

# How to Select a System for Anything and Be Successful

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

**Chris**: All right, Kenneth Vogt, thanks for joining me. First, if you don't mind, would you tell me a little bit about your background so that the person on the other end of this podcast gets an idea of who I'm speaking to today?

**Kenneth**: Sure, I'd be happy to, Chris. I'm one of those people you'd call a lifelong entrepreneur. And yes, I have had some stints in a more structured corporate kind of environment, but the fact is I keep going back to entrepreneurship. And I really do enjoy working with companies that are starting up but have big plans and those that have gotten to the first stage and want to get to the next stage.

**Chris**: Excellent. So let's jump right in here. The problem we're talking about today is adopting systems, so whether that is a marketing automation system, a CRM, or even a platform for your marketing such as Twitter, or LinkedIn, or a blog. How can companies set themselves up to do those things right?

**Kenneth**: Well, one of the first things that I would suggest is find somebody that's getting the results that you want to get and do your best to mimic how they're getting those results. In many cases, people are very open about these things. They will tell you exactly what their systems are. And that's just a good starting place.

**Chris**: Excellent. I guess if they go through that process with you and they're open enough about it, you're going to be able to tell whether what you've seen is actually real or not, right? But . . .

**Kenneth**: Yes.

**Chris**: You wouldn't want to go mimic somebody who you think is doing something right when the results behind it, if you couldn't find out, if the results behind it weren't.

**Kenneth**: Well, I think we have to start with results. So don't start with what you hope the results are. Those folks aren't really worth copying. You want to . . . and I say copy, mimicking. You don't want to exactly copy. But the fact is, there's plenty of people out there that are broadcasting their results. They're telling everybody. Or there's public information available so you can see that they're succeeding at it.

**Chris**: Right, I know that there are a lot of small companies now that are being fully transparent about their successes online, for example.

**Kenneth**: Right. And in reference to marketing too, it's not that hard to find out when something's successful. If you've been seeing ads over and over and over again from somebody, it must be working, or they wouldn't keep burning money on it.

**Chris**: So let's talk more specifically about selecting a system and how you go about . . . and, again, whether it's an IT system or just a platform, deciding what you want to do. So maybe you found a company that you're choosing to mimic their process. What's the next step?

**Kenneth**: Well, then the next thing is you need to be very clear on what results that you want to get, because chances are you're not going to find somebody that's the absolute, perfect match. So know yourself first and go in and make sure you're looking for those things, because it's easy to get fascinated like "Oh look, it does this, and it does that," except those things don't particularly support where you're going. So we don't want to get caught up in shiny and red. We want to focus on making sure we get the things that we are after.

And we don't want to kid ourselves about our own capabilities or our own expertise or knowledge especially of our team. This is not going to be the most interesting part of their world. This is just something they're going to have to do. So you want to make sure it's as easy for them as possible and as intuitive for them as possible.

**Chris**: So we talked about, well, figuring out what your team is and figuring out what your objectives are when you take on a new system. What about, let's talk a little bit about explaining your objectives to management because this is going to be a long process.

**Kenneth**: It can be, yes. Well, yeah, again, it's another marketing thing you've got to do. You got to market to your own management. And if you can keep putting in front of them the idea that these are the tools that are going to support our meeting the company mission, everything's got to tie back to that, tie back to the company mission. This is why I want this. I want this because it’s going to get us here to this thing you've told me you want.

**Chris**: So that brings up the situation that people probably commonly run into, again, in this long game, how do you set yourself up for success when you're under pressure to meet some quarterly numbers?

**Kenneth**: Well, you have to take some of your bandwidth, some percentage, and devote it to the long game. And you got to do it in such a way that it isn't being noticed by those who have a short-term focus. And that's a fact that we can't ignore. If your manager or your manager's manager has got that short-term myopia, that's the reality you live in. And so you've got to present to them that they're getting their short-term objectives met.

You have to keep filling the pipeline. This is true in many different kinds of departments. It's true in marketing. It's true in sales. It's true in R&D. If you don't keep things going that are going to help you long term, at some point, you're going to run out of short-term fixes. And then you're toast.

**Chris**: Yeah, okay, so let's talk about avoiding getting toasted. You adopt a new system. You get started. You're excited about it. Management buys in. And then you're going to get to the hard parts, right?

**Kenneth**: Exactly.

**Chris**: And some people would call this the dip, for example. And the enthusiasm starts to wane, or questions come up. And you start to question, "Is this the right thing to be doing?" And the risk, of course, in one direction is that you continue on, and it's not the right thing. So you would like to have some data. And the other risk, which probably more common, is that you decide that it's the wrong thing too soon. So how do we get smart about that?

**Kenneth**: Okay, well, the first thing is to be eyes wide open about what you're calling the dip. Know that's coming. It has to come, because at the beginning, you just don't know that much about it, and you're focused on all the good parts. And you haven't seen the flaws, and you haven't seen the hard parts. And you haven't seen the things that aren't quite as you imagined. And there's no way to foresee that upfront. So know that that's going to happen.

But when it happens and you've budgeted yourself for it, you've budgeted mind space, and time so that you can handle problems as they arise as you implement something, just keep in mind, "Is this system still meeting our objectives, the ones we stated at the beginning?" And that'll help you through the times of "Man, this is tough. I didn't realize you were going to have to do this part or that part."

"Yes, but it still meets our objectives."

"Okay, well then we keep going."

Or you realize as you get into something, "Hey, this was not what it was represented to be." Or, "I missed something serious in my due diligence upfront. Okay, well then it’s time to pivot. But chances are if you did your work right up front, sticking with it is probably the right path.

**Chris**: Okay, and what about . . . So maybe its meeting your objectives, let's give that. But the cost of doing that in mind, space, or other effort that was unexpected gets to be a little high?

**Kenneth**: Okay, well, first off, if you didn't budget for that, if you didn't plan for having something unexpected, that's on you. Don't get yourself in that position. If you get yourself in a position and go, "Whoa, this is very different than what was described. And there's a lot more here then I realized." Well, that's a different game. And I'd like to say that it doesn't happen the majority of the time. That's not usually the case. If we've done our work upfront and we're dealing with reputable people, for the most part, that's what we're going to find.

**Chris**: Right. I personally have experienced this situation where I did not get into that but can imagine in retrospect how it might have happened. And with a marketing automation system that I later had other experience with, let's put it that way. And thinking if we had adopted that, which we were thinking about at a previous company, we would not have had the capacity to make it work. And we would have drowned trying to save ourselves.

**Kenneth**: Well, sure, that can happen. And I guess this isn't the situation where you want to sit down and figure out who's to blame. That's not really the point at this point. You just want to realize, see what's right in front of you. Don't cloud your own vision. Face the reality, and then decide what needs to be done from there.

**Chris**: Right, and not to say we wouldn't have done our due diligence. I think we would have, and we took a different path for other reasons. But in retrospect, I always remember thinking, gosh, what looked to us to be the solution to all our problems would have made everything we were doing worse.

**Kenneth**: Well, and especially if you're talking about things that are software tools or online applications, pay attention to what version it is, because you can get very excited about version one of something. And it can be a lot more challenging to implement than you might realize. But if you're talking to somebody that's a company that's been in business for 10 years, they're on version 5, whatever it is, probably you're not going to have that problem.

**Chris**: Or at least, you would have heard about it.

**Kenneth**: And it’s not to say you shouldn't go with an earlier version of something or something that's new and exciting. It’s just go in with eyes open. Know that, okay, there's going to be some unexpected stuff here, more than normal, and let's budget for that.

**Chris**: So let's talk about evaluating that progress and proper metrics. So we're into it. We're measuring whether the thing that we've adopted is meeting our objectives. And we've figured out how to manage and work through any problems. How should we look at our metrics and know that we're measuring the right things and so on?

**Kenneth**: Right. Metrics is one of those things where I want to stand up on my chair and shout because . . .

**Chris**: Knock yourself out.

**Kenneth**: People love to focus on the things that are easy to measure, as if that's a criteria for what you should use. And it happens across the board in business and even outside of business. You go to the doctor, and they will measure things because those are the things they can measure. And that's how they'll diagnose things based on the things they can measure. But some of those things are just one-offs. And the same thing is true of business metrics. So we need to be really clear. Am I measuring something that absolutely is directly related to the result I want? Or am I measuring something that is related to the result I want?

Now, there's nothing wrong with measuring something related to the result you want, as long as you recognize that it's a one-off. So, for instance, if you're in some kind of marketing campaign where the result you care about is direct sales, well, sales dollars is a great measure, and it’s perfect. It tells you exactly what it is. However, that is a holy grail of marketing that you often cannot achieve. Often, you can't make a direct correlation between a marketing program and a sale. So then you have to measure things that come before the sale like, okay, how many leads did we gather? Or how many names have we added to our email list? Or how many phone numbers did we collect? Or how many companies did we reach? When you know those things, it helps. But also recognize that just because I've collected a bunch of email addresses, are they for the right people? They might be for the right companies, but are they the right contact within the company? Or they might be people with the right job title but not at the right companies. Or they might be people in the . . . maybe I don't know what countries they're in, and maybe that really matters to us. And it breaks down from there. Maybe they're the right title, but in the wrong-sized company.

So we need to map all our data together. Sometimes, you collected information and, well, you've collected data. It’s not information yet. It’s not information until you cross-reference it with some other data. And then you can see if you've hit the right results. And so sometimes, your marketing campaign is collecting just raw data that you have to further process so that you can know whether or not something's succeeded. So make sure you do the full work before you start making decisions, because you can collect up a bunch of stuff and just because there's a big pile of everything, "Oh, that's good," until you start cross-referencing it and realize, "Oh, only part of that pile is useful." Or, "less of that pile is useful than we realized.

**Chris**: So, for example, even traffic metrics. We did a campaign. We're getting lots more traffic. Are they the right people? Does that traffic convert into anything?

**Kenneth**: Exactly.

**Chris**: But that metric leads to another one, and you say, "All right, it is or it is not converting, and do we think it could convert higher?” How can we change that because . . .

**Kenneth**: And this is one of the big dilemmas of marketing always because there's often many moving parts. There's four things that you could change. So the first thing, you have a test run. You know what you got for results. Now, you try changing all four of those things at once, you basically started over.

**Chris**: Right.

**Kenneth**: So you got to change one and see what happen. And then you got to change another one, see what happen. And that takes time, and that takes money. It takes access. And I say time, you know calendar time, for sure, but also clock time. You know it takes effort for people to do. So you got to pick the best pony you can when you're doing that thing because most of us, we're not going to get a chance to test every possible little thing. And hopefully, with some experience we can get better at picking the next best thing to test.

**Chris**: Yeah, in my experience, testing is, honestly, in my experience, in many companies testing is non-existent, even though they have a volume of traffic, for example, that could be easily tested but they don't necessarily feel like they have the capacity to do a test to see if they could convert more people, which . . .

**Kenneth**: Oh, if I could reference something that you and I talked about in a private conversation earlier. Here's the thing about this. As you say, there's no testing, which means that the people at that company have no experience at this. So let's get clear here. There are people who are professional scientists. They've put in the work to get the education and to get the experience. Don't kid yourself that there aren't professional marketers that those people too with their degrees in marketing and finance and economics and any experience on top of that, they're going to be much better at initial testing than somebody who doesn't have that experience. And all they've got is a bunch of raw traffic and they think, "Okay, I've heard about testing. I read a couple articles on the Internet. I can bring the same level of expertise that I do to my true area of expertise. It’s not likely, so it’s a good idea to ask for help sometimes.

**Chris**: Right, find somebody who's good at that.

**Kenneth**: Exactly.

**Chris**: As a little aside, I was at the Authority Rainmaker Conference in Denver two weeks ago. And there was actually a woman who spoke there. She works for a company called Porch, which I think is a site where people go to get information about real estate and buying houses and so on, something in that sector. But at her company, and this is what she specializes in, they test everything. And when they have a meeting, the very first thing, regardless of what the meeting is about, is to report any test results. They test whether they should have meetings. It seems almost ridiculous. It’s certainly out of the range of possibility for any company I've ever seen.

But they're a startup. That's their mentality. We're going to test everything. And the good thing is they have a fearless attitude, like we're going to find out. And even if I say let's test this idea, and it fails, if we learned something, that's good. All I want to do is just encourage people to think about testing their marketing a little bit more to find out because I think a common problem and honestly the primary problem that I try to solve is spending time doing more and more things when there's possibility of doing the few things that we do better for less effort.

**Kenneth**: Right, and I know a number of people who regularly manage marketing budgets that are in seven and eight figures. These people live and breathe testing. It’s what they do. I don't know any of them who don't have testing as just top line importance for them. These folks have put the time in to get really, really good at this so you got to do that. You may be dealing with competitors where nobody in your space is really good at it. Well, bully for you, look at the opportunity you have then.

**Chris**: Exactly. And I think that there's a lot of opportunity in our space for any of those topics because we're all behind, honestly. And so if you can get good at one new thing in marketing, you're going to have a huge advantage. So when you say you've worked with these companies with seven-,eight-figure marketing budgets, for example, you don't need to reveal anything, obviously you won't, but you shouldn't. But what kinds of things are they testing? What would be something that would be a primary test to just improve something at a first pass?

**Kenneth**: Okay. These days, there's so much data available out there. It's not just the data you collect, but there's all kinds of public data and private data that you can buy. And you can match things against demographics, against psychographics. You can know so much. And same thing's true of business demographics, let's call them. The characteristics about business, you can dig in so deep. And you can also keep track of things that have to do with how much you're engaged with people and what an impact that has.

So in other words, what's the difference between somebody that's come and visited our site once versus somebody who seems to come back every week? And have we given them a reason to come back every week? Because if you find out that people that keep coming back buy things, well then you're going to want to make sure that people have every reason in the world to keep showing up. Because many people's websites, all they are is a billboard, basically, a fancy one but a billboard. Whereas, if you can make it current, where there's a rationale for the visitor to say, "Hey, I want to see what's happening there again." Well, then, in many cases, you can tie that to an increase in sales.

**Chris**: Right. So that's an interesting topic. We might have to come back to that one another time because buying that data and learning from that would be useful even for companies . . . Or I guess I'll ask. Would it be useful, let's say, I'm a new start up in a life science space, and I don't have that volume of traffic, is there data I can buy that would show me what I should be doing even if it's not data about my own audience?

**Kenneth**: Potentially. It depends on how specific you have to be. I know, many cases, a startup has got a really specific point solution. And it doesn't always match a market perfectly. That's one of the things that happens to us. Some companies, they can speak to a very broad market, and it makes sense. For others, they need something very specific. And sometimes, that specific market exists. People coalesce somewhere, and you can go after that. In other cases, they're scattered throughout. And so you have to approach your marketing a little different in that, now you're gathering more data than leads because among this pile of people is our market. So I hate to say it depends, but it depends. But the possibility is definitely there.

**Chris**: Okay. Well, yeah, that's interesting. It’s not something I spend a lot of time thinking about, purchase data. But I'm sure it would of interest to someone in my audience so . . .

**Kenneth**: Yeah, I have clients that use purchased data all the time, and it’s definitely successful for them.

**Chris**: I certainly know that in our industry, the thing I'm most familiar with is the SDI report. So they have I think a weekly or every other week newsletter that comes out. But then they also have larger packages of data about the market.

**Kenneth**: Right. Well, and then another way to call it purchased data is to team up with people that are already reaching that audience. And so you help them by submitting content they can use that then references you. Or perhaps, you sponsor their content, and you get in front of their audience that way. And you get access to data when people sign up for things. So if you give things away, you give away a white paper, or something that is useful to them, maybe a short video or an audio. And it gives you an opportunity to collect some contact information. Well, that's a way to get to somebody you know is interested in your topic.

**Chris**: Right, well, of course, I love that, all about the content. So excellent. Maybe we've talked about this, but are there any common mistakes we haven't talked about that we ought to leave people with?

**Kenneth**: I don't mind saying, again, stop talking because you want to talk. Say things people want to hear. That is just so important. And we have to keep reminding ourselves of it because it is just so easy to fall back into it. Another thing that happens is, again, this is one of the stand on a chair things for me, is I don't understand how business people, and especially those with a scientific background, can act so ignorant about statistics, because I know you had to take a statistics class to get that degree.

**Chris**: Right

**Kenneth**: Make sure that before you judge data that you have a sample size that will give you meaningful results. If you got a result of 5 plus or minus 10, you don't have a result. Make sure that it's 15 plus or minus 1 before you start making decisions about whether or not something's working.

**Chris**: Make sure you have valid data, exactly. I cannot argue with that.

Well, I want to thank you very much for all this information about picking systems, evaluating systems, selling them to your boss, and measuring your progress, and how to stick with those things. I think this will be very useful to the person listening to this podcast. I know a lot of these things come up for people in every company of all sizes. So I really appreciate your time that you spent with me today, and thank you very much.

**Kenneth**: My pleasure, Chris. Happy to be here with you.