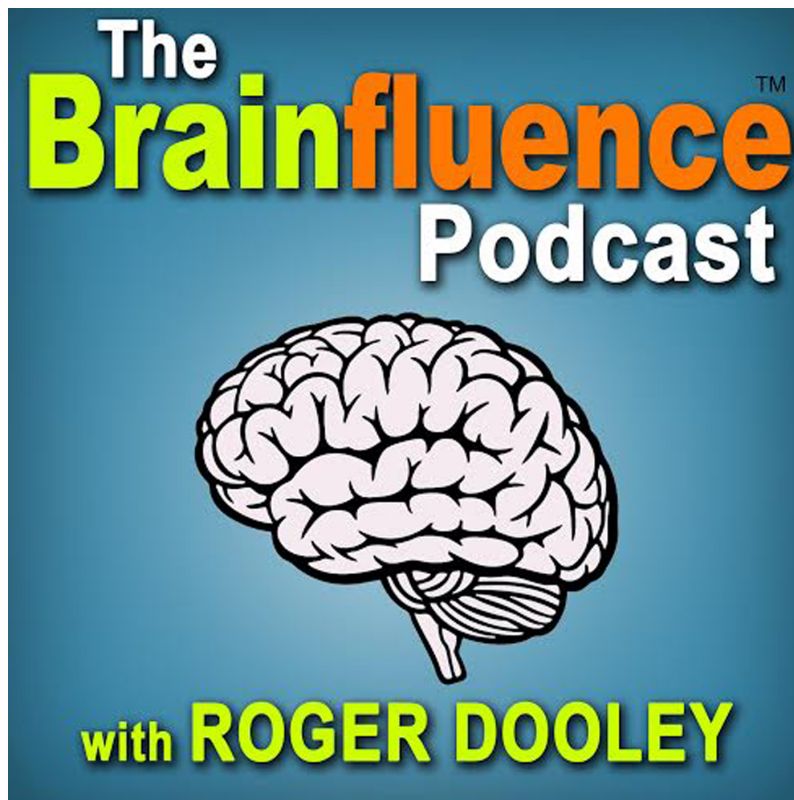


Conversion Optimization with Chris Goward

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Full Episode Transcript

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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker Roger Dooley has weekly conversations with thought leaders and world class experts. Every episode shows you how to improve your business with advice based on science or data.

Roger's new book, *Friction*, is published by McGraw Hill and is now available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and bookstores everywhere. Dr Robert Cialdini described the book as, "Blinding insight," and Nobel winner Dr. Richard Claimer said, "Reading Friction will arm any manager with a mental can of WD40."

To learn more, go to [RogerDooley.com/Friction](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction), or just visit the book seller of your choice.

Now, here's Roger.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to Brainfluence, I'm Roger Dooley.

Our guest this week is a return visitor to the show, and since he was the star of episode 13 and we've passed the 300 mark now, it's fair to say that this visit is long overdue. Chris Goward is one of the most recognized conversion optimization experts on the planet. He's the author of *You Should Test That*, guide to why and how you should optimize your digital marketing. Chris is the founder and CEO of WiderFunnel, and it's how brands like Dollar Shave, Microsoft, HP, and the Motley Fool get better results. He's the creator of the Lift model and the Infinity Experimentation process. Welcome back to the show Chris.

Chris Goward: Thank you very much Roger. Thanks for the invitation, it's great to be back.

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Roger Dooley: Yeah. Wow. Too long, way too long. I'm curious since it's been so long though, at least we can get some perspective on that. You've been testing for years before you were on the show and since that was about 2013, how has conversion optimization changed or evolved during that time?

Chris Goward: Wow. Yeah. So 2013 was when You Should Test That came out and at the time, we were really evangelizing the concept of experimentation, that's why the book was called, You Should Test That, because really a lot of people still needed to be convinced that experimentation was a better way to make decisions than the old gut feeling, intuition only driven process of decision making. And since then, it's really become de facto standard for the world's leading growth companies. Everyone knows they need to be experimenting, everyone knows that it's a strategy that the world's leaders are using.

Chris Goward: Now they really need to understand how to continuously increase their insight velocity from their experimentation programs, and actually create experimentation as a company wide way of making decisions, not just some backroom project in some analytics department as it often was back then. So it's become much more sophisticated to say the least in all ways from the process and systems and expertise and technologies that are involved in running experiments now.

Roger Dooley: Explain what you mean about that broader impact beyond just testing, presumably headline A versus headline B or a big blue button versus small orange button and that sort of thing. How is this driving company strategy as you put it?

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Chris Goward: Right. So, back in the day, experimentation kind of emerged in ... as I said, the analytics kind of area of companies where it began as a very tactical approach to tweaking and eking out slight improvements in the performance of landing pages. So, especially in digital marketing areas or departments, they were spending money on digital ads as they are today, driving people into landing pages and they realize that if they could find ways to improve small variations in the landing pages, they can improve their conversion rate on those pages and then improve their return on investment they were getting on those ads.

Chris Goward: Well, it turns out that that was a very limited view of the power of experimentation, and now companies realized that, conversion rate improvement is really just an indicator of what you can actually learn from those improvements, which is human behavior, which is why people act the way they do. You can create and design experiments that actually reveal much more interesting insights than just the tweaks in the growth or the tweaks in the conversion rate that you can get in your small little digital marketing campaigns.

Roger Dooley: What would an example of that be? I know in the real world where a company has moved out of merely getting an extra 10% out of a landing page and somehow affecting the bigger picture.

Chris Goward: Right? So, simple examples like the types of imagery that works better, originally people thought, "Okay, great, well, this type of image works better than this type of image." And that's as far as they went. But now they can start to look behind the curtain and say, "Okay, why does that

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image work better?" By pairing the experiment results with some deeper qualitative feedback that helps them to understand the reasons behind why people act the way they do, then you can confirm them with experiments, it becomes this virtuous circle of really understanding customers.

Chris Goward: That's where companies like Forrester for example, have gone out saying that the best growth companies are now what they call customer-obsessed companies. At the core of these customer-obsessed organizations is actually experimentation. The reason behind that is that you can now conduct experiments that are designed in such a way that they reveal insights into human decision making. So for example, a certain type of image may have an implicit perception and emotional effect on certain types of buyers that might not resonate the same way with other types of buyers.

Chris Goward: So different people have different emotional triggers, and by understanding those things, you can really understand much more about the psychology of your buyers, which then you can use to influence the rest of your marketing and customer experience touchpoints, whether it's online or offline, in store, in your product packaging, in messaging and value proposition. These insights are now being disseminated throughout the organizations as a real strategic insight into the customer mindset.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense I think Chris, do you see people applying testing to non-revenue areas of their websites, say for instance, if they would like people to engage with our content more where there's no direct

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revenue benefit, but nevertheless there could be a longer term business benefit?

Chris Goward: Yeah, it's a good point. Originally, as I say, conversion rates or which were really transactional, were the main drivers of experimentation. But businesses have different types of business models, have different types of goals at different experiences. Sometimes it might be content consumption, sometimes it might be near really actually reducing customer service inquiries. So, it may actually be self-serving to find answers to their questions rather than calling ... that could be a cost reduction goal. So one of the areas that's very important for an organization is to understand the right metrics for their experiments. They can use experimentation in all kinds of ways.

Chris Goward: In fact, there's a great story about the early days of Amazon and of course everyone uses Amazon, you can't have a good presentation without referencing Amazon. They actually ran experiments in their logistics processes by actually setting up completely different logistics buildings in different States that they would test the different ways of organizing their shipping and delivery logistics systems to AB test which one actually works better from an efficiency perspective. That's a very dramatic high cost experiment.

Roger Dooley: Pretty extreme, not too many of our listeners could afford an AB test each with its own warehouse.

Chris Goward: Right, yeah. Exactly. Amazon is well known as a leader in experimentation. They experiment on absolutely everything, and so they often have some of those wild examples, but we're seeing people experiment in all kinds

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of areas. So, what's important for an organization is to understand the metrics that drive their own particular business growth. So, what is it that's important to that business? It might not be conversion rate or it might not be transactions on a landing page anymore. It might be something that is in different areas of the business, it could be different things. But experimentation as a methodology, simply becomes a way of answering business questions wherever they sit, and understanding how to construct, design these experiments with the right metrics can answer any kinds of questions, as long as you have some ability to track outcomes of some sort.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, it's such good point because a lot of areas of the business often, I think are not really subject to any kind of quantitative analysis. You know that you're getting a lot of calls to customer service, so somebody says, "Well, throw up an FAQ page." Okay, we did that, now customers have that solution, but nobody really goes back to look to see how many times customers have to search that knowledge base or FAQ page or whatever it is to find the answer they're looking for. If they find what they're looking for, how they're interacting with it, where if you both instrumented to begin with and then run experiments once it's instrumented, you can really optimize that.

Chris Goward: Right. And putting just a little extra effort to think about how do I measure the impact of a change that I'm proposing ... can lead to some really interesting insights. Sometimes managers feel strapped for time and they're barely able to get their workout, and so thinking about the next step of ... okay, we're implementing a change, now I have to put in a little bit of extra effort to think about how do I test and measure that change? Sometimes I

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understand feel daunting, but those who take that extra step are really leapfrogging the competition by getting real insights into how their customers behave and making even dramatic leaps ahead of them by using those insights then to make even further changes. Thinking about the change as an endpoint in itself is limiting because you don't actually gain the knowledge to make the next improvement in the business.

Roger Dooley: Yap. One thing I've noticed in ... actually not even just the past few years, but going back, I don't know, probably at least seven or eight years, is that more and more we're seeing the principles of psychology, behavioral science, behavioral economics, and so on, applied to conversion and testing. So why is that? Do you see ... I assume you see that too because you've talked about that. What's driving that and how is that changing things?

Chris Goward: Yeah, it's a really exciting field to be in right now. There's so much research, primary research that's been going on over the last 20 years in the area of behavioral economics, consumer psychology. It's surprising how popular a lot of these books have become. You've heard of authors like Daniel Kahneman, Richard Taylor and then Dan Ariely and some of these others who are writing about the surprising ways that people act in irrational ways or in emotionally driven ways that are different than the traditional way of thinking about human decisions.

Chris Goward: It wasn't that long ago. In fact, in 2017, Richard Taylor won the Nobel Prize for his work in showing that the old economic models that businesses just relied on, were completely false because the underlying assumption in the old economic models were that humans were rational

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decision makers. You remember, I'm sure everyone listening remembers these old economic curve that you had, right? The microeconomic models where if you increase your price, you reliably decrease your demand by a certain relative amount. It's been shown many, many times through original research that's actually not the case.

Roger Dooley: But it seems so logical, I mean, we can relate to those supply demand curves, but of course when it's the real world, sometimes those things work other times they're way off.

Chris Goward: Right, and no one wants to believe that we're completely irrational beings that they don't act on in our best interest. But that's just the way it is. People actually make decisions emotionally and then only have enough logical, rational basis for their decisions to defend it to themselves, so they don't go crazy. But in reality, people make decisions based on emotional reactions that they have. So that opened up a whole new field of research, and what's now coming out is marketers are jumping all over this of course to understand that if they can understand the emotions behind why people make decisions, they can have much more powerful customer experiences that not only sell more but actually create better customer experiences, more happiness in their customers, more loyalty, better emotional resonance and increase profitability for the companies.

Roger Dooley: Chris, when you test things off, and I'm sure you end up using some of these well-established principles of influence, like social proof for scarcity, I'm curious, how often do you find those things work? I mean, obviously

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they must work quite a bit because when you go to a travel site, which are very heavily optimized for performance, you'll see there's only two seats left, only one room left at this price. So, they're applying Cialdini in the real world apparently with some success. I'm just curious, when you get up to the 30,000 foot level, how often do you see these principles working and do you find that there are exceptions sometimes?

Chris Goward: Yeah, it's a great question. You mentioned Cialdini, Robert Cialdini was one of the pioneers in this area and really popularized, especially for marketers, this idea that there are these cognitive biases that marketers have available and that consumers should also understand. What's happened now is that, often marketers have gone out to try to find these cognitive biases. Cialdini talked about six or seven cognitive biases and now we've got a list of nearly 200 cognitive biases actually that are well known and documented. So marketers have gotten really excited about using cognitive biases and understanding how to incorporate those into their marketing, and I've kind of related this idea of cognitive biases into the whole field of behavioral science.

Chris Goward: In fact, I think the perspective of looking at these as kind of tricks to manipulate customers at times, is a very limited view, and in fact, often verges on unethical at times. I look at behavioral sciences much more broad than a cognitive bias list of tricks that you can pull into your marketing. But behavioral science should be a way to genuinely understand your customers and in an emotional level to understand how to create experiences that actually do emotionally resonate with them and appeal to them and make them feel like you're paying off

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the needs that they have, emotionally and rationally. It actually pays off in business as well. There was a study done published in the Harvard Business Review that showed a subsection of highly satisfied customers, and they split out the highly satisfied customers into groups that felt no emotional connection with the brand versus some perceived differentiation emotionally and those who are fully emotionally connected with the brand experience.

Chris Goward: What they found was that compared to the overall highly satisfied customers, those that didn't have an emotional connection were 18% less profitable, and those who had a full emotional connection with the brand and the experience had a 52% increase in lifetime value to the brand, and these are all highly satisfied customers. So, it wasn't the functional satisfaction, it was the emotional connection with the brand and the experience that created a 52% increase in the value. So, it makes sense, but it's not just the techniques and tactics that are tricking people to buy, it's the overall experience that they have at an emotional level if it pays off over the long term, it actually has an increase in overall value to the brand.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, and I'm going to interject here a little tease or a plug for those of our listeners who want to do a deeper dive into this. In a few minutes, we will be giving a link to a webinar that Chris will be doing for our listeners, that's going to talk about some of these emotional factors, behavioral science factors that you can use to grow your business. But back to that topic, I think the over use of some of these things indeed is something that might have a short term impact but is not the way to build a business. So if you can somehow nudge people into making

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decisions they didn't want to make, well, you may get that order but you won't keep them around in the long haul.

Roger Dooley: But there are certainly very ethical and good ways to apply these things. If you are selling software and you find that you can include some customer testimonials for social proof or explain how many users you have, it's totally ethical and that may help you convert more people so that they too can benefit from whatever your product offers. So you definitely want to avoid those dark pattern type behavior science tricks. But at the same time, you can use these tools in a very powerful and ethical way.

Chris Goward: Yeah. Marketing has always had to deal with the question of ethics because any powerful tool in the hands of the wrong person can be used in the wrong way, but it doesn't last as you say, and it doesn't have a longterm benefit. Those who try to use those kinds of tactics end up with ultimately a lower lifetime value from those customers. It doesn't pay off. That's why often we're doing things like when we're running experiments, not only experimenting on the conversion rate, revenue, average order value, increase in benefit directly to the company, but we're also then tracking the customer satisfaction and return rates and the things that lead to longer term results. By tying those two experiments, we're making sure that we control for unintended consequences.

Chris Goward: So, there's a great example recently where we ran an experiment and had that exact result, where we found out that inadvertently in one of our variations we had created some confusion that was causing people to sign up much more to a plan that was higher value, but they didn't realize there were some downsides to the plan that they

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later on found out. So, it was creating some customer dissatisfaction and questions and interactions with the customer service to change back to the other plan.

Chris Goward: By tracking the full experience for the customers, we're able to go back, find the problem on the page and then change it again, which then actually increased conversion rate even more and didn't have a negative effect on returns or customer satisfaction. In fact, it had a much greater improvement to the brand overall. So, that's what I mean by finding the right metric to make sure that you're tracking the right things to get the ultimate benefit for both the customer and the brand.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I think that ... I'm sure Bob Sheldon, would completely agree with you on that, and that I know when you listen to him talk or some of the experts in this field, they constantly emphasize an ethical approach because really, I mean, when you are helping a customer get to a better place and I quote Zig Ziglar often on this that, he felt that your most important tool for persuasion was your own integrity, even though he would give you 20 ways to close a sale and that sounds very manipulative, that, okay, these are just little brain hacks that he's teaching people so they can get the sale and get out the door really fast. But what he emphasized was that, you've got to be doing that to get the customer to a better place.

Roger Dooley: If you were selling one of the products that he sold very early in his career was this high priced cookware and that seems like one of these very high pressure sales type things where people regret the purchase, but he always felt that even a person who did not necessarily have a lot of money, in many cases or in some cases, that purchase

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would get them an emotional state. They would like in the same way that perhaps early in your career you might not have been able to afford a Porsche, but you bought one anyway because you loved the way it looked, the way it made you feel and so on. So was that an economically wise purchase? Well, maybe not, but from an emotional ... was it an emotionally wise purchase? Yeah, maybe it was.

Chris Goward: To that point, you could argue that, perhaps it was an emotionally wise purchase. If we look at the span of human existence and the good feelings that we want to have and ultimately the purpose is to enjoy life perhaps, and so maybe in the end they enjoy their days even more. So who's to judge other than the purchaser of themselves?

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, Ziglar had an example of this woman who did not have a lot of money. She was living in a very poor sort of house, but when she saw her new cookware, tears came into her eyes because this symbolize to her, it's like what she had always wanted. Economically wise purchase maybe not, but in that case, maybe a good purchase anyway. One thing I imagine Chris is that, some of our listeners might think, "Well, okay, it's great if you're Amazon, you've got such tremendous website volume that you can start an AB test and a few hours or a few days later, you've got results that you have a very high level of confidence. But what if either you don't have that kind of traffic or if even on a busier website or app, you have an area that a particular product or service or something that just doesn't see that much activity. How do you experiment those conditions?"

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Chris Goward: Yeah, you're right. It's a great benefit if you've got the kind of traffic of the Amazons or the Googles or the Microsofts of the world. They're very fortunate to have that because they have the ability to run a lot of statistical testing. But that's not the only way to get customer insights. So, in every situation there is a way to get an insight about your customer, even if you only have one single customer, you can get some insights about them with the methods of qualitative inquiry. So, what you want to do ... there are many different tools and techniques for gaining customer insights.

Chris Goward: If you look at the outcome and the purpose you're trying to accomplish, which is to understand your customers, understand their needs emotionally and functionally, and find the best ways to communicate those things to them. Then you can take the tool for the job. For example, I've got this matrix, this handy matrix that I can ... In fact, I will share at the webinar, which shows the different techniques that you can use to gain customer insights and when they're appropriate. So, some tools are better at getting quantitative confidence. So for example, AB testing, right? If you run experimentation at high statistical significance, you get very confident results. But you only get the results based on the very narrow questions that you've asked by running two or three variations.

Chris Goward: So you're missing out on a whole depth of context in that experiment. Whereas if you go into a usability lab, you may only be talking to six or 10 of your customers, but you're getting a very deep, rich ability to gather context emotionally. You can see facial expressions, you can see mannerisms, you can ask them questions like a why? They make a decision or do something. So, that's a very

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qualitative, behavioral kind of research. But it doesn't give you high confidence that what you're learning from that applies to all of your audience. Those different tools are best used for different outcomes.

Chris Goward: In fact, the best way of getting the best insights is to use a mix of tools. The mixed method approach, which is sometimes to use usability labs, sometimes quantitative surveys, sometimes AB testing experimentation, sometimes clickstream analytics, web analytics, inquiries, and so whatever you've got available, you want to use those to increase how finally you understand the customer and not just rely on one or the other, but use, if you've got low traffic, use more customer surveys. If you've got high traffic, well, you have a little bit more flexibility on the kinds of tools you can use.

Roger Dooley: You mentioned facial expressions and that brings up a topic near and dear to my heart. That is neuromarketing or consumer neuroscience. Do you see a role for these tools? And they're not all neuroscience tools per se, but they fall under that umbrella of neuromarketing. Obviously got things like EEG for measuring brainwave activity. We've also got facial coding analysis for looking at expressions in an automated or manual way. You've got biometrics, high tracking and different tools. Do these things play a role as well?

Chris Goward: Yeah, absolutely. We've got research teams that are using various tools like that biofeedback to gather rich unspoken feedback that people are using. Yeah, there are different ways of using all of those tools, whether it's remote or in person. Often when you're using those kinds of tools, you've got some limitations, right? You have to

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be in a controlled environment, you've got to have the user's permission, you've got to sometimes hook them up to the equipment. So the benefit is that you're getting subconscious physical responses of that person to whatever stimulus you're giving to them, and that can be really insightful.

Chris Goward: The downside is that, you've taken the mode of their natural environment and you are now putting them into an artificial environment where you're controlling the inputs and outputs, which may have some effect on them. So you want to mix those kinds of neuro and biofeedback mechanisms with other types of tools in this kind of triangulation approach to get to the insights. Right? Mixing those with the quantitative experiments and the qualitative attitudinal feedback as well.

Roger Dooley: What are some of the biggest mistakes you see marketers making today, Chris?

Chris Goward: It's funny. Been in business now since 2007 at WiderFunnel, and before that I had a career in various types of agencies and marketing roles and it's funny to see marketers going through the same patterns where there ... especially I find in North America, marketers are very technology obsessed and they'll look for the next buzzword, they'll go to the next conference and they'll try to hear what people are talking about. Last year they're talking about personalization, now they're talking about artificial intelligence and machine learning and next year apparently they're going to be talking about personification. It's the next wave that's coming. There's all kinds of waves that happen. You remember a CRM back in the day, 15 years ago, where everyone was all

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over this and then social media happened and everyone's all over that.

Chris Goward: What marketers tend to do is get obsessed with checking off the check box rather than really understanding the strategy and where this tactic fits into the overall strategy. So there's technology obsession, I'd say that's happening, and it's especially prevalent in North American. I think it's because that we're so overwhelmed with data. There becomes a belief that, "Oh, if we can just leverage all of this data that's happening, that's trackable, that's appearing, that must be a silver bullet. Like there must be a way to use that to automate our life so that we don't actually have to spend the hard work of thinking about the strategy."

Chris Goward: Whereas in some other areas of the world, I'm finding, as we look at patterns across the world, areas of Europe, even in Nordic countries for example, they don't have as much shopping volume. They don't have as much data, but they're much more in touch with their customer because they do the more in depth qualitative studies because that's all they've got available. So, to your point earlier when you asked about how does a smaller business that doesn't have this much traffic do this work, well, they actually might be in a better position in some ways because they don't have the luxury of having all that data. So they don't become over-reliant on the plentiful resource, but they actually can get more in touch with the customer by using small data. I think the power of small data is often overlooked by marketers.

Roger Dooley: Right. We actually had a Martin Lindstrom on the show talking about his book, Small Data that addresses that

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topic and how observing people sometimes even in their home habitats, so to speak, was more powerful than trying to analyze reams and reams of numbers. That's probably a pretty good place to wrap. Now what I want to do, when we were talking about setting up this conversation, Chris, you offered to do a free webinar for our listeners who wanted to do a deeper dive into using behavioral science, using emotion and so on for growing their business. So, I'm going to let you explain a little bit more about what you have in mind.

Chris Goward: Yeah. Well, it came out of the conversation that you and I had and I thought it would be really relevant to this audience. So what I have is a topic that I'd love to present that's how to use the science of emotion to drive conversions and propel growth. So, what we've been doing is experimenting with various behavioral science frameworks, techniques, and tools that can be used with all kinds of businesses and all kinds of contexts, not just high volume shoppers, but can use these frameworks and techniques to create more impactful experiments. Use the tools to understand your customer, become a customer obsessed business and ultimately drive growth.

Roger Dooley: Well, that sounds really useful. Just for our listeners who may have attended a free webinar and found it was a sales pitch for a video series, this is meant to be informative and useful and not a sales pitch, correct?

Chris Goward: Absolutely, yeah. I've been doing webinars and conferences, presentations like this for 10 years, hundreds of events, and I keep being invited back because I know that I learned early on that, an overt sales pitch is not the right thing to do. That's not actually what

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benefits anyone. I'm here to share case studies and frameworks that we've developed because I love seeing the industry grow and adopt some of the best thinking that I'm finding from the customers that we're working with, as well as the research that we're conducting across many different leading brands.

Chris Goward: One or two companies might end up wanting to learn more and work with us and that's great. Others who aren't the right fit for us, will take these frameworks and use them in their own businesses, and that's also great. I love hearing back from people years later, that said, "The things you've written and spoken about really changed the direction of my career and helped me to get better results." That's really personally satisfying. So I'm looking forward to taking this one forward.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, anyone who is interested in that webinar, can go to rogerdooley.com/wider, W-I-D-E-R, rogerdooley.com/wider, and that'll take you to a place where you can get more information about Chris and his event. So, it sounds really exciting, I think Chris and I'm going to tune in myself for sure. Let me remind everybody that we are speaking with Chris Goward, founder and CEO of WiderFunnel and author of *You Should Test That*. Chris, I hope everyone will check out the webinar, but folks who just want to connect with you in some other way, how can people find you?

Chris Goward: So, we're always publishing content on our blog at widerfunnel.com. So it's widerfunnel.com/blog, as well as on social, of course I'm at Chris Goward on the various social channels and at WiderFunnel as well. We'd love to hear from readers and followers and listeners, so if you

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have questions and topics that you're interested in as well, feel free to reach out. So, thanks again Roger for hosting this, and it's always a great conversation with you and look forward to speaking with you again.

Roger Dooley: Well, definitely, and we will link to those places and to any other resources we spoke about on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast, and we'll have a text version of our conversation there too. Chris, thanks for being on the show, it's been great and let's not wait six years next time.

Chris Goward: Absolutely. Thanks a lot, Roger.

Thank you for tuning into this episode of Brainfluence. To find more episodes like this one, and to access all of Roger's online writing and resources, the best starting point is RogerDooley.com.

And remember, Roger's new book, *Friction*, is now available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and book sellers everywhere. Bestselling author Dan Pink calls it, "An important read," and Wharton Professor Dr. Joana Berger said, "You'll understand Friction's power and how to harness it."

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