WordPress Vanity Email Plugin Provides New Path to Domain Name Revenue - With Ian Clark

Watch the full video at:
http://www.domainsherpa.com/ian-clark-wpvanityemail-interview/

There are many ways to monetize a domain name - cash parking, affiliate links, eCommerce, advertising, even lead generation. Today we are going to learn about a new way for you to easily sell email addresses on your domain name, and we will learn how you can do it in WordPress - the Content Management System powering more than 57 million websites around the world. Stay tuned to learn all the details.

Three messages before today's interview educates and motivates you.

First, if you're a domain name investor, don't you have unique legal needs that require domain name technical know-how and industry experience? That's why you need David Weslow of Wiley Rein. Go search for David Weslow on DomainSherpa, watch his interview and you can see for yourself that he can clearly explain issues, can help you with buy/sell agreements, deal with website content issues and UDRP actions, and even help you write your website terms and conditions. David Weslow is the lawyer to call for Internet legal issues. See for yourself at NewMediaIP.com.

Second, managing multiple domain name marketplace and auction site accounts is a pain. Inevitably, you forget to sign into one and lose a great domain…or worse. Now imagine using a single, simple-to-use and comprehensive control panel to manage all your accounts. That's Protrada. You can setup search filters, analyze domains, automate bidding, list domains for sale, and buy domains across all major marketplaces. Protrada also has a new semantic engine that builds Google-friendly websites with rich content and network feeds. Sign up at Protrada.com to get 20 free credits and start building and monetizing your domains today.

Finally, if you have questions about domain names, where should you go to ask them? The answer is DNForum.com. Not only is DN Forum the largest domain name forum in the world, but it's the best. You can learn about

domain names and the industry, buy and sell domain names, talk about domain name news, and meet other domainers just like yourself. Register for a free DN Forum account and begin advancing your skills and knowledge today. And when you do signup, send me a friend request so we can connect.

Here's your program.

Michael Cyger: Hey everyone. My name is Michael Cyger, and I'm the Publisher of DomainSherpa.com - the website where you come to learn how to become a successful domain name entrepreneur and investor directly from the experts.

Monetizing your domains is hard work. Selecting a business model, executing against your plan, reviewing and refining; all the while focused on your earnings, or your income after expenses.

What if there were an easy way to supplement your income on your domain name assets, whether they were developed or not? That is the focus of today's interview - how you can easily sell email addresses from your domain name.

Let me give you a couple of examples. If you go to Chicago.com today, you will see that your browser is redirected to Identity.Chicago.com, where you can purchase, say, Michael@Chicago.com. Josh Metnick, Owner of Chicago.com and Ammar Kubba, a past Domain Sherpa and CEO of Thought Convergence are working together to develop that platform. Take a spin over to Identity.Brookline.com, and you can see what Doug Tanger is doing there also using @Identity Email Platform to sell @Brookline.com email addresses.

Today's guest has developed a WordPress Plugin that does something similar to @Identity. We are joined by Ian Clark, President of GardenMedia.ca. Ian, welcome to the show.

Ian Clark: Thank you for giving me this opportunity, Michael.

Michael: It is great to have you here. Ian, we chatted by Skype yesterday and you said that you just launched this WordPress Plugin, literally, yesterday, November 1st. How was the launch?

Ian: It was very good. It was very well received and it was launched on Adam Dicker's TheArtOfTheName.com. Adam did the Promo Intro for me, which was quite good. I was very appreciative of that. Sales have been very good. We have just been overwhelmed at the time. And I (Unclear 02:39.2) a lot of questions on operation and strategy, and it has been well received.

Michael: Great. Can you describe your WordPress Plugin? What does it do exactly?

Ian: Well, what it does is, it allows you to take this Plugin, activate it within WordPress, and then you can drag it to your sidebar of your functioning WordPress Site. From there, it will allow the user, at the front end, to go in and can test to see if their desired username is available. And there is a certain white list. As far as the Admin concern, you can set a white list and a black list. So, you can filter certain name that you do want to sell and some that you do not.

Michael: Okay, excellent. So, basically, it gives me the opportunity, like if I wanted to allow you, Ian, to reserve Ian@DomainSherpa.com. It would allow you to come to DomainSherpa.com, type in a username that you would like to reserve; it will check to see if it is reserved, if it is available, or if it is on a black list - I will not sell it. And if it is available, then you can actually purchase it for whatever price I sell.

Ian: That is correct. What happen is, any administration panel, we allow the developer to set their email - their PayPal address - and allow them to set two types of pricing. One is a standard price. That price would reflect what they would call a Bob@MyDomain.com or Frank@MyDomain.com. And then, we also have a premium listing; and that pulls the information directly from the white list. So, essentially, if they wanted Lawyer@RichmondHillLawyers.com, that would be considered a white listed name and there would be a premium price. So you can set a standard price and a premium price. Further down, we allow you to set certain

currencies - Canadian, the Euro, and the US Dollar. And then we actually have, when the user - I guess the web visitor - is looking for a desired username, we do a little bit of a sort. The first thing is we see what is taken, what is in the black list, what is in the white list, and then we serve up the proper PayPal payment process - the proper PayPal button - to facilitate that to the payment process. And, from there, it takes that information and puts it into the user's area of WordPress.

Michael: Awesome. And I just realized we have not said the name of the WordPress Plugin. Can you give the name for the users?

Ian: It is WPvanityemail.

Michael: And, for those not into the WordPress Community, WP stands for WordPress. So, WPvanityemail. Great. And of course, everyone has heard of WordPress. I mentioned before that it now powers more than 57 million websites around the world. I think it runs something like seventeen or twenty percent of the top websites in the world. Sites like CNN.com, TechCrunch.com, and CBSSports. But what most people do not understand, Ian, is what a Plugin is. Can you quickly describe what a Plugin is and why you developed a Plugin?

Ian: Well, essentially, WordPress does quite a bit for people. It is very easy to use; and it was a clear choice for me for those reasons you mentioned earlier to develop under that platform. A Plugin is a very small snippet. Not very large in size. And it can be downloaded from the WordPress.org Repository, or from my website. And it gets installed into Plugins Directory. The first thing you do is you log into your WordPress Admin. You activate the Plugin. From there, you would go into the Admin Panel and then you would do certain settings. So, essentially, you are setting in your names and all the information that you need, and then you click save. So, now that you have done that, the Plugin has now got the content in it that is required. But you need to actually put it on a public page. So, you go into the Appearance and you scroll to Widgets. And what this Plugin is, is basically a small little snippet or a widget. And you drag that widget to the top corner or the sidebar of WordPress in the Admin Panel. And that places it in the top; and WordPress, historically, has categories. You can put cloud tags, meta tags,

and all sorts of information and directories, and your latest post, recent posts, and favorite posts. All those sorts of things go in the sidebar, so it is very easy. You just drag it over and drop it right there. As soon as you do that, it is now part of the public part of the site. So now the web visitor can see that and can interact with it.

Michael: So, a Plugin, if I understand everything you are talking about, is basically just a piece of software code that extends the functionality of WordPress; and you have extended it by allowing vanity email addresses to be reserved and purchased.

Ian: Well, that is correct, but the thing too is the reasons for doing it were simple in that it just adds another revenue stream. It is kind of a neat package. It is does not really require, what I call, a lot of heavy lifting.

Michael: Yeah.

Ian: It is a small item. It goes in and it does exactly what its intended purpose is. It just puts another use to that domain name that you have invested in.

Michael: Exactly. How did you come up with the idea for this software, Ian?

Ian: Well, it goes back. There are two reasons actually. One was historical. It was history. I mean a long time ago, in 1990, I uprooted my family from Toronto, and we settled in a small town in Northern Ontario, population twelve hundred. Back then, I mean cows outnumbered people in that town. But, essentially, I got involved with some of the festivals in town, and I thought I was doing my part to be a new citizen, and they asked me to build the website for their festival. When I went to one of the Committee Meetings, they were not sure about me. I mean I was from out of town; I was a city person. So, to them, the Internet equaled porn, and they thought essentially that anything to do with the Internet was porn; and that is all they thought. So, they really were not too receptive in the beginning to this guy coming from the city to a small town; pitching a website for their small community festival that probably brings six thousand people over a two-day period. They did finally allow me to build them a website and, because we are talking 1993 that I did this for them, communication involved people phoning people.

Well, we had a party line. So, in that town, it was not secure. I mean people could listen in on your conversations and there was a certain amount of gossip that went on in community business. So, you would have to get into the car and drive to somebody's home. So, I essentially set the website up. I set them all up with an email address, and so that became our de facto way to communicate. I mean word got around that the Chairperson had Chairperson@(Unclear 9:42.9).ca. So it went around and, essentially, that was the beginnings of WPvanityemail. I took on two neighboring towns and, before long, I had sixty residents in Sunderland with their FirstName@Sunderland.ca, and I had over one hundred in the neighboring towns - Cannington and Beaverton. And I still own those domains to this day.

Michael: So, back in 1993. I am trying to remember what I was doing back in 1993, and I know I was on email, but I was also at GE. And we were using like a program called BT2000, like Business Talk 2000. I do not think I even had a regular email. Maybe I did at the time. I cannot remember, but yeah, this was probably something entirely new to these people; maybe Yahoo email was around. Do you remember if Yahoo was around at that time?

Ian: Michael, if I am looking at my timeline here and I just think maybe I am a little wrong in that. I mean I know my first pitch at the website. When I first went to the Committee Meeting and I did make my pitch to have a website and do these sorts of things, that is when I received not a very welcome. It took a number of years before they warmed up to the idea. So, it might have been later in '90 that we actually did put a website up and we did give them email addresses. We were in an under serviced area as far as communications were concerned, so we did not really get high speed for a long time. So, I think once we got closer to high speed that is the time it happened. So it could have been a little later in '90 at that point.

Michael: Yeah. Well, you had pointed Wayne Nelson, our Producer, to an Archive.org screenshot of Sunderland.ca from the Internet Archive. And that was from--

Ian: 2003.

Michael: --2003. Okay. So, if people go to Internet Archive and they type in Sunderland.ca and they look from 2003 - I actually have a Bit.ly quick link to that. If people type in Bit.ly/IanClark, they will automatically be redirected to the 2003 screenshot. What will people see back in 2003 that you were doing?

Ian: Well, I mean, at that time, these residents -- obviously it started out with the Committee members and then it gravitated to some of the town folk. They just had a basic FirstName@Sunderland.ca. I mean it was a good fit. I expanded that to other neighboring areas. So, within time, I had two other towns - Beaverton and Cannington. I own both the .CAs in those towns. So I had over one hundred in those areas.

Michael: So, basically, people would go to the website. They could see that they could log on to their email; and they could probably also request an email address at those accounts?

Ian: Very much so. And they could also check it. (Unclear 12:25.4) had a little bit of a snippet in there that would allow them to return to Sunderland.ca and then read their email right from there. Actually, what it would do is it would just eject them into the actual application. I actually had a hosted solution at that time too.

Michael: Very cool. All right. So let's go back into town. I want to dig into exactly how this Plugin works, but before I do that I want to go back and understand how you got to where you are today. If I look at your LinkedIn profile, Ian, your primary profession for most of your life has been gardening and landscaping. Is that correct?

Ian: It is correct. I spent thirty years as a landscape contractor. I mean, essentially, I really did enjoy the business. Due to some health reasons I could not continue on, otherwise, they were making materials heavier or I was getting older. I just decided to move on into the Internet. It is a little easier to push a mouse around, and that is how I started. So, I have always had a real interest in technology. Well, how I initially started was, I thought: "I could not do construction all my life." I thought I needed to get into the software. I was looking for software to design landscapes for my business, and I did not see anything on the market that I liked. So, what I had done was

I found a program on the Internet called Image Ready, and it was a hairdressing software that allowed you to take a picture of a person and put hairstyles on them. So, I made a phone call and I talked to the developer; and I said, "You know, I really like that idea, but I want to do it for landscaping." So, essentially, we agreed. So I developed a program called LSI. The Company was called LSI Software, but the application was called Landscape Illustrator. And it was an imaging view software program; allowed people to take a photo, contractors bring the photo into the program, drag and drop, bring in plants, and shrubs, and trees, and provide a picture of that house landscaped. And it was well received in a marketplace that we were the only people offering that type of solution for landscapers, and it worked out quite well. I ended up going on the road and we sold it to a lot of Canadian and US users. At our peak, we had, actually, twelve hundred users.

Michael: Wow.

Ian: In Canada and the US using our software.

Michael: And were those paying users?

Ian: Yes, they were. At the time, our software sold for seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Michael: Wow.

Ian: And, again, we were the only ones in it, but it only took a year or two. We ran that whole business for twelve years; there were almost nineteen competitors doing the same thing.

Michael: And what happened to that business, Ian?

Ian: Well, essentially, what happened was, at that time, with our other competitors, Google was actually coming out with their Google Earth initiative. I guess in their impotent wisdom they thought: "Well, we are looking for a program that we can bring into that fold that will allow people to, either through street view or through Google Earth, take pictures of their homes and place them where their home is on Google Earth. So they were

looking for programs that they could buy - companies they could buy - to offer that service to Google users. And we did make a pitch. We were on the short list for that. Google just did not write us that check. Our competitor got it - a Company in the US, called SketchUp. A very good program; very good people. And I think, at the time, that was a better choice for Google. They had a better system that fitted them a lot better than ours. But, again, it was the old story. I was just that close to financial freedom, but yeah. So, the only problem with that was, as Google took that business, SketchUp - that program, SketchUp -, which was seven hundred and fifty dollars as well - so it was right at our price point -, they put it on the Internet for free. So, we really could not compete. And it took two years to wind that business down. We supported our users. All we could really do at that point - we were not really making new sales - was to open up our security and let everybody out. So, our existing user base got one password - one security - and we just supported them up to a certain level of Windows - certain grade of Windows -, and that is where I left.

Michael: Yeah. So, most landscapers and gardeners I know can barely operate email, let alone websites, starting up software, and selling software packaged for hundred of dollars. How did you become so proficient in technology?

Ian: Well, I had this idea of designing landscaping just to serve my landscape business. So, what I was using was a spreadsheet macro to do my estimating. I was using a paintbrush program, called NeoPaint, at the time. And I found a third program that would allow me to quantify my design. Whatever I had done in Paint. It would quantify it and then I could bring that into the spreadsheet and I could come up with an estimate. So I thought this was something I wanted to package into one program; not three. So I went to the Government. There is an application called Connect-IT. And I made a pitch to them and I said, "I need somebody with a bucket full of money to invest in my business." And they did not think I was going to do well. Well, they thought it was a nice idea. So, they were having a Trade Show, where they were bringing investors in with people with ideas. So, they said, "We do not really think you are ready for it. We do not think it is for you." And I said, "Well, how much is it going to cost to put a booth?" And they said it was like three hundred dollars. I said, "Well, I will pay the darn three hundred dollars

and I will go in." So, I did; and I thought: "Well, the only way for me to get noticed in that sort of a Trade Show is to stand out." So, I mean maybe what I lacked in a business model and a business plan I thought I would make up in marketing. So, I am a landscaper. I had a truck. I had a dump truck. I had equipment. So I brought the biggest darn boulder I could find, and I wheeled it right into the hotel. And we put it dollies, we wheeled it in, and I stuck it right in the hallway right in front of our booth, and people had to actually walk around it. I ran a little slideshow of my three things - my spreadsheet macro, my NeoPaint; and I think I did have two interested parties, and I did select one. So, I did actually enter into an agreement with a company. It happened to be a successful businessman. He was retiring as Vice President from Honeywell. He decided to invest in my business, and I signed my intellectual assets to the business - whatever I had done as far as my knowledge. I was an industry insider, as far as landscaping -, and he wrote the check. So, we were twelve to fourteen years in that business. I had a lot of fun. I learned a lot from Bob. And I guess, to answer your question, I learned a lot of stuff from Bob. He was very giving of information, and his background was computers and was programming. So, I learned that from him. So, I refined. As he says, he guided me out of my bad habits into my good habits as far as computers are concerned. They were fun days. We did drive all over the US pitching software, from Boston to Chicago, to Arizona, and all over the United States.

Michael: Yeah. Wow. So, I discovered you through Adam Dicker's blog, which you mentioned earlier - TheArtOfTheName.com. What I want to know is how you know Adam Dicker. How did Adam get the inside track on your WPvanityemail Plugin for WordPress so quickly?

Ian: Well, Adam had purchased some domains from me. And actually, it was funny. When I did join up, a number of years ago, to Adam's forum, there was a classifieds section to buy DNFs. And you need a certain amount of DNFs to raise your membership. So, somebody was selling some DNFs in there and I purchased them, and it happened to be Adam. I guess I purchased some DNFs from Adam; I became a member of the forum. And then, I was pretty heavy in the .CA domains at that time and Adam obviously had his .COMs and all his other stuff. So, I mean he is Canadian. We are both Canadian and we both live in the same general area - same town. We thought

okay. Well, I pitched some domains to him, and he came back and said, "Well, give me a price." So, right off the bat, Adam bought forty-three of my domains. And so, we met in a coffee shop and he had the check there. And it was kind of funny because my wife at the time too. I invested heavily in domains and it was hard for her to comprehend what I was doing. So, having Adam's check and showing her Adam's check was kind of validation, saying: "Well, maybe you are on the right track." I mean, up until then, she was really leery of me and the domaining, and what we were spending on that sort of venture.

Michael: Yeah. And do you remember, back then, how many domains? How long ago was that?

Ian: Well, it would probably be about seven years back.

Michael: Seven years?

Ian: Yeah.

Michael: And so, you were investing heavily into .CA domains before .CA domains were catching on that a lot of domain investors were investing them. What was going through your mind at that time that made you think: "I should invest in .CA domain names"?

Ian: Well, essentially, what happened was - and again, I may be not sure if I am correct on my timeline there -, when the .CAs did come into Canada, you could not get a .CA unless you purchased the provincial code. So, you have .ON, which is Ontario; .AB, which is Alberta. So, all the provinces had their own provincial code, and then you had the country code. So, if you wanted Landscaping, you would get Landscaping.on.ca. Unless you had a company or a business in very province of Canada could you get the .CA. So, at that time, we were buying ON.CAs. And then, the story is you got basically first right of refusal of just the .CA if you owned the provincial codes. That is how it started out. And then, I could not really get a .CA at that time. I had a number of ON.CA. So, around the time that they had changed that ruling and then basically anybody could get a .CA was the time I met up with Adam

and, at that time, we decided okay. He purchased forty-three of my domains and he wrote me a nice little check, and that is how it started.

Michael: So how many domain names do you own today in your portfolio?

Ian: Well, I have got thirteen hundred domains.

Michael: Wow.

Ian: I would say sixty percent are .CAs; the rest are .COMs.

Michael: Great.

Ian: And I am heavy in the garden and landscape niche.

Michael: Okay. And do you sell domain names on a regular basis? Is that part of your regular income that you are selling your inventory through some of the marketplaces that are online?

Ian: Yes, I do. Well, what I try to do is I try to offer more of a solution than a domain. So, let's say, for instance, I will take a geo keyword - a good geo keyword - domain. I will put a site on it. And what I will do is I will try to get it ranked. I mean I will try to get it up in Google. I will have some articles written - keyword rich articles - about the topic and I will do some analytics. I will do some stuff to that domain to add value to it. And then I want to sell it as a solution. So, when I market it to potential companies, like it is usually a lot of geo services - geo lawyer, geo plumber, eye care; I find a couple different ones. Landscaping; gardening. I have got quite a few of those. And I find, typically, if I sell just the domain alone, a lot of them say: "Well, we already do have a website, and we have spent thousands of dollars to have that website developed; what am I going to do with this domain?" So, my solution now is: "Well, hey, I am offering you a solution. Here is a domain. It is ranked. It does have pertinent content in it. Just run it as a compliment to your existing site." Put information on there that is timely. Like if it is a lawyer site, how to select a lawyer; what do you need to bring to your first visit with your lawyer? So you can put a lot of things in that site - in that WordPress blog - that make you look like the good guy. You are providing a

service. You are providing really pertinent information on how to deal with lawyer; how to select a lawyer. And then, you can have a banner at the header, or the footer, or the sidebar that points to your business. So, it is just a win-win deal. You are providing a really quality backlink for yourself.

Michael: Yeah.

Ian: So that worked successfully, and a lot of my domains I do sell that way. Actually, I sold a domain to a lawyer. Actually, he had not purchased, but he was looking at purchasing, but he was dragging his feet. So what I realized is - I looked at his website and I had seen that he had two neighboring towns. So, he was not only (Unclear 25:14.9). He had an office in (Unclear 25:17.5) in Nepean. So I bought NepeanLawyer.com. Well, actually .CA - NepeaninCanada.ca. And then I got back to him and said, "For an extra five hundred dollars, you can buy the three." So, that was enough to close the deal.

Michael: That is a great tactic.

Ian: (Unclear 25:33.3).

Michael: That is great. All right. So let's come back to the WordPress software. So, why develop a Plugin for WordPress rather than a software platform, like @Identity is doing, when you clearly have a ton of software experience? You could have gone any which direction in developing this software.

Ian: Well, for me, I wanted to make something that was good for everyone. I mean not everyone has a Boston.com or LosAngeles.com Not everybody has that type of a domain. And I mean I wanted to service people that have all levels of domaining. So, from the guy that owns a blog and one domain to a guy that has hundreds of domains that is a little unhappy with his earnings that he is getting from parking and looking to start developing some of these properties and get a better revenue stream. So, like one version - one site version - of WPvanityemail cost $29.99. I consider it a bargain. Multiple sites - the price gets down as low as six dollars per site. So it is affordable plus scalable. So, it is not only city names. I mean there are fun and stupid names.

There are other areas of this that are maybe untouched. First and last name. (Unclear 26:50.8) name. Like I own Stonemason, so to have Bill@Stonemason.ca. Or I have got NaturalPools.com, which is kind of a niche - gardening industry. Garden landscape pools. It all goes hand in hand, but I mean somebody could have Installer@NaturalPools.com or Landscaper@NaturalPools.com, or Bill@NaturalPools. So, I thought occupations were important. First and last names obviously. I did sell a LastName.ca. Actually, how I did that was I went on LinkedIn and I just did a sort for people that had the last name that were from Canada in LinkedIn. I found a successful person - businessman. I was not able to get his information from LinkedIn, but I knew where he worked. He was the CEO of a big Corporation. So I sent him a nice little email. I found his email on the corporate site. I sent him an email and said, "I have your LastName.ca." So, he snapped it up for his grandkids; and, to him, it was a good fit.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. And did you set him up with a WordPress site that also had this Plugin for email addresses, or it was just the domain name?

Ian: It was just the domain name at that time. And being that I had the history. There is a certain amount of history of offering vanity-type emails. There was a long time that I let it go. I did not really keep it up, but I thought I have changed. My solution now is a solution rather than a domain. So, if I can sell the whole thing together, sometimes it takes a lot of questions out of the equation. People feel more comfortable with that.

Michael: Sure. So, let's say that I wanted to offer email addresses to all the past Domain Sherpas that I have had on DomainSherpa.com. So I want to offer you Ian@DomainSherpa.com. I can purchase your Plugin for $29 for my one site.

Ian: Yeah.

Michael: And then, because I run on WordPress, I go into the Plugins, and I install it, and I get it up and running. And I say that my price is zero, let's say. So, then you go in and you can sign up for an account. And then, what actually happens when you go into the system and you sign up and you

submit your order, regardless of the price that I set for an email address? What happens at that point?

Ian: Okay. So, you are thinking from the point of the end user?

Michael: Correct.

Ian: Well, essentially what happens is, when the end user does get a successful choice as for a desired username, up will pop a PayPal. As soon as they click that PayPal button, it will send them to PayPal to finish off the payment part. It will also add them to the user area. And the third thing it does is it triggers off an auto response email that will send them the information that they entered plus the information required to set that up as an add-on as an alias to Gmail, Hotmail, and all the different services. Okay?

Michael: Okay.

Ian: It is triggered. That is all done instantly, as soon as they are registered as a user within that WordPress site. Then, what the developer has to do is something they have to do. They actually have to go into their hosting control panel and they have to set that account up. Now, I have qualified that on the website. Now, the reason is, is essentially a Plugin is something that I give to you. It is remote. It is going on your server. So, you may have Plesk, CPanel, or Direct Admin. I cannot really write an API for something that I do not have control of. And it is security issues and it is a lot of things, and you do not really want to make that call from within WordPress. So, for me, essentially, we tried to do everything we could within this Plugin and automate as much as we could. So the only manual portion would be to go into your hosting control panel, add their email account, and then that is it. There really is no interaction required within the end user anymore because everything is spelled out in that auto response email message.

Michael: Okay. So the auto response I set up and it says: "Go to mail.DomainSherpa.com and your user name is Ian@DomainSherpa.com, and your password is whatever you specified when you signed up," and so that automatically goes out to them. Now, I need to hustle as the domain owner and go set up the account before you try and sign in.

Ian: Yeah, correct. And you know what? I think it is a small task. I mean, obviously, in a perfect world I would like to do that for you. It cannot be done in a situation with a Plugin. It is more of a hosted solution. Like if I was hosting your WordPress site and I was saying: "Here is a hosted solution. My Plugin is already preinstalled," I could certainly have the API because I have got access to my CPanel; that could be done. But essentially, I did not want you to have that option. I mean, again, I am dealing with the average domainer here. I wanted them to have lots of flexibility. I mean I have three different web servers that I use. I mean I have a Baby Croc Account with HostGator, and I have two PPSs; and I would imagine some of the other domainers are similar. So, I just wanted to sell something; my fee is based on the number of sites it goes on.

Michael: Sure. So, in my automated email, I could say: "Check in after four hours from receipt of this email. Your email will not work until four hours from now." So I have got four hours now, and that is easy enough. Or you can say twenty-four hours, so I have got enough time to go in and set it up. And I use Gmail as my backend, so I can easily go to Google Apps, sign in as DomainSherpa, and add an account under DomainSherpa. So that is all pretty easy to do. Now, let's follow through on this scenario, Ian. When you go and sign up on DomainSherpa for an email address - and let's say that I have set the price at ten dollars -, is that a one-time fee of ten dollars or is that a recurring fee of ten dollars? How does that work? How does your system allow?

Ian: Well, it is a one-time fee. Now, again, it is qualified that is an annual fee. Now, I mean the biggest problem is, again, I cannot put a Subscribe button on. So let's say they do type in a successful desired username and it comes up with the PayPal button. The PayPal button is Buy Now. I cannot put a Subscribe button because that would mean I have to go into your PayPal account and make a subscribe button. On the fly, I can only make a Buy Now; not a Subscribe.

Michael: Okay.

Ian: So there are things that we are working on. I mean there is no question. I do have some solutions coming up in the short term that will solve that somewhat, but I guess really what I am saying is the average domainer, whether small or large, there is some manual task to it. I think that as long as you qualify with your end user that there is going to be a little bit of a lag time before I go in and I actually make that account in my hosting control panel; and yes, you are going to have to do a little bit of work in Gmail. Once that is done, the heavy lifting done by Gmail, and Yahoo mail and Hotmail. And basically it is up to you to look at your users and send them a recurring notice. At that point, you can go in and send them a Subscription button.

Michael: Sure. Okay. And so, you might be coming out, in the future, with the option to Subscribe and pay yearly. Right now it is just a one-time pay. If somebody buys that software today, Ian, for $29 to install on their website and you later come out with an improvement to your Plugin that allows for annual subscriptions or some new feature that maybe you will come up with tomorrow, will they have access to that new feature or do they need to purchase the software again?

Ian: No, absolutely. They will have access. How it works, with WordPress, there is a repository, and there is also a subversion. So, every time I put up a new Plugin, I put it at WordPress.org. And then, essentially, you will log into your admin at WordPress; there will be a little button that says there is an upgrade for one of your Plugins. You click on it and you can upgrade right from within your WordPress panel. So, when you buy one license that is perpetual. Last a lifetime, but it is pinned to one domain because, as soon as you put that registration code in, we do an outcall to my server to validate it. Once it is validated, you do not see that again. You can always go into the panel > saved. It just takes that whole entry box out because it is now a validated solution.

Michael: Got you. All right. So, do you have any recommended email system that would work well with your program, Ian? Let's say that the end user has a website, like DomainSherpa. I do not have a hosted email account. Do you recommend a certain platform that I can go to and use for DomainSherpa.com from now on so that I can easily sell and add new email

addresses to it? But if I do it with Google Apps, it is going to be fifty bucks a year per user.

Ian: Well, see, you can actually change you MX Records, and some will allow you one hundred email addresses. So you could go to Yahoo or Gmail, and you could get up to one hundred addresses; two with a business account. But obviously, if your domain is hosted at DomainSherpa.com, do you have CPanel? Because if you have CPanel, then you basically can add them as a add-on email right there. You do not really need a thing. For instance, you do not really need to change MX Records or nothing. You just basically want your hosting control panel. Go into CPanel and go down and add them as an email. That is it. And then, whether they use Outlook, we have provided instructions for Outlook. Sometimes I have mapped. Changed the MX Records and have mapped them to people for Blackberrys and different things. So, sure.

Michael: So the instructions for Blackberrys, or Outlook, or mail on my iPhone are all just applications that access my mail system. And the mail system that I am currently using on DomainSherpa.com is Google Apps. So I am using Gmail through the Google App System as my email box. But it costs me, if I want to go to a business account, fifty dollars per user per year. So, it is not a great solution for something like that unless I could figure out a way to charge people much more than fifty dollars per year.

Ian: Well, we have got quite a few people on different accounts, and I understand what you are saying. As far as answering what services, I do have people in Gmail Services. Did you map your MX Records?

Michael: I did. I mapped my MX Records over to Google Apps.

Ian: Okay. Well, like in some of the accounts, I have not. You got to remember it is user centric; not domain centric. So, basically, let's say you have Mail@DomainSherpa.com. When people buy and email address from you and receive the auto response, obviously you have changed those mail records. I mean they are changed now. So, if that person has a Gmail Account, they just basically go into Gmail. It does not really cost you as far

as that is concerned because they are going into their Gmail and just adding it as an alias. It is just an alias.

Michael: They are adding it as an alias. Right. But when somebody emails to Ian@DomainSherpa.com, for example, it has to go through my system.

Ian: Actually, you are correct. You are the exception in the fact that you have changed your MX Records. If you did not and you left in CPanel as far your Mail.DomainSherpa.com, then for sure. Then it is just done as an alias through the thing. But considering you have changed your MX Records it does not apply that way. But if you had not and you are using Mail@DomainSherpa, then yes, they add it as an alias and it is done.

Michael: Okay. So, I do not know the process of the @Identity Platform very well. I had them Ammar Kubba on here earlier in the year, which I mentioned earlier, and he talked a little bit about it, but really, it seems like it is a yearly charge for a domain name, like Ian@Chicago.com, but they do not actually manage the email system for users. They actually just allow you to point that email address at another system. Are you familiar at all with how their system works?

Ian: No, I am not.

Michael: Okay. And so, that is not fair of me to ask you then how your compares to them. I just need to have Josh Metnick from Chicago.com come on the show and actually explain the difference of how his operates. So, yours is clear. You set up an email address through your account and you provide people access to that, and you sell it to them right now at a one-time basis; maybe in the future on a recurring basis.

Ian: Yeah, and you are correct. Just for a simple layman terms, if they have a simple hosting account, even a HostGator Account is excellent for these sorts of things. It is quite seamless in that regard.

Michael: Great. And what kind of price points have you seen work on some of the domain names that you have it installed on?

Ian: Well, it depends. I mean a good geo keyword I would say one hundred to one hundred and fifty dollars a year. If it is a white list name, I have seen two hundred and fifty to three hundred. I know some people. Adam has got a very good collection of domains. He has got Canadian.com. So, I am not sure what Adam is going to charge in that regard, but it could be a couple hundred dollars. So I think that is a good price point. I mean obviously people can go get free emails everywhere they want, but they cannot get this type of email. I think having a good email address adds a little bit of credibility to you and it says a lot. I mean I look at vanity emails like vanity license plates. Essentially, it says a lot about the owner, and the owner can make a statement through that; and they renew every year. So, between a vanity license plate and an email address, the same thing applies.

Michael: Yeah, definitely.

Ian: Same principles apply.

Michael: Definitely. And so, I wanted to make the point. I am not sure if you have actually sold any email addresses on domain names that are parked, but it is possible to do that, isn't it?

Ian: Well, no. See, the problem is, when you park a domain, essentially, it is at the parking company's control because you change your DNS records to them. So you do not have any mail options. There is nothing. For what I offer, you need to have a working, functioning WordPress site. That is it. That is about the only requirement. So, that is how my Plugin works, but to run an email service I think you really need to have it set up on a server and there needs to be something there because, again, it is a remote situation. The parking company could do it, but you could not.

Michael: Okay. I am sure there is a lot of Domain Sherpa audience that might chime in. I am just thinking out loud, but I am sure if you parked it at GoDaddy. I am more familiar with Frank Schilling's new system - Internet Traffic -, where you can actually control that little banner at the top that says: "Go buy it here," and it takes you to the InternetTraffic.com or Domain Name Sales Website. You can actually modify that top banner to say: "If you want to buy it, go here. If you want to buy an @Domain.com name, go here," and

you could maybe take it to a main website, where you sell just that domain name. You might have to modify your Plugin, and maybe that goes against your copyright.

Ian: Well, you know what? Really what I wanted was an ease of use. I mean essentially, I really think if you have got a functioning WordPress site with some content and you put a little bit of effort into that WordPress site, this is just an add-on. And purely Plugin equal add-on. You can very easily drag it in there and you are in business. And there are some little things in it that you need to do. I am in the process of documenting them as far as I can; and we are constantly going to try to get more automation into this thing, but basically that is it. I mean it is simple. I did not want to be too complex with it, but right now it does require a functioning WordPress and site. And that is about the only requirement at this point.

Michael: All right. Makes sense. So, geo domains, short white label-type domains, and generic domain names you would say are the best ones to install this type of Plugin?

Ian: No, I would say first names would be good, last names, occupation-type domains, and fun and stupid-type domains. PullMyFinger.com. Those sorts of things. CoolBeans. Those things. Things that kids say that are hip and trendy. Those are things that I would find that would really do well. And I think city ones are obviously good, and I mean I have got a lot of Town.ca - small town .CAs. Population 2500 to 4000. Not big areas, but fairly proud residents, and maybe they would go for it. For me, I have got about one hundred and forty domains that I am in the process of putting through my WordPress Plugin. So, I mean all of them may not fire as far as getting buyers, but some will. And I mean, even if you get one person pays for one email address that pays for the cost of the Plugin. I am a smaller type domainer, so I thought that this would suit a greater audience for me.

Michael: Yeah. Well, it seems like a great solution. I know many of the Domain Sherpa audience know that I live on Bainbridge Island, right across the Puget Sound from Seattle, and I own BainbridgeIsland.com, which the Castello Brothers and Elliot Silver convinced me over time to purchase and convert into a directory. And we have a print magazine for the town that we

also run, and I think there would be a lot of citizens that would love to have a Name@BainbridgeIsland.com that shows their affinity to the place that we love so much rather than a Something@Gmail.com or @Yahoo.com. So I am definitely going to be trying it. A couple of ideas for you that I will throw out, Ian, allowing me to set a premium domain name to be anything without a period, and lower price domain name to be anything with a period. So, for example, Ian.Clark would be a hundred dollars. But if you just wanted Ian - no period - in there, it would a two hundred dollar purchase.

Ian: Yeah.

Michael: Or maybe character counts. Anything over seven characters is one hundred dollars; and anything seven characters and under is two hundred dollars.

Ian: Yeah. Well, those are good suggestions, and I will certainly keep that in mind because I am going to be improving this constantly. In fact, now that we have wrapped up Version 1.9, we are already on the next version. So, we have already got things in place for the next one.

Michael: Awesome. And when you say we, is it mainly you doing the programming, or do you have other people that do programming for you?

Ian: I have a programmer I work closely with.

Michael: Great.

Ian: And we have a good relationship in that we can get things done quickly turned around. And if there are any problems, like we did have one user. See, ninety-nine percent of the web servers allow outbound calls. So, when you put our registration code, it needs to call back to our server for validation. Well, he did not have that option so he had to call his hosting company. So, he was concerned, but we tracked it down and we found a solution to be his hosting company. So, he took a support ticket; got that solved.

Michael: Great.

Ian: But I mean we are right on top of any type of support. I mean it is a new business. We launched just recently. I mean the idea has been there, as you can see, since 2003. I did not really come to any realization that I needed to do this. There was no outside influence to it. I mean I had done it in the past. I knew I would do it again. There was a little bit of a lull from when I started to when I picked it up, but I think the delivery method of a Plugin is the way to go. I mean I look to bring more of these Plugins out. And maybe one thing I do like to say is the reason for this, as far as the business is concerned, is I have a spreadsheet like many domainers that has hundreds of categories in it. There is your legal names; your two-character; three-characters; premium; brandables; everything. So, the list goes on and on and on of how you categorize your domains. Well, for me, I thought: "Well, maybe that is not the right way." So I took all those domains and did them by the principles of development. So I changed it all. So I got down to eight columns, and my first column said email solution. So, right now you are at my first column. I mean I know that there are seven more columns that I have yet to define, and I have started defining them, but I know that, in one column, I was able to take 120 or 130 of my domains, put them in that column, and say that is the solution for that particular thing. So, that, to me, was important because I look at that spreadsheet every day and I go: "Oh my God, how am I going to?" You cut and paste it here; you move it over there, and then you find yourself moving it over to another column. This way they all went in there. Now, there are all kinds of stuff. There is a mish-mash of everything, but it fits the email solution perfectly. So, for me, that was 120 solutions solved. So now we are rolling out different sites and we are installing the Plugin. So, that, to me, was important.

Michael: Great. Well, and I am sure that is a great tip for other domain investors as well who have their spreadsheets and another column may be email development, and take a look at their opportunities and see if one of them affords a WordPress developed website, or if they have a WordPress developed website, just adding on the email addresses and trying that out. It is a great idea. I look forward to see what is coming out in future development of the roadmap, Ian. If you have a follow-up question, please post it in the comments below, and we will ask Ian to come back and answer as many as he can. If people want to follow you, Ian, I believe you are on Twitter at @GardenCA. Is that correct?

Ian: Yeah. Garden.C on Twitter. And if I can say one thing, Michael, before closing. I am kind of glad I am in this industry - the domaining industry - because I think a lot of the big players in this industry are very giving of their time. So, I did want to single out a couple. I mean Adam has been very giving of his time, and I think he is approachable in the fact that he does listen to what I have to say. I mean it is a little bit of giving back and forth, but he has definitely been a good mentor in that regard. And there have been some people on Adam's forum - DNF Forum - that have been supportive too. One particular is Stewie. He has actually offered up some timely advice for me. So, I am appreciative of the support that I have gotten from people because I did donate thirty years of business to the gardening industry. And you had mentioned earlier maybe gardeners typically are not that computer literate; and that is correct, but I find that I donated thirty years to that industry and I put a lot of heart and soul in that industry, but there really has not been a lot of support from them. A lot of the big players in the industry never realized when I was pitching the Internet and any solutions, and my iPhone, and my iPad Apps, they thought I was blowing smoke up their butt. I mean, really, they did not take me seriously, but I think what I am getting from domainers as a whole is I am getting support. I think these people are saying: "Well, Ian, maybe you are way off track." So, I mean there was a good sounding board there. So, I think that kind of support is needed. So I am appreciate of that. I am in this business and that those big players are helpful.

Michael: Yeah, I agree wholeheartedly. There are nay-sayers in every industry, but this is one industry where there are more constructive people who will give you support, give you advice, and give you their time, which is some of the most valuable assets that we have; and it is a very welcoming and giving community. I agree wholeheartedly. I also want to point out that you do have a Facebook Page. If people prefer Facebook instead of Twitter to follow what is going on, you have a Facebook Page at WP-Vanity-Email. I was number two to like that one. I am not sure if you were number one.

Ian: Oh yeah. Well, I was number one.

Michael: All right. And if people go to Bitly.com/WP-Vanity, it will quick direct them over there. If you are signed into Facebook, you can just click the like button, and then you will get all the updates that Ian has.

Ian Clark, thank you for coming on the show, telling us about your new WordPress Plugin for vanity email addresses, and thank you for being a Domain Sherpa.

Ian: Well, thank you for having me, Michael.

Michael: My pleasure. Thank you all for watching. We'll see you next time.

Watch the full video at:
http://www.domainsherpa.com/ian-clark-wpvanityemail-interview/