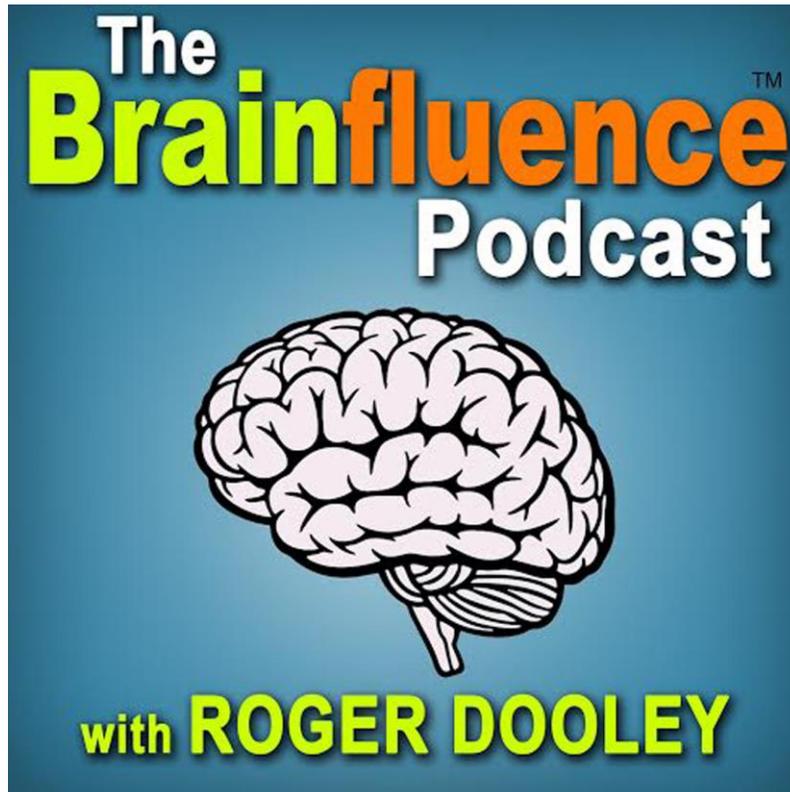


Ep #14: Conversion Science with Brian Massey



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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast. This is Roger Dooley and today with us, we have Brian Massey, also known as the Conversion Scientist. Brian's an expert on conversion optimization. He's the co-founder of Austin based Conversion Sciences and the author of Your Customer Creation Equation: Unexpected Formulas of the Conversion Scientists

I've seen speak both here in the US and abroad and I always enjoy his talks because he usually talks not about just conversion but the underlying psychology. One thing that you won't see in this audio podcast is Brian's normal speaker outfit. It's not a suit, it's not a Steve Job's jeans and black turtle neck setup. It's a white lab coat.

Brian, for starters, welcome and tell us about the lab coat.

Brian Massey: The lab coat, there's a couple of stories. The first being that when I put on the lab coat not only do I land the impression to my audience that I'm smarter than I actually am but I actually make myself believe that I'm smarter than I actually am and there has been some interesting studies along those lines to prove out the fact that we're able to solve cognitive problems when we're wearing a lab coat as opposed to our normal clothes or even to a lab coat that is called an art smock. That's one reason.

The overarching reason that I selected the lab coat as a touchstone is because when I put it on it is symbolic for leaving the world of marketing myths, of sales superstition

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and of gut feel when you are crafting messages and persuasive texts to then copy and pictures for your visitors. That is left behind and we are entering a world of data-driven, data guiding decision making where we let the visitors tell us through, in our case they're doing tests, how they want to receive information and what's more likely to make them become a customer lead or a subscriber on their websites.

It's as much a psychological as an intellectual shift in my approach when I put that on.

Roger Dooley: That's really fascinating. I've seen the research that shows you get a little bit smarter when you're wearing a lab coat and it suggests that maybe I'll just wear lab coats all the time and maybe we can up the collective IQ of the world a little bit. Are you wearing it now?

Brian Massey: I am, of course.

Roger Dooley: Okay good. I was going to say if you weren't it might be tougher to keep up, but since you've got it on I think we're in good shape.

Brian Massey: Always. I always have it on when I'm presenting.

Roger Dooley: Awesome. Brian, I first read your book a year or two ago and I really enjoyed it. There are a few good books on conversion and print and I think yours is probably the easiest to read and to start to implement right away. It's comparatively short, not that short, and I find very accessible. Who is your target audience when you're writing the book?

Brian Massey: The target audience for that, I didn't design the book to be a long, plain ride read. My audience really was small and

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medium size businesses who rely on third parties to give them advice. They are hiring a developer for their website or they employ a developer and hiring typically a designer outside the company but may also be inside the company.

In managing the business they're really relying on that developer and that designer to give them the right advice. Unfortunately, unless you've been testing sites like I have over the years, your advice is going to be bad. The advice you get from your developer and your designer is often going to be wrong, just plain wrong. They mean well and much of what they do is based on what other people are doing.

The book was written to help you ask the right questions and to give you an appropriate amount of skepticism whenever somebody says, "Here's how we should do it," that you can ask the question, "Well, this is important in my business. Why are we doing it that way and what evidence do you have that this is going to work for me?" When you start to ask those questions then you look at your website very differently. The book is designed to help you change the way you look at a website and to make you a better web manager.

Roger Dooley: In the beginning you talked about the readers setting up a digital conversion laboratory. Explain what you mean by that.

Brian Massey: We have all these amazing tools. It's like if you go back a few decades it will be like ordering an ant farm from the back of one of those comic books that you read. You would get the ant farm and the ants.

Roger Dooley: Did you every order one of those ant farms, Brian?

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Brian Massey: Of course I did.

Roger Dooley: I had one for a while too. That was kind of fun. Always there's a fear among moms and so on that they would somehow all escape in the house.

Brian Massey: I'm sure that we probably released a certain number of invasive species of ant into the US through those things, but curiosity cannot be held. You learn things about ants that you never expected to learn about ants and you became closer with them. I built an affinity towards that species and all other species, lowered fear of them.

The same thing with your digital lab. What you're doing is you're setting up tools and you really get to see the people coming to your website, people trying to solve a problem, people trying to look cool with your clothes or people trying to just escape for a little bit and have a moment of entertainment through your content.

You get to see how they behave and I think all of the same things that you get from the ant farm apply. You begin to build an affinity for them, you begin to understand them, you begin to think like them. If you're talking about building a web business, there is nothing more powerful.

The digital lab is the analytics that you put on the site to see where people are going. One of my favorite tools is a hit map, a click tracking tool, crazy egg, click tail, inspect click. There are number of solutions for that that shows you where people are clicking and how far the scrolling and having some tools in there where you can do split testing if moved along to that level of questioning are part of the lab and in my lab there are a number of tools allowing me to spy on our client's competitors and see if

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the competitors are testing themselves and what sophistication they have along the lines of using data to make decisions.

The lab can consist of some fine PDFs. In fact, we've got a list of resources on a site called myconversionlab.com. You can go and number one, you can take a look and see the sorts of things that I put in my lab and begin to pick some of your own. Everything from reporting and graphics to interesting analytics packages and add-ons for things like Excel and Chrome and such.

It's the tools that allow you to understand your visitors a little bit better and understand your industry a little bit better. That is your lab, your experimentation setup, and most of it exists in your browser.

Roger Dooley: That's great and I think one thing our listeners should know is that while you obviously you can spend a lot of money on the used tools, many of them are free either to test or even to use at a low level for a while. If you don't have a lot of traffic or if you just want to do some very limited testing, quite a few of these tools are easy to implement and very, very inexpensive, even free.

Brian Massey: Yeah. Free and cheap is the rule. There's no excuse for not experimenting with some of these interesting tools except for lack of curiosity.

Roger Dooley: Right. Of course the hope is that once you find gee, I'm really upping my conversions by using this tool up to perhaps a higher level of usage where you have to pay them a little bit more money, but still it's really great. I've been playing with a few free tools on the blog and it's been illustrative.

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Brian Massey: Which ones do you like?

Roger Dooley: I was testing the Yoast plugin that is hooked into convert.com. There are a couple of others that I've played with too that are in the split-test category or other tools. It's really great. Just adding instrumentation. Of course, Google Analytics has a ton of tools built in that between Analytics and Tag Manager, all free tools up to really relatively high volumes of web activity. You can really learn a lot just from those things.

Brian Massey: Yeah. I think either as a business manager or even as a marketer in a larger company, you've got to know these tools and be comfortable with how to use them and how to properly read the data because they're very powerful and you can draw some wrong conclusions from them. You're going to have to understand these tools and how to use them in very short order here. It's not going to be enough to be good at crafting messages. You have to know what the results of those messages are on the bottom line.

Roger Dooley: In your book Brian, you talked about there being five different kinds of websites. Do you find that sometimes businesses that you deal with don't really know which kind they have or they're not sure which kind they have?

Brian Massey: Absolutely. It's interesting that over the years that I've been working on both from publishing the book and prior to that I presented on the kind of website you might have. There hasn't been any additions made to it. I expected to get a lot of feedback from people that oh, my business doesn't fit into one of the five.

They've held up pretty well and just very quickly you've got the brochure site, you've got the site that the

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consultants sell which is typically a business to business sort of thing with a long sales cycle. You've got the online stores, you've got the online service and what I call publication site which is a site that is primarily content and it's either a subscription model or an advertising model.

That was one of the main reasons I wanted to bring these categories forward was because when I first started in this business everybody was putting up what you would call a brochure site. It is a site that talks all about you and it needs to be well-designed and pretty. There is a place for the brochure site in the pantheon of websites, but most businesses do not need a brochure site. They need one of the other types.

Each type has a corset of strategies that you want to drop in. People who need a consultancy site usually put a brochure site up and it just isn't going to meet the needs of the visitors who are trying to understand how to choose a typically expensive complex solution to a complex problem in their business. It can be everything from logistics of getting product from point A to B to human resources software. A brochure site that talks all about you isn't going to do that.

I think that's the primarily example of using the wrong type of site. There are opportunities to work to beat your competitors by deciding you're going to be a different site. That might be a consultancy site. You could say, "You know what, we're going to put some tools and things online." Model ourselves more like a service, an online service and can fundamentally change the way they go to market on the web. In playing with these kinds of modes of sites, you really can find some interesting themes and some interesting insights about your business.

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Roger Dooley: I think probably one danger of the brochure sites is what our mutual friend Bryan Eisenberg talks about what is we-we syndrome, which is too much emphasis on we throughout. That's what a brochure does. It talks about you and your capabilities and so on and rarely focuses on solutions or what your visitor or your customer is really interested in.

Brian Massey: Yeah, absolutely. The paper brochure was limited because you never knew who was going to get it. It was given to the sales guys, it was left in the lobby, it was left behind that sales calls, it was distributed in periodicals. You had to write it generic and general, but we don't have to do that on the web. Our lab really can tell us who's coming and how we need to speak to them. We don't need to be safe and we certainly don't need to be inwardly focused. We need to focus on our visitors concerns and desires.

Roger Dooley: When we talk about conversion we usually think about very measurable things like a completed lead form that's submitted and received or an e-commerce order that goes all the way through the pipeline and so on. You talk about things like conversion to awareness and things like that. What are some of the other types of conversion and is it possible to measure those things?

Brian Massey: In general, we find it's more difficult to measure conversion from really fall as a funnel when you've got a bunch of people out there that don't know your product and maybe don't need your company and maybe don't even know that there's a solution to their problem. You really got to convert them from unawareness to awareness.

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You got suspects being converted to prospects, prospects being converted to qualified prospects and at each stage there's a different way of measuring that. At awareness, the number of people coming to your website is a good measure of how you're doing about converting people from not knowing anything to becoming aware of the product and your company.

The problem is that those are the conversions that we spend too much time on when really it's converting them to being aware of the product to actually considering it as a solution to their problem when we get into the consideration phase and then of course into the action where we want them to take some action. Those are the places that we don't spend enough time. We've spent a great deal of time letting people know about what we offer and very little time about helping them make the decision. Those are where the real opportunities are in the marketplace.

You're talking about conversions that are be lead or added conversions where you're offering a piece of content or a webinar that helps them understand the problem, helps them make a decision and you can actually measure those with contact information that they provide, number of people who attend. Really meaty metrics that you know are moving the business forward.

Those require a higher level of commitment on the part of visitor and so they require a higher level of persuasion, more testing, more understanding on what the visitors wants and more refinement of your message, all of which conversion optimization is designed to deliver.

Roger Dooley: Looking at content, when we think about conversion we think about landing pages that have one very clear

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objective in mind getting the person to buy or to give up their info or whatever. On content pages, an objective might be to have the visitor to scroll down a few times to get to the end of the content and that would be indicative that somehow the content engaged them and that was probably some kind of a micro conversion there. It may not mean that they've made a decision to buy or to inquire, but at least you've increased probably your awareness or your authority or something of that nature.

Brian Massey: The thing is that the rules of marketing and advertising haven't changed. You still need some number of exposures before you feel that you are comfortable with the company or a brand or a product. The number that has always been bandied about, and my experience, has been seven to nine touches of some sort.

That can be a banner showing up on a page if you're on CNN, a banner showing up for a particular brand, then getting an email, then seeing an invitation for a meet-up in your town from somebody who works for that company. Three or four tweets and maybe something on Facebook, maybe an ad or something on Facebook.

Individually, none of these things is going to generate a click but when you start to add them up, a suspect who suddenly realizes they have this problem is going to not only bring that company to mind but it's going to have an artificially inflated level of trust just because it looks like that company's everywhere.

We need to play that, continue to play that game online and at the same way that we do it in broadcast television, broadcast radio, print, the more traditional places we've done it because trust is one of those important ingredients when somebody comes to make a decision around

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solving a problem, giving you some information or better yet, pulling out their credit card and buying something from you.

Roger Dooley: Right. Probably a lab coat is a good thing too for that trust part.

Brian Massey: The lab coat is a very effective hook. Wish I could say that I ...

Roger Dooley: Yeah. All the Dr. Eds or doctor-looking people on the TV that assure that smoking cigarettes was fine or particularly this brand wouldn't make you cough than the next brand. That was all about the playing to authority and trust.

Brian Massey: There's the old study of the guys in lab coats convincing someone to give test subjects higher and higher levels of shocks.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, the Milligram experiment. Scary what people are willing to do if they're being told to do something by somebody who looks official. That showed that they would deliver what sounded like a neurolethal shock to subjects that they couldn't see. Fortunately, the people were not actually being tortured to death in the other room but the people who are administering the shocks didn't know that.

Brian Massey: I know. Fortunately, I've not driven anybody to harm anybody else using the power of the lab coat. Mostly it's just a hook on which people can hang value. If I was a total dope, if I was not that smart or if I was telling people lies, those are the things they would be associating with that lab coat and it would carry a negative charge just as well as positive charge.

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Roger Dooley: Right. That's true because if what you're doing is increasing memorability, if you're doing things that are memorable but, then obviously it's going to work against you.

Brian, a while back we semi-collaborated on some high tracking tests and what I worked on was confirming that the old baby looking at the headline trick actually worked with images of adults too where the person picture on a webpage was looking at her pointing at the headline. The headline got more visual attention. That doesn't mean that it will convert better. Actually, there's some indication that conversion isn't necessarily related to reading that headline or the call to action. Nevertheless, it was interesting.

When I was doing that you were working on testing the effects of videos and in particular, these animated sketching videos. Curiously, can you describe that a little bit and what you found?

Brian Massey: We had done an experiment with a company called Zumba in which we had invested in a day-long shoot, 120 different videos, 24 products. The goal was to add video to an e-commerce site essentially, e-commerce apparel site, and see if that would increase conversion rates. Zumba had a unique audience in which we thought the motion and the music would be well-received. It turned out it wasn't. We did all that work and we actually saw a lower conversion rate for product pages that had video on them.

Roger Dooley: This is why it's important to test, right Brian?

Brian Massey: Yes it is.

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Roger Dooley: As good as your gut is, it isn't always right. You can probably gauge the skill of a conversion expert by their emphasis on saying, "Okay, we've got to test this even though I think it's a great idea." The more they are sure it's going to work, probably the less they know.

Brian Massey: Exactly. Anyways, a little after that a company called MERO Metrics came and said, "Hey, we want to loan you some iTracking software, iTracking equipment and I thought, "Perfect. We can find out exactly what's going on here." We tested three kinds of business video which I've never been able to find iTracking tests on. One is just talking head video which I'm explaining a concept. One is webinar style video in which just static images are shown as I voice over. Then the whiteboard video in which I actually draw on the screen to illustrate the points that I'm making and I was dying to find out how people watch this whiteboard video.

We had 22 people go through the process in watching one of the three videos and then we also did a split test to see which would generate the most clicks on a short form. What we found out was that people watch whiteboard video, they watch the pen, I mean they watch it very closely and it's like as you watch the video with the iTracking bubbles on it, the red, blue and green bubbles much like you would see on a weather map but they move in real time, it's almost like someone's writing with a bit of fire on the screen. It's fascinating to watch. I'll give you the URL. You can publish the URL to actually go and see some of the examples of that.

Roger Dooley: We'll post that in the show then.

Brian Massey: That tested the best in our split test, our landing page split test. Our landing page split test which drove a bunch of

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traffic to one of the three pages that were identical except the kind of video that they saw was different.

We found that faces in video are extremely attractive, much like you would see on a webpage or on a print ad like what you are testing. Even if you have a prop, like in one point I held up my book, attention would go on that for just a minute but very quickly go back to the face and that was an interesting insight.

Watching when people look away from the video in a noisy environment like if your video is on YouTube, we got to see how people who were in a clinical situation told that they were being recorded still would be drawn to look away at the sidebar and the other things that are on the YouTube page. Noisy, distracting environments, like YouTube and Facebook, are dangerous if you're trying to persuade somebody with videos.

Roger Dooley: That's really interesting stuff. I would guess the reason the whiteboard videos work so well or hold the attention so well is just the constant motion. Compared to a slide show that's periodically advancing the content but otherwise it's static, that's just not really engaging our brains which are more or less trained to tune out stuff that's stationary because chances are it's not a threat or something to eat but just sitting there. On the other hand, where you've got this constant motion of the sketching going on, it's hard not to watch that and focus on it.

Brian Massey: I think you're right. This was a long video, it was eight minutes, each of these videos was eight minutes long. We stretched the attention ...

Roger Dooley: I know. I think I saw it about 200 times.

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Brian Massey: Stretched the attention of the audience but even the engagements on graphs that you saw on YouTube where the whiteboard video just held attention for so much longer even to the six and seven-minute marks. It's very interesting. If there's something going on I think it's so effective that it has to be more than just the motion, but I'm not sure.

Roger Dooley: It's interesting. I know that I've seen some of the internet marketing folks who use these very simple videos that have words on the screen that are almost like subtitles but that's all there is on the screen going with the narration. Supposedly, those things convert fairly well although they don't seem all that engaging.

Brian Massey: They don't seem all that engaging. The thing is the infopreneurs who use these things are avid testers. I actually keep my pulse on. They're like the tabloids that the Men in Black used to see when aliens are coming to Earth or when aliens are misbehaving. I keep my tabs on these infopreneurs who are less worried about brand and more worried about raw persuasion as harbingers of what techniques we might bring over and adapt to a more brand-sensitive industry like the clients that we work with.

Roger Dooley: That makes a lot of sense because they are very good at testing and optimizing and even if you don't use the exact same techniques you can certainly see. If you see something that's used consistently multiple times or across multiple sites, chances are that really works.

Brian Massey: It's just a hypothesis that we're taking from them. Obviously we're testing those and these other industries to see if they work.

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Roger Dooley: Let's talk a little bit about lead generation. It's a special case for conversion. You're not really trying to sell anything so you often merely need to get somebody to give up their email address and a little bit of contact information. Curious about a couple of things, how good of an idea is it do you think to include a bunch of form fields that help qualify the lead versus where you'd have a very simple form but then the qualification has to take place a bit later? It's a conversion versus qualification tradeoff. Then also I'm curious about phone leads and whether you've worked with that at all.

Brian Massey: For every business it is a tradeoff between how many qualifying fields you're going to put on the form. In almost every case, the more fields you add to a form, the lower your conversion rate is going to be and there's fewer leads you're going to generate but the higher the quality is going to be. Somebody who is more determined to learn about your solution or be contacted by a sales person, they're going to find a way to get through the fields that you've got.

The caveat is don't add any fields that your sales force isn't really using. If they've got a script in which they're going to ask these qualifying questions upfront and every lead is going to get to answer it, then it's probably not appropriate to put it on the form itself.

There are situations for instance you're applying for a loan in which having too few fields will work against you because if you say, "Apply for a loan now," and all it asks is your name and your email address, there's something going on here. I'm being squeezed. It's very different for everyone.

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Now, if you want to generate phone calls one of the things we found is the best way to generate a phone call - for our clients phone calls are worth 5 to 10 times what a form fill is because after someone fills out a form you've got to get through to them by email, you've got to get them to come to action, it's a whole other conversion process, whereas if they pick up the phone they're talking to a knowledgeable person on the other end they're more likely to close.

One of the best ways to get people to call is to put a big, ugly form on the page, make the phone number very evident. In other words, put the phone number in the headline. Add a big, ugly form and you're going to see your phone calls skyrocket. So much so that we actually did a test in which we didn't even put a form on the page. All you can do is call. The phone number was very prominent, it was in the headline, it was repeated 75% down the page. We find those to be the ideal places for phone numbers.

Phone calls drop 56% when we took the form off. Adding the form back in and then adding some text at the top of the form that said, "If you really want to take real action now, you'll call us. But if you want to fill out this form," and it was a long, ugly form. In this particular agency that generated the most phone calls for us. It's another one of those strange rules of thumb you get, but whenever we take a new client, they want it during phone calls we say, "Well, first thing we need to do is put a big, ugly form on the page", and they look at us like we have three heads, but it's worked in a number of places.

Roger Dooley: It's a fluency tradeoff there, I think, where one thing looks really difficult and the other, by comparison, looks a lot

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easier. I think it's probably true for mobile too. Wouldn't you say Brian that when people are in a mobile environment, even a short form can be a real blocker almost to conversion whether it's an e-commerce site or a lead gen site.

I think they're seeing some data that shows that mobile folks will get to the point of placing the order and if there's an easy phone number where they can just tap it in their phone and complete the order that way, often they'll do that rather than go through the process of trying to enter their credit card information by tapping it out on their phone.

Brian Massey: Yeah. The click-to-call and the social network connects the open authorizations that you get from Google and Facebook and then those guys where you can just click a button, they'll grab all of your contact information from their database and send that on really are winning right now on the mobile phones. You're absolutely right. It's a pain in the butt to fill out a form on a mobile phone.

Roger Dooley: Sure that will be addressed overtime with stored information and some really nice mechanisms. At the moment, the phone is far from dead despite what people might think.

We're about out of time, Brian, but just to ramp up, we're both in Austin, Texas and you're actually a rather long-term resident here. I'm a bit newer, about four or five years now. There's an amazing concentration of conversion in web marketing experts here and we've talked about that or marked on it for years. You actually did something about it and published a blog post, that we'll link so the show knows what it's about, all of the conversion and web marketing experts that are here in

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town. What is it about Austin do you think that it's been a magnet for all this talent?

Brian Massey: I don't know if it's coincidence. I think Austin is a creative class of town and it's good mix of technology and classical creative, it's a huge music scene here, a very hippie-driven art scene and then the University of Texas drives this high technology, smart guys, even a number of the smaller colleges here in town are just training these bright technology-oriented folks.

I think that forms a nice soil and then there are just some anchors. Bryan & Jeffrey Eisenberg live here. They're the founding sons of conversion optimization space and they developed their knowledge around the wizard academy which is an unusual school out in the Hill Country here, a business school that takes a very different approach to what makes things work.

I think they form a core and just the fact that you can have this cross of creative plus technology. Conversion science as we say it takes a rigorous creativity to do conversion optimization. You've got to have the discipline to do the science, but at the end of the day you got to really get outside the box because audience is just so surprising. Austin just is that. It may also just be the fact that we're the first ones to claim to be the conversion capital of the world and that's all it takes.

Roger Dooley: We owe it all to you Brian. Let me remind our audience that we've been talking to Brian Massey. His book is Your Customer Creation Equation: Unexpected Formulas of the Conversion Scientist. Brian, how can folks find your stuff online and connect with you?

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Brian Massey: Everything we're learning we're teaching and giving away at our blog, conversionscientist.com, and if you are interested in the book and would like to become a friend of the author, me, be happy to give you a free chapter that you can try out and you'll find that blog, the book blog, at customercreationequation.com.

Roger Dooley: Super. Brian, it's been a real pleasure talking to you and I look forward maybe to talking to some of the other Austin experts in the future, but you are first Austin expert. Congratulations and congratulations on bringing that to floor as well. It's been great Brian. Thanks a lot.

Brian Massey: Thanks for having me. It's a pleasure always, Roger.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.