

Inspirational Marketers Series featuring Billy Bass, Five Star Tech

Piyush Saggi

Greetings, everyone. This is Piyush Saggi. I'm the co-founder and CEO of Parmonic here in Atlanta. I have a very special guest with me today, Billy Bass from Five Star Tech.

Billy, welcome to the Inspirational Marketers series. I'm grateful and thrilled to have you here.

Billy Bass

Thank you for having me. I appreciate the opportunity.

Piyush Saggi

Very good. I want to start, first of all, by asking you some questions about your personal journey. Tell us a little bit about where do you live, where did you grow up and what your personal journey has been in life so far?

Billy Bass

Absolutely. So it's a bit of a long story, so I'll try to condense it. But I grew up outside Chicago, Illinois. Went to elementary school, middle school there.

Ended up having to move just north of Nashville, Tennessee, when I was in high school, which at the time was a bit hard because you spend so much time in one area and then you have to move, leave your friends, but it ended up being a blessing in disguise because it opened up a whole new world of possibilities of different kinds of people who live in different parts of the country, different parts of the world even.

And so I was able to go to college from there in Kentucky, and I actually studied to be a musical theater performer. That was my first choice of profession.

And I decided that it would be really fun to move back to Chicago. So I went there and did a couple of shows. Had an opportunity to work at various theme parks.

Worked on a cruise ship. Moved to New York city for a couple of months, and lived out there, and just had a really great time being an artist and making

some amazing friends, meeting amazing people and just using the gifts that I've been blessed with as far as singing and acting goes.

But I got to the point in about 2013 where I was like, I'd really like some financial and geographical stability. And so the next best thing I was working for a theater company in Kentucky and they were looking for a part-time marketer.

And I said, I feel like I can figure that out and ended up working for them for about four years in a part-time, turned into a full-time role and then moved on to Chicago, worked for a company called Broadway in Chicago for a few years doing marketing work for them and in website content, and ended up back at the theater in Kentucky up until the time the pandemic hit.

And during that time, it's very difficult to do theater when we're all quarantined and isolated. So a lot of us were furloughed and ended up exploring just what some other possibilities would be.

It wasn't really looking around, but I had a friend reach out and say, hey, we have this position open. Our boss would love to interview you. And one thing led to another. Now I've been working for Five Star Tech for almost a year and a half.

Now it's been a wild journey when you think back on all the little dominoes and bits and pieces that got me here, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Piyush Saggi

That's fascinating. What a vibrant career path so far. Tell me a little more about what your current role at Five Star entails.

Billy Bass

Absolutely. So I joined Five Star as the marketing and content coordinator. So a lot of that work was working on social media, collecting posts, curating content, creating content, working with videos, working with blogs, working with other folks in other departments.

So at Five Star, we have three main departments. We have a managed service division. We have a data analytics division and professional development. So it was really fun working with different team members from those departments, trying to figure out what content works best and how I could help best support the sales team in their journey trying to bring in new clients, nurture current clients.

And about six months ago I was promoted to the director of marketing. So I still do a lot of the content creation, but even more now it's just kind of managing all of our marketing opportunities, whether that is content that we create internally, managing advertising campaigns, working with various tools and partners like Parmonic to try and elevate our own marketing game and just take advantage of all the wonderful content and people that we already have here at Five Star.

Piyush Saggi

That's fabulous. And the work you all do is so fascinating. The work that Five Star is doing, I have kids who go to elementary school so I can really understand and value.

Let's do a couple more fun questions. What's your favorite snack?

Billy Bass

Oh man. I feel like I've got to say chips and salsa or chips and cheese dip, anything chips and queso, anything that involves chips and cheese I can never go wrong with, but anytime we go out to a restaurant that has chips and queso or chips and salsa on the menu, I could probably fill up on that before the entree actually arrives.

So I think it's got to be that.

Piyush Saggi

Very nice. What's your favorite book or movie?

Billy Bass

I'm going to go with movie here just because I like books. I just don't have the attention span to read as much as I wish I did, but I love Star Wars through and through.

I was a big fan of the original trilogy and I was at the right age when the prequels came out back in the late '90s. And one of the coolest things to me was before they released the first prequel episode one, they actually re-release the original movies in theaters.

So in 1997, I think it was maybe '96 even, we got to see A New Hope, An Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi on the big screen. And I'd already seen them at home on VHS, but having a chance to see them in a movie theater was so surreal and such a cool experience.

Piyush Saggi

I can imagine. That's great. I had a guest last week who had a very similar taste as well. Tell me a bit about the person who's had the most impact on your personal or professional journey.

Billy Bass

Oh man. That's a tough question here. So there's been several along the way. Obviously my parents have always been supportive no matter what I've done. So I would be remiss to not include them in this list.

So I'm always thankful for them. But I would say Johnny Warren, who is the executive artistic director at the theater in Kentucky that I was working at, he took a chance on me as a marketer because I was a musical theater performer beforehand and had worked with him when he was the director of the shows.

But I don't think that I'd be here without that opportunity to work for him and figure out this marketing journey and the transition from being a performer to becoming a marketing professional without the ability to take some risks and learn along the way.

And, again, just to be supported by him and my other coworker Margaret there, it was a very small team. There were only three of us that were full time at that company aside from when in the middle of the summertime when we had all the actors and the crew, and so working with Johnny over the course of nearly 10 years has been one of the biggest difference makers in my career path for sure.

Piyush Saggi

That's fascinating. I think that first break, that first inflection point is just so important in everybody's career.

Billy Bass

Absolutely, absolutely. Especially when you're making a jump from the industry of performing, and although I was still working for the theater, the job was so different than being on stage.

Now you're behind the scenes and you're trying to support the performers and sell more tickets to the shows. And that was one of the things I was nervous about joining Five Star. I'd never worked for an ed tech company before, and working K12 it's such a variety of different opportunities with public schools, private schools, charter schools, and there's so much variety with what Five Star does and what we can offer to those schools.

But again, the team at Five Star Technology solutions has been fabulous to work with. It's been really exciting for me to learn along the way and learn even more about the educational industry and ed tech in general and figuring out different ways that not only how can I support the sales team, but the company in general is so high on innovation and they don't just limit that to the people within specific departments.

It's like, how can we innovate as a company? What can we do to affect our partners, our clients in a positive way. And so having that mentality of everyone can innovate is always great.

And it makes you feel good about what you do and you feel like you can contribute in multiple ways to the success of the whole company.

Piyush Saggi

That is so inspirational to hear. Let's segue into your role a little bit. Let's zoom out for a second. What's your view, your perspective on what's the big goal of marketing in general and then what are the big goals for you and the team here?

Billy Bass

Absolutely. It's marketing is such a crazy world because there's so many potential elements of it. You hear marketing and you can throw advertising in that bubble.

You can throw public relations in that bubble. An element of sales lives within the marketing bubble. And it can be internal marketing and external marketing where are you trying to educate the sales team or other folks in the department or on the team of new things that are happening?

Are you talking to your potential clients, your prospects, your leads? But my big view of marketing is you just want to continue to elevate the brand, whether that's in front of people who know what you do, or people that don't know what you do, you just want to continuously think of ways to elevate that brand and to get people to associate that brand in a positive way.

Whether it's through content marketing or thought partners or strategic paid advertisements on Google Ads or something like that.

There are so many different avenues that you can travel down through marketing, email marketing, just direct mail marketing. What ever the cases may be. So the fun part for me is to figure out, okay, who's our target market?

The famous words of any marketer. You have to know who you're talking to, right? And this is an interesting part where I kind of connect my musical theater background to my marketing job now, where I had a teacher in college, who we were talking about acting, and we were talking about acting a song specifically, and her questions were, who are you singing to, and what do you want?

And you can kind of have the same mentality. Who are you marketing to and what do they want? What is it that they need? And it goes back to the innovation with Five Star specifically, we can kind of tailor what it is that we do towards folks, because it's so much easier to work with people when you meet them, where they are, versus just trying to sell a product wholesale to everybody.

It works for some folks, but for what we do, every school is different. Every district is different. Every superintendent has a different agenda based on their budget or their resources or their staff.

And it's been really great being at Five Star to learn that and say, okay, now we can market that way. The fact that this is not a one size fits all solution, we can meet you exactly where you are, which means on the marketing side, where are those people?

Are they on the email? Are they on LinkedIn versus Twitter versus Facebook? Are they going to click on ads, display ads versus search ads? Checking your Google search console and saying, okay, what are people searching?

How are they finding us? And what is it that we need to continue working on? There's so many different avenues of marketing.

It's easy to get granular with it, but you kind of have to take that step back and say, all right, the main goal is just promote Five Star as an excellent K12 ed tech organization that can help you with managed services, professional development, and data analytics, and go from there.

But it's fun to get into the nitty gritty details and say, all right, what do we want to do? Increase the website traffic X percentage from year to year.

Do we want to grow our LinkedIn followers? Do we want to increase our click rate in the email? And obviously your answer is probably yes to all of those questions, if you're trying to grow and expand, but what's really fun for me is

when you get a chance to focus on a goal like that and then see the fruits of your labor as those numbers grow.

Piyush Saggi

That's great. I love that story you shared from your music teacher's perspective. Who are you singing to? What is it they want? I think that is just so catchy and inspirational.

Billy, you're an exception in the sense that you're talking about brand, and you're also talking at the same time about working with the sales team and leads and all, which is an amazing blend.

And that's what we want in all of marketing. How do you maintain the balance between brand marketing versus short term results and lead gen marketing?

Billy Bass

It's been a bit of a challenge, and that's one of the exciting things for Five Star over the last year or so is we've really been focusing on our internal processes. We have a coworker, Mary Gosman, who does a little bit of people in culture, does a little bit of sales, does a little bit of marketing, and she has such a great vision for how these processes should work.

And what's been great is once we've been able to sit down and say, for example, one of our most recent products is the Chromebook engagement dashboard from our data analytics team.

And if a school utilizes Chromebooks within their district, it can help them visualize all kinds of data that they may have access to, but it would be really time consuming, they may not have the manpower to do it, and they don't know how to find it otherwise.

And we sat down with our data analytics team from the beginning and said, all right, here's our timeline. We want two months to come out and say, we want to put all of our assets together. We want to create this content.

We want to enable the sales team. And that really helps me as the marketer to say, okay, sales team, here are all the things we're going to build for you. We're going to establish two dates to host a webinar about this new product.

So we can inform our current clients and our potential leads and prospects about what this does. Here's a website splash page for it. We've already built it out. It has all the information.

Here's your internal battle card about it. Here's the one pager, here's the social media post, all these things that we're able to have ready to go once we press launch. And then I'm able to work with the sales team based on the feedback that they get from their meetings, their demos to say, all right, what are the things that are working for you on the sales side?

What are getting people in the door? What are those buzzwords that are getting you those meetings, or even getting you a quote, because I can take that information and transfer that to the marketing side, because if it's working on that individual level, it's definitely going to work on the broad scale level.

So I can change some of the messaging in an email blast, or update some of the language on the splash page. And so it's definitely the perfect blend of a tag team because the sales folks are getting that individual contact and connection, whereas the marketing, we're able to see, okay, based on my click rate and based on my open rate, I can tell this isn't working or that isn't working, and I can pass that information on to the sales team too to be like, okay, this link, very popular, make sure you send people here or lead with this.

But we also have that relationship with the team that is developing the product and is the brains behind the product to say, okay, what about this change? Or what about doing this?

Or what do you think about this? And so the fact that sales and marketing and the product development team are all working hand in hand, like you said, it's the perfect blend because it's not siloed.

Everyone knows what's going on. Everyone's aware when there may be an issue or maybe an objection or has a question about a feature, we're all able to work together and get answers really quickly.

Piyush Saggi

That's a great example of even building internal positive feedback loops...

Billy Bass

Absolutely.

Piyush Saggi

between you and the sales team. I love the way you described that. Sellers are in one- on- one conversations, one- on- one meetings, and then you, as marketing as the newer role of marketing is aggregating all those observations

from the marketplace, from the world, and then making the sales team even more effective.

So that's beautiful. You talked a bit about all these different content pieces in the last couple minutes. What role does video webinars play in your marketing play in the mix?

Billy Bass

They're very important and they've become even more important. And when I say webinar, I don't even necessarily mean a live webinar. Obviously most of it happens through Google Meets or pre-planned out, but what I've found just as effective is an on demand webinar.

We've been able to do this, like I said earlier, when we are launching a product, we want to make sure we have an opportunity to get in front of as many people as possible. Obviously, if you can tell the story one time to 50 people, it's easier than telling it 50 times to 50 individual people.

It just saves time for everybody. And the more people you have in a room, the more you're able to bounce ideas off each other, you get different questions you may not have expected. And going back to the schools, every school is different.

And so having those unique experiences, every school's not going to have the same question. So when you get everybody in the room together in a live webinar, it's one of my favorite places to be because you learn so much about what people need, what they're looking for, what objections they may have and what innovations you may be able to bring to the product to better adapt it to a school's needs.

So it's been extremely important for us, both in the live sense and in the on demand sense, because once you have that piece of content from the live webinar, you record it, then you can have it and send it out to as many people as you need, whether that's on the marketing side in a big email blast, whether that's on the sales side, where they're having a conversation, they say, if you don't have time for a live demo, hey, check out this 30 minute webinar.

It's really easy to look through. And I know we're going to get to this too, but the great thing about what we've been able to do with Parmonic and these webinars is taking those, and my favorite thing is the Munchables.

The munchable moments that you can create from those webinars are just ideal, because the time that it saves when you don't have to go through and actually cut up a video to find those moments, I can't tell you how happy I was the first time I watched the Parmonic demo.

And I said, oh my goodness, this is going to save me hours of time in the long run if you're thinking about doing a webinar every month, if you're trying to find those pieces of content, the fact that Parmonic lays it out for you, and you can go in and edit and change, you can grab the transcript.

It's been wonderful. So for example, we've had two webinars that we've done so far where we've basically just created a homepage on our website using the full video that you can show, but also taking those important moments from the webinar, whether they're specific questions asked by the attendees, or if it's the information that people really want to see when they're attending the webinar, instead of sending someone the entire 37, 40 minute video, you can say, hey, check out this minute and 20 second clip about why MFA is important in your world, or, hey, watch this two minute video about why you need to know when your Chromebooks auto update is going to expire, because it's going to affect your purchasing cycle, et cetera, et cetera.

And instead of saying, here's the full video, go to two minutes and 30 seconds to find the thing you're looking for, because odds are some people aren't going to take that extra step. Just giving them the information automatically is wonderful.

And what I love about the fact that you can do that on one page, then you can see the analytics. So if I send an email out that has three of these munchable moments in there, I'm able to see, going back to our previous conversation, which one was the most popular?

Who clicked the most? Or which one was clicked the most? And then I can go back to the sales team and the development team and say, hey, this seems to be a really popular question, pain point, et cetera.

So we may want to look at this more or ask more questions about this. Maybe center some more of our marketing around this. It's like real time analytics without having to create the videos yourself.

And so in another world we've actually uploaded the video just to create a blog piece out of it. Because again, aside from the munchable moments, the second favorite feature of Parmonic is the fact that I can download that transcript.

I don't have to transcribe the videos. And I've done that a multitude of times to create close captions for videos, to actually grab some texts from a video. The fact that I can just download a document from Word and just automatically be able to see and copy and paste, again, just another amazing time saving feature.

And if you talk about content marketing in general, having one 30 minute video, you can automatically turn it into these munchable moments that you can either share a link to or download MP4 directly.

You can create a blog post around it. You could really create like a white paper or a flyer based on the text that was given and link to a video. The possibilities are really endless.

And the fact that these features are all in one place is again a huge time saver and super efficient and something that I wish I had five years ago.

Piyush Saggi

Thank you for sharing that. That's very, very encouraging to us and the rest of my team here as well. Billy, as you zoom out and think about Parmonic from your perspective, your team's perspective, your brand's perspective, what's the impact that's had, and you've covered a little bit of it already, but just to summarize, how do you see the impact Parmonic has had on you, the team, and the brand?

Billy Bass

One of the most exciting things about Parmonic and webinars in general is we get to lift up and empower our own subject matter experts.

I'm just the marketing guy. Our sales folks are our sales team and they're very well versed in our products. I'm well versed in our products, but nobody knows them better than the people who are developing them or working on the products or working with the schools every single day.

And I love when I get an opportunity to empower and uplift and spotlight one of those subject matter experts with a webinar. And at the end of the day, the fact that we have this on demand and I can kind of use this wherever.

It really just shows the power of Five Star because we have so many thought leaders and subject matter experts who know what they're talking about, are very trustworthy, it helps elevate the brand in total.

Because now you are saying, okay, yes, we know the products are great, but also look at the people behind the products. Because when you're talking about working with a company, especially a company you've never worked with before, there has to be that element of trust.

And that's one of the best things about webinars and video content, in my opinion, is the fact that you can build that trust by seeing someone's face, by seeing them light up about the product they're talking about and really showing you how a product works.

So that way all of your questions, or at least the majority of your questions we hope, are answered before you even get into the live demo or the sales call or whatever the case may be.

And so I love uplifting our team and showing off our brand, elevating the brand at the time. And then again, with the sales team, it just gives them more assets to use. It makes them feel more empowered.

It makes them feel like they can be more successful when they have the tools and the resources to give to their prospects, to give to their leads or clients, because they're not saying, oh, well, let me get back to you or, oh, let me schedule a live demo.

I can give this to you right now. You never have to worry about it again. And then if you have more questions, we can jump into a call after that. So I think it just makes everyone's lives a little bit easier.

It definitely elevates the brand and it just gives us so many more resources and tools at our disposal to not just do our jobs easier, but do them more efficiently and use our client and prospects' time more efficiently as well.

And at the end of the day, you want the process to be as seamless and easy as possible, right?

Piyush Saggi

I love that winning formula of spotlighting your own internal thought leaders, both to give them the spotlight and showcase their knowledge and expertise,

and also establish the company as a thought leader, because that's what potential customers are looking for.

Are we doing business here with a thought leader or a laggard?

Billy Bass

Absolutely. And at the end of the day, a person, you think about yourself and the way that you do business, whether it's a grocery trip or actually buying something for a school district, you're going to do business with people, not a brand, right?

So even at the grocery store, whether that's asking for help finding something, or at the checkout counter, you remember those experiences, and they affect your decisions moving forward. If you have a bad experience with a person at a company, you may not ever go back to that company.

And so to really empower and uplift our people, I think is so important because those sales deals at the end of the day, they're not being closed by Five Star marketing.

They're being closed by the men and women who are making those deals and are working with those clients and working with our partners and building those relationships. It's all about relationship.

And this just allows us to build that trust and add another element to that relationship in a huge way.

Piyush Saggi

Billy, one of the hallmarks of great marketers is they do a lot of hard work and yet they give credit to the sales team and you fit into that where you all are doing so much from a marketing perspective.

And yet at the same time you're so graceful in giving credit to the sales team, that they are the ones, the men and women closing the deals. The last question I have for you here is what are your top three tips for other marketers like you?

Billy Bass

Oh man. I think one of the biggest things is I never assume that I know everything, and that I can attribute back to my acting days and theatrical days, because as a performer, you're never going to have the perfect show.

You're never going to have the perfect performance of a character or a play or a musical. And so it's always striving to be better. And I think the same is true, especially today in marketing, when things change so quickly and the platforms change and where people are or the hashtags or whatever the case may be, everything changes rapidly.

So you always have to be on the lookout for new advancements in the way that you should post or what time you should post or how you should email or what your subject line should be. There's always things to learn.

So never stop learning is one. I think two is surround yourself at your organization with people who know what they're talking about. It kind of goes back to number one, but when you can be informed, because you're working directly with the people who know the product, or know the objections that will just make your life so much easier and make their lives easier.

So collaborate as much as you can with the people who know what they're talking about is number two. And number three is just always think about your target market as humans, as people, individuals.

Everybody that is going to be buying whatever you're selling, at the end of the day, they are people like you and I. And we always try to talk about what's the target market, what's the persona, what do they look like?

And while it is humanizing a person, to an extent you're also just creating a group and a segment of people. And so at the end of the day, I love thinking to myself, would I buy this or not?

And why? Or would my spouse or my sibling or my family member or brother or whatever the case may be, would they buy this and why or why not?

And if you have people who in your life are your target market, obviously that's the easiest person to go to. But at the end of the day, remembering that, yeah, you're looking for clicks and opens, but they are individual people.

And just making sure you're being cognizant of that and respectful of that and their time too.

Piyush Saggi

That's lovely. I have to say the third one is my favorite, because it resonates with me personally as well that no matter how digital we are at the end of the day, it's about the person it's about the human on the other side.

Billy Bass

Absolutely.

Piyush Saggi

Billy, with that, I want to thank you. I want to be respectful of your time. And I'm really grateful you joined me here and shared all these beautiful perspectives and insights. And I also want to thank you for being a Parmonic customer.

So thank you very much for being with me today.

Billy Bass

Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me.