michigan and I knew other people didn't have it. I knew I had a leverage point. I used that leverage point, and I exploited it with the local newspaper. It was awesome.

Andrew: You just called them up and said, "Do you need broadband internet? You don't even have to pay me. I'll set you up with broadband. Just give me a little mention in your newspaper."

Gary: Yes. Actually, a big mention, but yes.

Andrew: A big mention. How big of a mention did you get?

Gary: Yes. Every day I was getting an ad like this big, a column. I had it every day. They were so excited for me to just come in and hook it up. I didn't call them. I go look at people. These days people really like you to stand in front of their face and look at them and smile, and say I'm a real human. I'm here and I can do something to help you. I went in there and the guy liked me. I hooked up their stuff, and then I went around and hooked up their Apple computers up. All the employees were so excited. I never even had a bump in the road. They always advertised me. I could do what I want.

Sometimes, I got full pages, just because.

Andrew: Wow. This is WiFi, this is the way I might give my neighbor access to my internet connection, right?

Gary: Yes.

Andrew: Here's the thing. Where do you even come up with these ideas? The problem that I have is, I'm going to be listening to this and my audience is going to be listening to this and saying, "You know what? This guy Gary is smart to hook up with Joomla!. He is smart to hook up with the newspaper industry. What do I do to come up with ideas like that?" I'll ask you, where do you come up with your ideas? How do you come up with these kinds of partnership ideas?

Gary: You have to see the hole in the market. You have to see into the future. You can kind of copy an idea or you can take a concept and say, "How can I improve this idea?" That's what I always think. Something can always be made better. I don't always try to reinvent the wheel. In the ISP business, I didn't reinvent the wheel. I just wanted to figure out how I could do it better than anyone else and how I could provide better support.

It is always about better support. If you can provide better support than the next person and you have the same product, you have to shine it pretty. There has to be a pretty shine to it. It's like the Walmart shelf. You can have the same product on the shelf, but one looks prettier than the other. Probably the same price, you are probably going to grab the prettier one just because. Again, don't reinvent the wheel and focus on something that you can achieve, a goal that you feel is in your capacity.

Andrew: That still does not help me understand how you come up with ideas for partnership. Most people would think the newspaper is a big, maybe today they would think it is a big dinosaur. Back then they would think it is a big company, they don't need me. Advertising in it must be very expensive. They could probably afford to buy broadband or anything they want. Is there a way that these ideas come to you, or do you just shoot lots of ideas? Are you the kind of person who maybe called the newspaper up, tried this idea, called the barber up with another idea, called the local TV station. Were you just pitching ideas until one worked?

Gary: 100%. You're right, with the ISP business, it didn't start just by that. I had the local radio station partnered with me too. I was crawling up towers and hanging radio feed at the top of the towers. The same thing . . .

Andrew: I see. You are just coming up with ideas for people. You say, "I have this broadband. Who can use it? You're looking around. Like a hungry man sees everyone looks like a steak him, you're looking around saying, "Everyone is a potential partner. Who can I give this to in order to get some customers from them?" You pitched the radio station, they sent you people. You pitched the newspaper. Can you tell me about who you pitched who said, "No, come on kid, what are you doing?"

Gary: Who did? At that time, I didn't get very many no's, to be honest with you.

Andrew: Really. Because broadband was just so good?

Gary: Broadband was so good. It was.

Andrew: I see. When you are on dial-up, it's true, getting broadband is heaven.

Gary: It is heaven. Back then especially. I even did it to the city. In Cheboygan, they didn't have broadband either. I seriously was disseminating little PCMCA adapters so I could get partnerships. Little adapters, so I could build a partnership with a company. I did research. I traveled down to see people, to see what they were doing. I took those ideas and I just leveraged them in my city and people loved it.

Andrew: Your love and interest in technology came from shadowing other people who were passionate about it, from having your dad introduce you to it and then foster it. Where did this partnership passion and ideas come from?

Gary: That is the way I think actually.

Andrew: That is just who you are. You are always the person trying to deal.

Gary: Yes.

Andrew: Were you doing it even in high school, elementary school? Can you give me an example of how you did that?

Gary: Let's see here. Me and my friend Charlie got in trouble on the bus for monopolizing kids' lunch money. We would make bracelets. My grandma taught me how to make crochet bracelets. I would crochet a bracelet and we had pencil and stickers. I would bring them in a pile on the bus, and the kids would be like, "I've got to have a pencil. I've got to have a sticker. Or I have to get your crochet bracelet. It looks so cool, it's pink." I'd be like, okay, it's your lunch money. Charlie and I saved up a lot of money, and we had it in a bag. The school ended up taking it from us. We got in trouble.

Andrew: Schools do not like commerce. I don't know why.

Gary: Our school enterprise was dead after that.

Andrew: Even at Northern Michigan Online, you managed to get yourself, maybe not a fire hose as big as the one you have with Joomla!, but a lot of garden hoses sending you new customers. How big did the business get?

Gary: We had 4,000 dial-up customers, and we bought 2 companies. It was fairly sizable for

Northern Michigan.

Andrew: 4,000 dial-up and then how many broadband customers?

Gary: I bet we had over 100. I don't remember the specific numbers. It was a handful, maybe more than that. I don't remember. You charge more for the broadband connections. Back then, you know how much a T-1 cost? It was really expensive to pay for the Internet connection, for one megabit connection plus the . . . back then AT&T charged you mileage for your circuit and you had to get it from somewhere. It was a lot of money.

Andrew: Today, I've got that speed on my iPhone. It seems to me that broadband is what you used to get partnerships that brought you dial-up customers. Dial-up was the biggest piece of your business?

Gary: Yes. Dial-up is where we made the money.

Andrew: Broadband is what you used as the hook to get the partnerships to bring in the revenue.

Gary: Yes.

Andrew: It has been a few years. Can you talk about what the revenue was back then?

Gary: We were over a million dollars a year.

Andrew: Over a million dollars a year in Northern Michigan Online, a company you started at 19 years old. A guy who grew up in a mobile home, in a trailer park?

Gary: Not a trailer park? But it was a trailer.

Andrew: In a trailer. It didn't even have the park.

Gary: No park.

Andrew: No park.

Gary: It was on a farm. It was farmland.

Andrew: I see.

Gary: Grandpa ran red poll cattle next door, and we were farmers.

Andrew: You know what? I grew up in New York City. This seems like a fun life for me. But maybe after a week, I might say I've got to get back and live in an office like yours. So, you get it to

that. How does it feel when you bring in your first million dollars?

Gary: Back then? You know what, I wasn't that excited about it. I needed more and that's all I see is more actually. I don't feel like I am ever finished. Jim Collins talks about these people. Level five leaders, and he talks about they never think they are finished. I still don't think I am finished. I am never finished. That is entrepreneurship.

Andrew: Why, why not?

Gary: I don't know. I have things I want to do in my life, 100% honest truth. I have people I need to help. I want to help myself. There are selfish reasons. Everyone has a selfish reason. You can't deny that. I want my mom, I want my sisters, I want anyone that ever helped me, I want to someday say, "Wow, here it is. Go relax or something." All my team members on my team at CloudAccess, where I am at now, I have a passion to make them rich. I have a passion to grow everything around me, and I say always, "It's no fun to get rich alone." It's not.

Andrew: You said also to prove something. To prove what?

Gary: I like to compete. I was in sports. I think in this world that I'm in now, I am 31 years old and there is a big market out there right now for what I'm doing. I want to be the best in it.

Andrew: I see. When you first brought in money with Northern Michigan Online, what did your family, what did the Brooks say about it? What did your sisters say about it? How are they impacted by this?

Gary: My mom was probably the person who was most proud of me. She would always just tell me, "Wow, Gary, I can't believe you even know this stuff. Where did you get it from?" I'm like, "I don't know. I just know it. I just get it in my brain." How do figure you are going to put together an ISP? Where do figure out where to get the pieces and parts? I just had that inspiration to not give up and find those pieces and parts and put them together and make it happen. That's it. My family has always been real supportive. They always cheer me on. That is just the way they are, and I'm sure they know if I ever make it really big, I would be glad to pay a bill or two.

Andrew: Were you able to do anything nice for them?

Gary: Yes. I bought my mom stuff. I bought my mom a hot tub and things that she needed, that she wanted, chunks of money. I even set her up a business. We had other kinds of businesses. They were cash stores, Payday Advance stores. We did one of those.

Andrew: You did a Payday Advance store?

Gary: Yes.

Andrew: I would love to find out how those are set up from nothing by a guy who doesn't have any experience in that business. Maybe that's a distraction. She was running it for how long?

Gary: A year. They all got sold to a different company. Those got sold, too.

Andrew: Where is she living now?

Gary: East Jordan, Michigan.

Andrew: Different kind of place?

Gary: No, just a bigger place.

Andrew: Still a trailer with no park?

Gary: No trailer.

Andrew: No trailer. No park.

Gary: Nice home. Decent home, everything is kosher for her. She has her own business. She owns a bakery.

Andrew: A bakery. Your dad?

Gary: He owns a business, too. He doesn't work anymore. He owns a lawn care business in Atlanta, Michigan.

Andrew: Are they still together?

Gary: No, they are separated now.

Andrew: Why did you decide to sell the business?

Gary: NMO?

Andrew: Yes. Northern Michigan Online.

Gary: Northern Michigan Online. I was tired. I got tired of it actually. There was a point where I only wanted to do certain things and I just wanted to escape it. I basically said, "I don't want it anymore." I kind of left and I went to Florida. I went and relaxed for a year. That's what I did.

Andrew: What did you do when you relaxed a year? I did that too. I took more than a year for the same reason. What did you do?

Gary: Let's see here. To be honest with you, I did not do much. Probably the most important thing I did, I partied a lot. I hung out. I just hung out with people. But probably the most important thing is I got my Series Three and I learned how to trade commodities.

Andrew: Get out!

Gary: Yes, no joke. I went to one of those boiler plate places, where they have the brokers chilling in the back room and they are training all the newbies how to sell pork bellies. I learned all that, and I ended up sitting in the room where they boiler plate people for a while. I figured out that is not me. I left and that was the end of that. I ended up coming back to Michigan.

Andrew: Did you lose money in the whole thing?

Gary: I spent it all.

Andrew: You spent it all on this, on that and partying.

Gary: Yes. Hanging out. I wouldn't call it partying, because I'm not like crazy.

Andrew: Really? For me, I wanted to go and explore that part of my life. I never partied in high school and college. I was always the awkward guy that didn't know how to party, so I would stay home and read. I went out and I discovered how to party. I had little bit of money, I went out. Was it the same reason for you, that you look back and you said, "I didn't get to do this. I was too busy in these clubs my parents were setting me up in and were fun at the time but I didn't get to go to the real clubs."

Gary: I did actually. I haven't told many people that to be honest with you. I slept in that business. When I started that business, the NMO business, I slept on the floor by myself, in the back room for a long time, a year almost. Just to build it. I was not going to give up. I was going to build this thing and I built it. It got wearing. It got to wear on you, and I wanted to just escape. Some of my other friends, they all went to college and did other thing and they got to explore themselves. I was stuck behind this business, managing people and at that time, I really did not know how to manage people. I was not very good at it.

Andrew: I was just talking to Neil Strauss, the author of "The Game," and most people think partying and hanging out and dating is easy. I guess it is for some people, but it is work for others. For him, he spent a couple years of his life learning how to just meet girls. When you got into it, was it hard to figure out like how do you not set up a business plan for what you are about to do? How do you just go out and just enjoy life? Was that a challenge?

Gary: I don't know. I just woke up every day and I hung out by the pool. At night, I went and drank and met girls. I'm pretty good at meeting girls to be honest with you.

Andrew: You feel comfortable going over and starting a conversation?

Gary: Oh, yes, yes.

Andrew: Easier than starting a conversation with a newspaper about why they need to use your broadband?

Gary: Same.

Andrew: Same. It's just another conversation. That's impressive.

Gary: Yes, just another conversation.

Andrew: I made a mental note to come back and ask you about managing people, you said was hard? What was the challenge?

Gary: Being young and having the people around me be older and building systematic approaches. There was a failure there I believe in how to structure the employees, what they did and how much . . . I'm much better now. I feel confidence in working with other individuals as a team. I didn't leverage team as much as I should have like what a team is and how we work together and . . .

Andrew: Can you give me an example of one thing you did without a team where you really should have included other people?

Gary: With that system there, I made a lot of decisions by myself. I did not take the time to include other people. Even just take the time to brainstorm or make alternate choices or look at other options available to me. That's the failure. Sometimes you get in leadership and you're like, "I'm going to make this decision and I'm going to make it this way." Those are some of the things I did at that time. I thought a leader was making decisions. But I've learned now, leadership is more leading by example. Sometimes I wasn't a good example to my fellow team members.

Andrew: Do you have an example of when you were not setting a good example?

Gary: You're digging deep.

Andrew: So far it's paid off. It's worth it.

Gary: I'm trying to think of a good quality example. I don't know if this is a good case example. I didn't replicate people in my company. I say you do this and just let them do it and think that it is okay for them to handle it. I would just think it was handled. I would not go back and double check it or cross-check it, things like that. That is a huge failure in any business, if you are not cross-checking yourself or you're not replicating. In my new business, I call it N plus one human. With humans, I do N plus one, you have to train two people at least and add a third for the plus one for replication purposes.

So you can't ever get in a bind if someone is going to leave the company or hurt you.

Andrew: After starting with nothing, going to great heights, what was it like to go back to nothing afterwards?

Gary: Actually, me, I have a drive inside of me. I have to get back to the top again. And if I'm not there, I have to keep trying. That's it. It is genetically encoded.

Andrew: I see. You start off 2006 and say, "I'm just going to go do another one. Do another company, I'll get right back where I was. No doubt, my competitive spirit, my knowledge, my willingness to work is going to get me right back up to the top."

Gary: Yes, sir.

Andrew: What was the original idea for the business?

Gary: You're talking years again. I don't remember years or days of the week. I'm not that type of person. Are you walking into how I built the Cloud?

Andrew: Exactly. The CloudAccess. What was the original inspiration that created CloudAccess.net?

Gary: It was MichiganMedia.net.

Andrew: What's that? Oh, it was MichiganMedia.net at the time.

Gary: Yes. It's funny. I seriously started out sitting at table, saying I was at the bottom. I was leaving the financial companies. We had built online payday loan things and I wanted to get away from it. I was over it. I started MichiganMedia.net. I loved local. I loved Google Local. I loved everything about local. That's what that company was about, strangely enough. I knew Joomla!, and I knew Google Local. So I was building an infrastructure for launching a Joomla! website, a local business website and then connecting it to Google Local.

Andrew: I see. The local barber who wanted to get online and also be found on Google, you give him the one-stop solution for it, website, Google, done and done.

Gary: Done.

Andrew: Got you. All Michigan, because you loved that area.

Gary: All Michigan. I was in Michigan and it was MichiganMmedia.net. It was a goofy looking website, and I didn't really know what I was doing. That is when I found my first Polish guy.

Andrew: First Polish guy?

Gary: Yes. My first Polish team member. I had found a . . .

Andrew: In Poland.

Gary: In Poland. I had a job. I needed to complete the job. I ended up at a Joomla! conference and meeting a whole bunch of cool people in the Joomla! world. I fell in love with it and I didn't want to go away from it. Let me back up a little bit. The guy's name is Erfin, and he's from India. He was a person I found on getacoder.com. He was the person that helped me. He sent me the link to Joomla!.

Andrew: Why Joomla! and not WordPress? WordPress is more popular. WordPress has all these plug-ins. It also has a great community. You love Joomla!. You loved since the beginning essentially. Why? What am I not seeing about Joomla! that you saw?

Gary: It is the community. It's the people.

Andrew: The community. What was it about the people?

Gary: The people there are friendly. They will take care of you. I know situations where we've bought laptops for each other, or just in general pat each other on the back. I've had situation where people offered me money to be in a Joomla! business or I've done the same . . .

Andrew: Really?

Gary: Yes. Yes. People in our community, it's like a family and we actually don't break up.

Andrew: That is something that I did not know about Joomla!. I didn't understand that the community was that type, which is also great for me, because it means that they are going to tweet this around, they might blog it and so on, help you and help me along the way. For people in my audience who know WordPress but don't know Joomla!, can you maybe explain the difference and why some people prefer Joomla! over WordPress?

Gary: There are a lot of things. Not talking bad about WordPress, but WordPress is WordPress. Joomla!, to me, is an application framework. There is like a CMS screwed on top of this application framework, but the cool thing is that underneath you can build applications. You can imagine something and you can build it.

Andrew: Like what? What's an example.

Gary: An example? Want a big example?

Andrew: How about one big one and one that's more relatable. A smaller and a bigger.

Gary: Sure. The first contract that I won, relates back to me. It was HN Publishing. It was my first big contract. HN Publishing is connected to a larger entity, a publishing company, one of the biggest in the world. They came to me and they needed help to convert their 1.0 Joomla! site to a 1.5 site. Their Joomla! site intercepts information from their shipping and helps approve the books for people. The people in HN Publishing do a design, and they publish it out to the Internet through their Joomla! site display out there. The author approves it or disapproves it. Then it goes back down. It's kind of a workflow process for the business.

Andrew: I see.

Gary: That was something we were able to participate in and build for that organization and that's where I started to fall in love with it because that's the type of thing you can do with Joomla!.

Andrew: How about a smaller application, maybe like if I were running a local church or a publishing company? By publishing company, I mean like a one-man publishing company. How would Joomla! impact my life?

Gary: This is the really cool part of our company. A \$6 million piece of software over here that a community supports. You find a template over here. You put the template on top of the Joomla! site and you put it up on the Web. Then you articulate your data inside of it or whatever you want. We have this really cool extensions directory. It's like your iPhone, it's the Apps Store, and we have that directory. It's called Extensions.Joomla!.org. You go there and you can shop all these extensions and they install inside your Joomla! site. They are zip files. You take a zip file and put it inside your Joomla! site and it unfolds and it does something. They're called extensions, but there's ways to unfold that. Like a calendar, if you just need a calendar on your Joomla! website, you go buy the extension or you get a free one. Either way, we have commercial and non-commercial. You install it on the site and all of sudden you can do all this cool stuff and it's unfolding and it's yours. It's GPL, it's open source.

Andrew: Okay. I know I should probably be one of these people who's maniacal about one or the other WordPress or Joomla!, but I'm just so curious and I don't have the patience to fight for one and not the other instead of opening myself up and listening to both. I get your passion for Joomla!. How do you transition from wanting to helping local businesses get online to suddenly focusing on Joomla! and helping people create Joomla! websites?

Gary: It is the tool I picked.

Andrew: Once you picked that tool for the local businesses, you became known for that tool more than for the customers that you service, and others were starting to come to you and say, "Hey, you know Joomla!. Can you help me out?"

Gary: It wasn't really like that actually. I actually went out and got them. In my community,

people didn't know about Joomla!. When things started to spark is actually when I created stuff for the community. That's when it started to spark. That's where the money's at.

Andrew: Like what? What do you mean, what did you create for the community?

Gary: We started out with a couple of extensions. When I talked to about meeting the Polish developers, we made a couple of extensions for the community, like a Salesforce extension, something that integrated Joomla! and Salesforce together. We could sync data back and forth. I used that software that I made as link bait. People would get the software and they would see a little ad at the bottom that said "need custom development." They would click on it and I would have a little marketing page where they would come.

Andrew: Interesting. That's the spark and that started bringing you customers.

Gary: From the world, not so much from my community. That is when I figured out, it's not about my community. I love my community, but it's this whole worldwide market that's open and it was there in front of me.

Andrew: What else did you do to bring in new customers?

Gary: Back then, it was just mostly that -- building software for the community. The extension directory is that powerful. In our community, it's really powerful. We get lots and lots of hits from that thing. If you build something and you stick it in there and it's good, people are going to come from that, like the App Store, come to your site and then you just market yourself. I, personally, always make sure that my telephone number is on my site. Even as an Internet company, I made sure that telephone number was on there, and I would pick up the phone and talk human rather than trying to be some no-name base company.

Andrew: What would happen if I take out my iPhone right now and called the phone number that is on Demo.Joomla!.org?

Gary: Which one? Are you going to dial sales or . . .

Andrew: I see 231 call number.

Gary: 231-844-4053.

Andrew: Yes?

Gary: I don't know what extension it is. But dial the support extension, someone will be there to pick it up.

Andrew: Someone will be there right now.

Gary: Yes.

Andrew: Real time. You can't ask me to edit this out if it doesn't work.

Gary: Or dial the sales line, someone will pick up the sales line.

Andrew: That's always the answer in all of these systems. Sales always gets you through faster than an operator. [Recording: Thank you for calling CloudAccess.net. For Customer Service and Sales, press one. For billing, press two. For technical assistance, press three.] Let's see, technical assistance.

Gary: There you go.

Andrew: It's okay if no one's there. [Recording: Thank you for calling CloudAccess support. Please wait for the next available representative.]

Gary: There's someone there. They better pick up.

Andrew: Put you on the spot here. [telephone ringing] Here we go. [Phone answered by technician.] Oh, man. All right. Sorry. I was just testing to see if Joomla! tech support actually reached a human being, and it looks like in two rings I got through to a human being. Thank you. I don't want to take up too much of your time. You must have other tech support calls. But I've got Gary Brooks here on the phone with me doing an interview, and I just wanted to see how good tech support was.

Technician: Okay.

Andrew: Thank you. I'll get back to the interview now.

Technician: All right. Okay. Bye-bye. Have a nice day.

Andrew: You too. That's incredible. That to me, that's stunning. I know usually with open source software, I imagine you have to install it yourself, figure it out yourself. The idea is that talking to a human being is what is going to cost you money. That's the hard part to do. How did you build a tech support team that can take my call and all the people who happen to go to the demo page?

Gary: A lot of hard work. Joomla! is PHP. So you have to know some PHP. You have to know some CSS and HTML. You have to know application framework. You have to know Joomla! left and right. You have to know IP. What is a DNS entry? What is a record? What is a CNA? What is this stuff and how to cross correlate it, connect it all together. I have to train all my staff. They have to know every piece of that. We're not just a hosting company.

Andrew: How do you do that? As a guy who had trouble managing, who took on all the work

himself, how do you get to a place where your people are that proficient that if someone calls them up and challenges them, because they've got an urgent crisis, they could live up to it? What do you do?

Gary: Systematic approaches. Everything is documented. Communications. I give a lot of credit to Skype. Collaboration with Skype is so amazing and Google applications. When I can get you on the phone and I get a brainscrums, in our company we do what I call brainscrums, we get together on the phone and hammer things out together with a Google apps and a Skype session. We sometimes bring in two or three people. I encourage battles in our company. I encourage people to communicate with each other and not always have to agree. In fact, I encourage not agreeing. If you don't agree, then say it out loud. I encourage people not to get chips on their shoulders. If you're the type of person at our company that gets a chip on your shoulder, you won't make it very long.

Andrew: How do you teach HTML to somebody who's new? You're saying that you have someone in the office who trains them, who says try it, build it? Do you have some system like that?

Gary: Luckily, most of my people have masters. A majority of my staff is in the Polish office. We have a Poland office. The Polish people, they're just really intelligent people and I give them a lot of credit. They love technology, especially the people I have. They came from a technical university, and some of them programmed in C and they know PHP already out of the box or they've done other languages. It was just a process of giving them time to study. I give them time to sit down and do a project and study something. I try not to pressure them too much, but I put enough pressure on that they feel encouraged.

Andrew: The first group of people came to you because of the plug-ins, and the Polish developers were helping you put that together. What was the next milestone, as far as getting customers?

Gary: It was prodding and digging through people coming at us and trying to convert the higher paying projects. My goal is to get \$10,000 plus projects. Again, it comes back to the partnerships. Partnerships is what leveraged everything in our company. I partner with agencies. I'm in the Joomla! world and I know that the big contracts are probably not Joomla! contracts because people don't know what Joomla! is, in that world. I went out and found agencies. I knew the agencies had big money. They already had the clients. I didn't need to worry about getting the client. I had to win the agency over and the agency had multiple clients. The agency would create the Photoshop files, and I'd say, let me automate that for you. Let me take that Photoshop file and I'll automate it for you in a content management system. I convinced lots of them. I convinced lots of those partnerships. I partnered with an agency. I gave them an affordable rate for larger chunks of time. I would take their work and we would convert it into a functional application.

Andrew: What would you automate with their photos?

Gary: Agencies will draw on a Photoshop file. They'll imagine the application. They'll start with wire frames and then they'll go into real designs. We take those and descriptions of what they are

looking to build for their client. So we take those files and convert them into a Joomla! site. We take the Photoshop file and slice it and cut it in pieces, and then make HTML in it and PHP code, screw it all together, put it against the Joomla! framework. Out the other end comes this really cool tool that the agency can give to their client so they can update their website. Like all the cool websites you guys see out there that do application-style stuff, like Facebook-style stuff, that kind of thing.

Andrew: You said to them, "You must have lots of clients coming to you for website development. You design, give it to me, I'll make sure that it works."

Gary: That's right.

Andrew: Again, is it just cold calling, you doing what you did when you got the newspaper, back in the day MNO days?

Gary: No. I would hunt these people down. I would go to conferences and I would target an agency. There was this one moment when I found this really cool company called Red Sage Communications. They're out of Alabama. They've been a real help to my business actually. Hi, let's say hi to them. They were a great help to me. I hunted one of the ladies down at a conference, just to talk to her because I saw that she was an agency and I knew that they probably had work. I ended up winning them over, and just from me being human and speaking to them, they continue to give me business. I was just an honest business person who did honest work for them and they continue to bring me business.

Andrew: What do you mean by hunted them down? How did you get her to say yes? I'm fascinated by sales.

Gary: I shook the lady's hand. I exchanged business cards with her. I had a very small window. Sometimes you have a very small window and you have to get something from them. I went up and I said I'm this and this and this. I won't be able to talk to you now because you don't want to waste people's time when it's the wrong time. It's the wrong time to make a business sale sometimes. If you witness someone at a conference and you are targeting them, it's like a hunting game. I hunted her and then I got her and then I continued to trace her. I called them and they ended up calling me back. I tease them with information. I tell them how much I know and what I can do.

Andrew: What kind of information would impress them enough for them to say, "I've got to find out more about this guy"?

Gary: In this world, it's about being able to take their applications and code them. I tell them. Imagine whatever you want to imagine. Imagine the application, draw it up, and just let me handle that. They're like okay, we'll trust you. I earn their trust and create their stuff.

Andrew: Why did CloudAccess beat out guys like GoDaddy for the Joomla! account?

Gary: I think it's because I was part of the community and I think that I'm Joomla!-centric. I went out and participated in events. I shook hands with people that are in the community. I think they saw honesty and integrity in me and believed that I could do it.

Andrew: I get that and I see it. Some people might be hearing some noise. It's my stomach growling. It's 3:30. It's late and part of the reason it's late is because you spent half an hour with me, answering some pre-interview questions with me, making sure that the software is right. When my Skype gave me trouble, you just stuck it out. I kept waiting to see when you would get frustrated and say, "All right. Andrew, I've got a business to run here. Let's get it on, let's move." You weren't. You made sure everything was right. I understand why they would want to work with, and I'm amazed that the guy behind Joomla!, the guy behind these demo sites is as calm as you are. You've got so much going on right now.

Gary: Yes. It's crazy here. Could you imagine 22,000 sites coming at you a month?

Andrew: No. So many people who have issues or questions, have problems, who want to upgrade, who want to find out why you are on their bill and so on.

Gary: It's team. It's all about the team. That's the win. You can't do it by yourself. All the way down from the investment company that helped me, CapitalPlus.com. All the way into the members in my Polish office, my founders . . .

Andrew: How much did you raise?

Gary: A half a million.

Andrew: Okay. That's it?

Gary: Yes. But I'm allowed more.

Andrew: You said your founders, you have co-founders?

Gary: Yes, I do.

Andrew: Who are they?

Gary: Some of the Polish staff. Go to CloudAccess.net, even to this day it's hard to pronounce their last names, because they're so long. If you go to the CloudAccess.net website, go to the bottom and there is a team page down at the bottom and the founders are listed there.

Andrew: I saw that. They're co-founders. They came on afterwards, when you switched the company to CloudAccess?

Gary: No. Some of them were actually with me with Michigan Media. Michigan Media is the same company. It was an L.L.C. and I just changed the name to Cloud. I saw a cloud and I know servers. I know how to build infrastructure. You tell me to build a telephone company and I'll build a telephone company. You tell me to build a fiber plant, I'll build it. Yes. I do. The same thing, we're building a bigger data center next door. Our data center is in the building. Our fiber connection is in the building here in Trevor City, Michigan. It's next to me. I didn't outsource this stuff. I plan on building the infrastructure.

Andrew: How much does it hurt that it's CloudAccess.net and not .com?

Gary: Nothing.

Andrew: Nothing. Why not?

Gary: Why not? It's about the brand that you are building. You don't want to be CloudAccess.org or anything like that. Between .com and .net, I'm a network guy. I am a network. In the scope of domain names or TLDs, as we call them in our world, .net is unique to networks, I would say.

Andrew: Oh, I see. All right. You are actually sticking with that. That's the way things started, and then people just started picking .net or .org, regardless of what they were doing and the whole message that was supposed to come with that top-level domain was gone. You are still following it?

Gary: Yes. Sticking with it.

Andrew: You are sticking with it.

Gary: I'm sticking with .net all the way.

Andrew: I did not know before this interview that Joomla! allowed people to create demo sites. We actually used Joomla! as an example of what not to do in a Mixergy class. There was no way to say, "This is what Joomla! is. Go hit this button and use it." They were three different columns with three different messages. Now, if you want to go check out Joomla!, if you're just playing around, you hear about Joomla! and want to see what it is, go to Joomla.com, which will redirect you to Joomla!.org, because they're sticking with it too. .org means that it is a non-profit. Then you hit the demo and you create your own Joomla! site. That's fantastic.

Gary: Thanks. Yes. Ebay thought the same thing.

Andrew: What do you mean?

Gary: They selected Joomla!. They are going to use Joomla!. One of the biggest implementations of Joomla! is eBay is going to use it for an intranet. They are going to put their analytics

in the system. They've got 16,000 employees who need to look at some analytics. They are going to set up some kind of system. My friend Louis, who is working at the company now, he is actually one of the Joomla! core developers. They have him at eBay offices.

Andrew: Should I be, because of the exclamation point be instead of saying Joomla!, be saying Joomla!?

Gary: Our president of Open Source Matters, Ryan, says Joomla! rocks, and yes, it's with an exclamation point.

Andrew: Joomla! Like Yahoo! with an exclamation point. Joomla! The website is CloudAccess.net. Of course, if you go to Joomla! and hit the demo, you can see his work. Gary Brooks, thanks for doing the interview.

Gary: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Andrew: Me too. Thank you all for watching. Bye.