



Interview with

Mike Cline

March 2010

Yanik Silver: Hey, everyone. This is Yanik Silver. Welcome to another Maverick Business Insider Interview. With me I have a Maverick Business Adventures member, Mike Cline.

I've actually known Mike for maybe two years. Our chance meeting came out of a debacle where a company that won't be named put some programming together that basically blew up and sort of screwed up: actually the launch for this product, for Maverick Business Insider, that you guys are receiving.

I was talking to some of my friends and someone suggested, "You've got to call Mike Cline. He can fix it and he's awesome." I was desperate and willing to do whatever it took. Mike and his team literally dismantled all the other code, plugged in what they knew would work, and within 48 hours we were back in business with stuff that was even way more bulletproof than anything we had designed before.

Working with that serendipity of what seemed like a complete disaster turned into something good, which is actually one of my core philosophies. There's always some sort of opportunity or silver lining in the clouds.

We never would have gone with Mike's company or even been introduced to him, and then he became a Maverick Member, and I've been incredibly impressed with the stuff that he's done and the way his brain works around the architecture of creating sales processes.

We'll talk about that. Mike has a couple different companies. I'll let you share some of those. One's a software company that we've used before, and you have a new joint venture with Mike Filsaime, which is PayGlide. We'll talk about that as well.

So, Mike, welcome.

Mike Cline: Thanks, Yanik. I'm glad to be here to chat with you today.

Yanik: Yeah, should be fun. Anything you want to fill in the blanks on, maybe give them a little in a nutshell and get them up to speed on your background of where you came from and where you're at now?

Mike: Sure. I started the tech company that you were referring to. The name is Generic Solution Engineering, and I started that about seven years ago. The name came from not really knowing what I wanted to do. I had a background in technology just from playing with computers and stuff. My actual formal education is in engineering physics, so space systems and stuff. That was my real desire as a kid.

Anyway, I sort of fell into business really out of clients having needs for technical services and sort of grew from there.

Yanik: How many people do you have right now that you employ?

Mike: I have seven people right now. We're still small.

Yanik: A lean company. Are you guys virtual, or do you have an office?

Mike: Everybody is virtual now. I did have an office for a short period of time, although it was just me and one other guy, and then we got rid of that. All virtual. People all over the county.

Yanik: Cool. Why don't we start with the part that people think they need the most help with? As you know, our core philosophy is make more money, have more fun, and give more back, so we'll start with the make more money part.

“I came in there and fixed it, and everybody was just stunned”

Just thinking back to how you got started in what's essentially a service business, and there could be some people listening to this who aren't really intrigued by software and aren't technically oriented and so forth, how did you get going on that aspect, and what would be the best advice you could provide for people that want to go down that same road?

Mike: How I got started on all of this is really a neat story. I was working for a computer company, and I bounced around a couple different positions in the company. I first got started doing phone support with them, then I was doing internal tech support working on the computers that came in broken.

Then I got to go outside and do the calls, get on the road, go out to a business and show up and everybody's freaking out, having a big problem today. "Oh my gosh! The server melted down!" or something like that. I got to come in and be the hero of the day.

I literally got addicted to that concept of how enjoyable it was to come in and have the solution for somebody's problem. I spent a lot of my own time continuing to educate myself and learn. I'm definitely a lifelong learner. I'm addicted to learning, probably more than anything else.

It just so happened that one of the last service calls that I was going to that summer, this was in 2003, I went to a business that I had been to a couple times before. This was the remote office, by the way. I grew up in Indiana, so this was all happening in Indiana. The primary office was in Georgia, and the tech team in Georgia had been trying to assist the remote office in Indiana for two weeks with these problems, and they just couldn't figure it out.

Finally they called in this computer company I worked for. It didn't take me fifteen minutes. I came in there and fixed it, and everybody was just stunned, like, "How did you even know it was just this little knob to turn here, and this little switch to flip here?"

I said, "Well, that's why you guys pay us."

The owner of the company called up from Georgia and basically said, "I want to hire you."

I said, "I work for these guys."

He said, "I don't care. I want to hire you."

I'm thinking, "What do I do in this situation?" They literally want me to be doing remote system admin work for them, not just in the Indiana office, but in the Georgia office. I can't take a client of this company that I work for and that I greatly appreciated and this sort of thing.

I went back and talked to the service manager there and said, "Here's what these guys want to do. I am going back to college here, and this would be a good little gig for me to have on the side."

The service manager says, "Mike, you can take that client under one condition, and that is that you charge them what we charge them." For me, at that time, I was so stunned. I was like, "Wow, you want me to charge them near \$100 an hour for this kind of work?"

They said, "That's what we charge them. That's business standard rate for this kind of work." I can't believe they're going to take me up on that, but they did.

It didn't take a month of me doing that kind of work for me to realize that I could get more clients, and I could continue to evolve the business. It was all based around being able to solve the problem, that top-notch service and value that you're providing.

If you're doing that, the money's going to come. That was a core lesson that I learned early on and sort of fell into. I think once you get a taste for the financial freedom and time freedom that comes with starting your own business, you definitely get addicted to that as well, and it becomes a core part of who you are.

Yanik: Did you have any entrepreneurial role models or history in your family or the people around you?

Mike: I didn't have anybody in my family that was an entrepreneur. My father, who was a marine mechanic, always talked about it, though. "What if I could start my own marina?" I always looked up to that. I aspired to it when I heard him talk about that sort of thing.

The owner of that computer company had a big impact on me just from his actions, from watching him when they had their Monday morning meetings and the way he talked with the team.

At one point that company had about 70 or 75 employees, so it was pretty big, but I was able to get some face time with him. That was a good inspiration, and I did get some good guidance from him, especially early on.

Yanik: So you went from \$100 an hour, and then you started bringing in more clients as word spread about the kind of service you provided?

Mike: Yes. Word spread from them a bit and then just more friends, and talking to people. A few years back the economy was in a different state than it's in now, so I would say there were more dollars to be had for people wanting to get into the Internet world and getting deep into technology.

It spread that way. Almost all of our business, even now, comes from referrals, from recommendations, the same way you heard about us.

As much as we're in the marketing world in terms of the clients we have like you guys and the many other ones out there, we don't utilize a lot of those same strategies. We

utilize referrals more than we do anything else.

Yanik: Do you guys actively create the referrals or is it simply just if you do a good job they're going to talk about you?

Mike: It's asking for them as well. We'll go out there and ask a former client for them. Some of my guys try to attend conferences and talk to people and ask, "What are your needs? What do you have going on that you need help with? We could service you."

Yanik: I always forget the name of your company. I want to say it's Generic Size, but it's not. It's Generic-something Engineering.

Mike: Generic Solutions Engineering.

Yanik: Right. Generic Solutions Engineering. Like you said, when you first came up with that name it was because you didn't exactly know what you were going to be doing.

If you were to give advice to someone going into the tech field or software development, how important do you think the name of your company is? Is there anything to that?

Mike: I think the jury's still out on that. You, for example, forget it. People forget it. People are like, "What is that name?" From a marketing perspective, it's not a common name, although it's generic. I don't know on that particular question.

Yanik: Okay, no worries. Let's talk about the evolution of your thinking. You went from \$100 an hour by yourself. It seems like you got leverage with bringing in some other team members. What's been the latest evolution? Walk us through the evolution of leverage, making sure that your effort and your time doesn't equal the money that you get paid.

Mike: That's a good one. It's taken me a while to learn that, and I think in some ways I'm still learning how to properly leverage myself. The evolution was, "Let's hire some guys in. I don't have to do the work now. I can watch the work being done, and I can still make money from it."

In a service business, it's a lot harder to scale, I think, than in a product business. I can't just have twelve guys and do \$25 million this year. You're not going to do it in a service business.

Well, I guess you can, but you have to find those high-end niches that really work for you. Early on it was get more people. As it started to transition, I learned, and I learned really by following you, Yanik, and then getting involved.

One of the things you released was *34 Rules for Maverick Entrepreneurs* a year and a half ago.

Yanik: Yes. Everyone who is going to be listening to this or reading this has that.

Mike: Great. There are a couple really good nuggets in there that hit me. Part of that was how you position yourself in your industry. You can be the low-cost leader, or you can

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be the high-end guy. You just need to understand where you are currently and where you want to be.

In reading that I realized, "I'm always about providing this super high-end value to our clients so the value's way over the top. We really need to focus on targeting those higher-end clients and ramping up our range and some of the products that we do have cost-wise and just pounding that value into those things so that everybody gets the 'Wow' effect when you work with them."

Yanik: Give me an example of how you package up some of your services. I'm not quite sure how they were done before.

Mike: One of the software applications that we built three years ago allowed for advanced marketing logic in your sales processes. You could add in complex logic and both pre- and post-transactional upsells to an online sales campaign sequence.

You can get a lot more revenue out of it per visitor, contrasted to doing it the old way, which was maybe having a single pre-transactional upsell and no post.

We initially started selling our time. That was the big thing that we sold, just our retainer blocks at standard rates. We were then installing some of the software that we had just built. We had a wide array of little chunks and snippets to code here and do this, and all sorts of fancy things. We found pretty early on that we had to package it up and turn it into a product.

Originally, that thing started at \$8,000. The packages were installed and we were out the door. We started moving up. Right now that is something that we sell for \$20,000, and some of the extra value-adders that we have in there have to do with the support we provide post-launch, that kind of thing. It evolved over time.

It's funny, I look back and I'm like, "How much of this stuff did we do?" It's just the tech time rates that the guys were working, as opposed to turning that into a product, a packaged A to B with set expectations as opposed to this fuzzy service work.

Let's go back. That's something that I think exists in the service business that you struggle with. Clients a lot of the time don't understand all the additional pieces that have to happen on the back end for one little change on the front end.

Being able to create a product in that niche that is quantified to a dollar amount and an outcome amount goes a lot further than this ambiguous, "I think we can get that programmed in sixty-five hours," kind of thing.

Yanik: I want to highlight this point because it's a big one. You took something from "I think that project would be 65 hours" to "Here's your package price," and educating them on what is involved and what they get afterwards, too. Is that about right?

Mike: That's one way to say it. Realizing what kind of projects we take on from the service perspective can be packaged and turned into a product. We can really know what our ROI is on that kind of stuff. We can ensure that the value is there for the client, and we can price it accordingly.

Yanik: Did you have any internal fear about that, going from \$8,000 to \$20,000? Is it going to be a big flop, or maybe people weren't going to buy this?

Mike: Well, the reason for the price raise on that particular product was that, in application,

we watched the thing more than double the overall output in sales campaigns in split tests with real data. It just multiplied it by two instantaneously. When you're pushing any amount of traffic, that's an absolute drop in the bucket.

Once again, it did kind of change our target market and we had to keep crawling up to the higher-end scale that would get the most value from this kind of a tool. It's not something that we could sell to everybody like we could tech services.

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instantaneously."**

Yanik: Got it. That's a good point, too, figuring out where those little hinges that swing big doors are and then finding the right clients that way.

Mike: What we did there was we took that same software concept, and we did build out an entire self-service, lower-end tool for people that work at that level but wanted some of the benefits of that kind of thing.

Yanik: So you took what was working on the high-end and packaged it up in a do-it-yourself model that really could be a product with very little tech support on your end?

Mike: Yeah. It's pretty much completely automated. Even though it's completely automated, the profit margins are actually smaller than our higher-end packages.

Yanik: That's actually a good segue into one of the subjects that we need to talk about, which is the order or architecture. I don't know what you would call it, but you're talking about pre-transaction, post-transaction. Do you have a name for the entire process?

Mike: The online sales process?

Yanik: Yes, the online sales process.

Mike: What we'll do is put together what we call marketing maps for these processes. The marketing maps dictate it all. Is it a pre-trans here or a post-trans here? How do they link together? Do we do dynamic logic on the post-trans based upon somebody taking a pre-trans?

Is it a linear flow, meaning does everyone see both post-transactional upsells? Do they split and go to two different ones? We use marketing maps to define the flows in the sales sequences and we use them to define general Web site flows, as well, like integration to an external system, a membership site, or something like that.

Yanik: Let's dig in a little bit on that. I think a lot of people, even if they don't have all the tech capabilities you guys can implement for them, can probably get some best practices that you've seen from a lot of data flowing through your systems.

Let's define some of that. The pre-transaction is an upsell that could be what? Maybe a radio button or just a check box before they give us their credit card?

Mike: Yes. Obviously, it depends upon the sales processing system that they're using. It could be as simple as two different buttons on your sales page that say, "Here's the

standard option, or right here beneath it is the special upgrade, bonus item, super discount, save this much.” That’s the button that’s flashing, that kind of thing.

We’ll often do those pre-transactions, like you said, with a check box directly on the checkout form itself. We have a decent amount of data on this particular item here. I say it’s the way to do it, but every market’s different, every industry’s different; you’ve got to split test those for yourself.

We’ll put those pre-transaction check boxes immediately after the credit card box, but before the submit button. The thought is, by the time you got someone entering their credit card, they’ve already committed to buy, they’ve already punched that thing in.

I’m talking single-step checkout forms here. Once they’ve committed to buy, then you’re making that additional offer. That’s one of the reasons why the post-transactional concepts are so great.

You already have someone who’s purchased. You’re not going to sacrifice or risk that initial sale by offering somebody something up front. You’re going to wait until that one’s signed.

I think, as most marketers know, if you give the people too many options on the front end, they’re not going to take any action. Keep it simple and streamlined.

With these marketing maps that we use, we really map out the process. If you map out your process from A to B of what you want your clients to do, you can then start to quantify it and measure it.

You can use tools like Google Analytics with a Google goal on your final page, making sure your tracking is on everything. You can use what’s called the Funnel Visualization Tool, and you can see where people come in, where they fall off, the page-to-page conversion rate, and you can start seeing what’s really going on inside of your processes.

Once you can see stuff, you can start using Google Webpage Optimizer to start doing A to B split tests or ideally, multi-variant testing on the pages that are in question that you want to get the performance up on.

Yanik: I’ll circle back to some split test results that you had. Going down that same path to the pre-transactional stuff, I think people kind of get like, “How far down the rabbit hole can we go with the post-transactional stuff?” which means that the credit card has gone through.

Now there’s some sort of thank-you page, success page, goal page that comes up. I guess that’s where the process really begins.

Mike: Yeah. As far as the post-transactional upsell logic, how far you can take it depends on your market, depends on how aggressive you want to be. The goal of selling anything is to get a customer for life.

In a product-based company it’s a little different, but in a service business, it’s like, “We want clients for life.” That’s what we want. We don’t ever want to lose a client. We want them to keep coming back to us for their next need, their next need, their next need as long as it’s in our toolset to do such.

When you build these processes, you just need to be conscious of that. How would

you feel if this is what somebody put you through? Would you trust them? Would you trust them more; would you trust them less?

What are the emotions that come out of you as you try to put yourself in their shoes? In some niches, people like to buy, and I've seen some sequences that are five or six pages long from a post-transactional standpoint that generate a whole lot of revenue.

"...the biggest thing is making sure you deliver"

Yanik: If you were going to break down a couple best practices for post-transactional, is it giving them a limited offer, like "You'll never see this offer again"? Is there something else you've seen work really well?

Mike: That's definitely the logic you want to follow, the one-time offer logic. It truly is a one-time offer, depending on how you build it, obviously. The way we build them is so you can't get back to those pages. It is part of the flow itself. Someone would have to go to the front end all the way back through it to get to that particular item again.

We generally try to keep the pages short and use video. We show a short video less than three minutes on that particular product that is an upsell. It's going to make sense with your initial sale, for the most part, and how the two items complement each other, or how you're going to get more value out of what you already purchase by also getting this thing.

After the transaction is done, the biggest thing is making sure you deliver. I see a lot of guys say, "We'll give you a thanks page and send you something in 48 hours." That's a major letdown.

Yanik: That's a good point. What do you think about pricing? Would you take post-transactional upsells and work their way through the highest price point, then go to low, lower, lower, lower, or would you start low and work your way up? What have you seen working best?

Mike: It depends on the product. I've seen both sides work; I've seen both sides not work. It truly is dependant on that particular type of product you're selling and the mindset of the buyer and how you got the buyer there, too. Is it affiliate traffic? What is it?

Yanik: What about any really cool tips, tricks, neat whizbang, stuff you've seen on the post-transactional where you're taking data from what they've already submitted and customizing what they see, or anything really unusual that you've been a part of?

Mike: Yeah. You can build your flows out as complexly as you want to. Let's say, for example, someone wants to collect taxable income on the order page. If you're in a financial niche where you need that number for taxable income or discretionary income, you can take that data and drive people one way or another way, depending on their answers to questions.

Instead of income, let's talk gender. If you got a men's and women's type product, or better yet, a sales page that's more specific to men or women on a post-transactional upsell, you can split it and move it both ways.

That logic applies over on your general data side. Maybe you got an opt-in before they hit the main sale page and you want to get gender there because there are two different ways to talk to people, depending on whether they're a man or a woman, on how to sell this thing.

Let's say the product doesn't fly with both. You can split the data there and have two different pages displayed based upon that. Some of the cool stuff I was mentioning earlier is Google Analytics with Funnel Visualization. Most people don't use that tool.

We did an optimization project for a pretty well-known Internet marketer not that long ago, and we did a Funnel Visualization scope on it, we watched some of the traffic come through, and it really stood out to us that it was ridiculously low.

They had a multi-step purchase process. It wasn't just a single-step cart buy. They had a partial disclosure, full disclosure, and then credit card info. It was actually broken up into three pieces, but they were doing some data collection and some tracking. That's how they wanted to do it.

Anyway, we noticed a major, major drop once people hit the credit card page, way more than you'd normally expect in terms of conversion through that page.

We started looking at the copy and we made one recommendation for a headline change, just one. They ran that test, and it more than doubled the throughput just from that one headline.

It wasn't even the main headline. It was like a headline on the left underneath the video, but it had to do with the clarity of the shipping charges that were associated with the particular item.

Using these tools can make a massive difference in your processes. That's some of the cool stuff we've seen that's made a big impact. It's not that fancy of a tool. Most people are running Google Analytics. It's just digging in there and looking at all the extra stuff it can do.

Yanik: You've been involved a lot recently with the new Visa and MasterCard regulations coming down about forced continuity and all that. What do you see as the best practices for your clients?

Mike: We're trying to stay on top of that and making sure we're only recommending the best practices. We have a couple processes in place right now. We're in the process of getting some of the merchant accounts to approve them based upon the new regulations. There are regulations that the FTC's put out, there are regulations that Visa MasterCard have put out, and there are regulations that the merchant account has put out.

While they all are similar, they don't all necessarily say the same thing. While you can be good with the law of the FTC, Visa/ MasterCard may shut you down and fine you a lot. Or Visa/MasterCard may not address an item that's in violation of the FTC.

I don't have a lot of advice on this particular topic, other than just make sure you've read whatever your merchant account has released. They're going to generally be the most conservative. Just keep your ears open for these kinds of changes.

The bottom line is if your process and/or business focused on delivering quality value to clients. If that's the way everything's positioned, and that's what the design is all

about, there's probably not a whole lot to worry about as long as you're following the regulations.

You get some massive charge-backs and some BBB complaints in there. I'm not versed in exactly what triggers the law to come knocking at the door on some of those high levels. You've got to be out there to provide high value and contribute to the economy.

"Not doing that has made our business a lot more successful."

Yanik: Let's change gears a little bit. Let's talk about your latest project. I think it's a little instructional to think about how that even came into being. Do you want to give the story on the background of PayGlide and what had to happen in order for it to come together?

Mike: PayGlide is the newest thing we've been working on. We've been working on it for just over a year now. It is an e-commerce platform, another shopping cart tool, if you will, that's out there; however, it's a bit different.

Let me back up here. With all the stuff we've been building for clients over the years, all of it is in platforms on top of other applications. We've never designed an application from the ground up ourselves, mainly from the idea of "Why reinvent the wheel?"

If this does 60 percent of what we need, let's build the 40 percent. Let's not call in a traditional programmer and say, "I've got to do it my way and rebuild the whole thing." Not doing that has made our business a lot more successful.

As this has gone on and as we've built these tools, I have, for a long time now, wanted to build our own platform and say, "There is a better way to do this stuff." It would have less headaches for us trying to build things for clients.

It would cost them less. It would just be a better thing overall. It wasn't until the first Maverick trip that I went on, which was just over a year ago with Yanik there at Baja, I met Mike Filsaime in person. I had known of him for a while, but I met him.

We were actually roommates in Baja and started talking over the course of the few days we were on that trip. We realized we had the same vision. He has dabbled in e-commerce solutions like this. He's in the Butterfly Marketing stuff and Pay.com. He was really wanting to build an enterprise-level solution.

With my company's background in the crazy upsell logic and all that stuff we've done and our background with Salesforce.com programming, it just made a great match for us to come together. We realized, "This is something we should do together; we can get this thing done and build a killer app that services a lot of people."

Yanik: I always find it interesting how ideas finally come into fruition and what has to happen, whether it's serendipity, whether it's like attracting like energy, or whatever the case is. You've had that idea for a little while now, and it wasn't until that moment came together when you were like, "He has a different skill set than I do, and maybe it is worth partnering up on."

What's your take on that?

Mike: I feel a similar way. There are definitely some other forces at work. Somebody once said to me, "Everything is exactly as it should be in this moment in time, and then the next moment and the next moment and the next moment."

What you have to do is realize why everything is exactly as it should be. Whether that is opportunity presenting itself or challenge presenting itself for you to learn and grow from, you are exactly where you need to be.

It was interesting, especially in retrospect, to look back on all the things that had to happen for Mike and I to sit down and have the conversations we did in Mexico in the middle of nowhere that have led to this project. There's definitely something else going on.

Yanik: That's very cool. I think, originally, how you got involved with Maverick was somehow Chris Zavadowski, who's part of Maverick Business Insider and was helping us with the launch, found out that you were like building a dune buggy, or trying to build a dune buggy.

Mike: That was on my list. I know you've got your bucket list, Yanik, and one of my items was that I wanted to build a buggy and go race in Baja. I've seen the videos, and off-road racing has always fascinated me. I grew up doing quite a bit of off-road motorcycle racing. I just thought buggies would be awesome, and Chris says, "We're doing that in a month and a half."

I was like, "Are you kidding me? I have to go. Yanik, sign me up. I have to go."

Yanik: It's crazy how things work out sometimes. That's actually a good transition into the "have more fun" part. Talk about your bucket list. Has that helped you have a broader life that's not just all around business?

Mike: Yeah. A lot of my "have more fun" has been further defined and quantified by just being involved with Maverick. A lot of really good learning for me has come from the events and actions with the other guys there. I'm really learning from them. What are they doing not just in business but in their lives that is making them happy?

I think we're all looking for that. We're all looking for ways to be happier with our lives: financially, personally, with family. When I first got started, I would say from 2003 to 2006 or so, I didn't spend nearly enough time on myself with both the self-development and the have more fun.

I was just nose-to-the-grindstone determined to make this thing work. "Come Hell or high water, this is going to work. I'm not going to go through the corporate world."

I think that did help me quite a bit. I wasn't stopping to smell the roses. I wasn't stopping to think, "What really fun things should I do this week?" Was that one-week list sent out to the people that are going to be listening to this, Yanik?

Yanik: Yeah, they have access to it, and if you guys haven't seen it, it's at that www.MaverickBusinessInsider.com/multiplier.

Mike: I've loved that concept. That right there, I think, is so key. It's so key to stop and say, "What should I do this week to have more fun? Do I give more back? Am I living a balanced life?"

I've found that when I can become more balanced, things just work a whole lot better. It's a whole lot easier. You're not fighting against the current.

"I've come to terms with it that it is something I have to do."

Yanik:

I was reading an interesting book that I just finished last night by a guy named Ted Leonsis, who was owner of the Washington Capitals and is someone I look up to. I've been a die-hard fan of the Caps for 20-plus years. His book's called *The Business of Happiness*.

One of the concepts he talks about is that early on, the only muscle that he exercises is his right arm. He was saying that he over-indexed his business. He had a huge, bulging right arm, but everything else was atrophied because the rest of his life was out of whack. He actually ended up writing a list of 101 things he wanted to get done over a lifetime. He had a couple other things that were really interesting besides the list. It's worth reading that book.

That just reminded me of the list. Is it in written form, or is it just in your head?

Mike:

I came across one I wrote. Five years ago I wrote one. I came across it recently, and it made me chuckle because I've done some of those things now. I must say I've come to terms with an item that has been in the back of my mind that is on my bucket list.

I've come to terms with it in the past six months because it seems absolutely too incredible to even think about doing. It's kind of like my premier, number one thing that I want to accomplish before I die. It has to do with space.

I'm a huge fan of space. It's kind of what I went to school for, it's what I dreamt of doing when I was a kid. I got in that position to go work for NASA or thermodynamics and stuff, and I realized that it was a desk job, not going to space.

What I want before I die more than anything is to go to space. Not five minutes like the ticket you have. That's not enough. I really want to be a part of exploring space, exploring our solar system, exploring it, of man exploring it.

I'm trying to formulate how to make that a reality. I've talked to a bunch of the guys that I know in the space industry, and I'm trying to figure it out. Is it a business structure that I create? What exactly is it? I've come to terms with it that it is something I have to do.

Yanik:

Off the subject of learning for the people listening to this and really for you, I really enjoyed this science fiction novel. I can't remember the name of it, but the first one's free on Kindle. I'll find it and send it to you. You should really like it. It's all that technology around mining asteroids and self-propelled space vehicles, basically bouncing from asteroid to asteroid to propel yourself. It's pretty cool.

Mike:

Send it over, I'll check it out.

Yanik:

I'll make a note to look it up. There is one cool thing I want to talk about in the more fun stuff. You and Marie, your girlfriend who I met in Iceland for a Maverick trip—I

can't remember if it was before or after, but you guys were traveling for a long time.

Mike: Yeah, we were actually traveling for three months. We got some backpacks and said, "Let's go to Europe." One of the things that we're actually a part of is an organization called CouchSurfing.com. It's essentially hosting people that are traveling through the area for a night or two or three or however long you feel like, and then finding other people that would be willing to host you when you travel.

The idea is just to connect with local people, experience the local culture, and get a lot more out of the area than just staying at the five-star hotel where they tell you to go get the most expensive jet-ski rental.

We did that. We Couch Surfed for probably 50 percent of our Europe trip. We started in Egypt, not quite Europe.

We started in Egypt, traveled through there, then up through Italy, Switzerland, Germany, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, UK, and then Iceland where we were at that Maverick event. It was a blast. It was something that I'd wanted to do for a while.

I spent three months in Paris back when I was in college with a study abroad program. I wanted to go back and experience more of Europe.

Yanik: Talk about some of the lessons and some of the resources or tools that you've found incredibly helpful to run your business while you're gone for three months just traveling around.

Mike: It was kind of a social experiment in some ways. The thought was, "Could the business actually run itself and be profitable while I was gone, while I traveled? Would it run itself into the ground while I was gone in the blink of an eye?"

Essentially, what I did was just go out and get a cheap laptop from Best Buy, the lightest one that I could get, not like a \$1500 Vaio that I knew would get stolen. I had a laptop, and that was basically it. I was running everything from a laptop. Most of my business is virtualized anyway, so it was really just being in different time zones and what different Internet connectivity we would have.

Yanik: Let me back you up one second. For the virtualized part of your business, what are the main tools you guys use to keep track of the rest of the team and what projects they're on?

Mike: We have a combination of Google apps for your domain. We use that. We do some document-sharing in there, but it mainly just centralizes everyone's e-mail and chat and that kind of fun stuff. We actually just have a Windows 2003 terminal server set up where everybody remotes into it, and we have all our directory structures and all the crazy permissions for who can and can't get stuff.

It's kind of traditional business, rather than using what we call the New Age tools. Project management is done with MS Projects, at least on the software company side. We actually do use Basecamp for PayGlide and that works pretty well.

Yanik: So pretty much all you needed was an Internet connection. Did you have a USB flash drive that had passwords on it or anything like that, or was it literally just an Internet connection so you could get into your virtual server?

Mike: Yeah. An Internet connection into the virtual server, and we operate on that with master key prints there where we have one place where stuff is stored. We have crazy long passwords that we change frequently. I just memorize it.

Yanik: Of course you do; you're partially a rocket scientist.

Mike: A phone was the other thing there. Skype just came out for the iPhone at the beginning of last year. I had that on my iPhone. I did not do an international data plan, but I had the international phone stuff turned on just in case I had to use it.

"I realized in those months away that this would not sustain itself unless I fill that void"

We did Skype over the Wi-Fi for the phone. It worked great in a lot of places. The city of Lucerne, Switzerland, by the way, has free Wi-Fi for the city, so that's pretty handy. I walk around with a Skype world plan and can talk anywhere in the city on the thing.

Egypt was a little bit of a struggle. It was funny, the nice hotels wanted to charge you like \$35 a day for Internet connection and the cheap hotels had free Internet, but it was really crappy. It was actually better, though, than the fancy hotels' Internet that you had to pay for.

I think we ended up getting a Vodafone wireless Internet card for Italy. Italy is where we got the Vodafone wireless card. Vodafone is similar to Verizon, but when you travel through Europe, every country is different and you've got to get a new sim for the darn thing for every country you go through. After Italy, I pretty much gave up on it.

Yanik: What did you learn from running your business virtually for three months? Were there certain places that were stronger than you thought? Were there certain aspects that were weaker than you thought? You don't have to give me specifics, like someone didn't do what they were supposed to do, but just some generalization things that people can take away.

Mike: I realized particularly that I had positioned myself as the bread-winner for the business. I was closing the deals. I was involved in the project specs. Even though I had other guys involved in it, nobody was driving it like I was driving it.

Recently, I've gotten somebody that does what I call sales involved. In the nature of our business, so much just comes as service work. You don't really have to close the deals as much as just spec them out and say "Here's the price tag."

I realized in those months away that this would not sustain itself unless I fill that void of somebody really driving that new additional business instead of just waiting for it to fall into their hands.

Yanik: That was a good realization of, "I don't need to be the main rainmaker if I can bring someone else in and go work on other projects or just screw around Europe."

Mike: That's probably the way to say it, too, because I realized that I couldn't do it. I know I did take a few calls while I was there that were new projects, that kind of thing, but I realized that I couldn't actually do that, so I had to figure out a way to fill that gap. I, myself, in business, struggle with that concept of filling a gap with an automated proc-

ess or another person.

I think, "I can do that myself, and I can get it done in 37 seconds. Why do I need to go get somebody else involved? They're going to eat up some profit here, and etcetera, etcetera."

I am my own worst enemy, in terms of scaling a standard business model, as opposed to more of the automation side of things.

Yanik: I think that's a good realization. Something that a lot of entrepreneurs and something that I've struggled with as well is that I could do those things so fast. I could jot off this e-mail, or I could do whatever. It's painful to create checklists, it's painful to create the systems, but once they're done, it's very liberating.

Mike: I'm very thankful for some of those I've created because I've been able to wipe a lot of stuff out of my brain. I don't have to think about it anymore. I don't have to keep tabs on whether we actually collected the money for so-and-so's project, or if that one extra thing they called about at 2:00 in the morning and wanted, did that get put on the checklist?

Yanik: Perfect. As we wrap up here, is there anything that you want to talk about on the "give more back" side? I know you've been involved with the Branson school. You were one of our beta members with the Branson School of Entrepreneurship, working with a group out there, right?

Mike: Yeah. I'm on my second mentee right now. The first one kind of fizzled. Nothing to do with me. That's been a great experience, to try and understand that culture and how that culture's developing there in South Africa.

I'm very impressed based upon what resources these guys are starting with and the goals and ambitions they're still going for. We take so much stuff for granted over here. Granted, that's quite cliché.

I haven't been to South Africa, but after Europe this past fall, I did go over to Asia and spent some time in Cambodia and Thailand, the rural areas, and you get a real appreciation for the resources we have available to do what we can do here, in terms of business, growing a company, and chasing our dreams. It's just absolutely amazing, and it's inspirational to me.

I look forward to some of the stuff you're doing, Yanik, with Maverick 1 Million and expanding the mentorship, expanding some of these entrepreneurship-fostering tools.

Yanik: You're on the cusp of that. You guys are building it. I'm really thankful that you guys are in charge of that. For the "giving more back" part, you take time out once a month to do a call with the Branson School students, right?

Mike: Yeah. We started to do twice a month, but we're back down to once a month at least for right now.

Yanik: In my own life, any time that I've done something like that, it's incredibly rewarding. I actually feel like they're getting the short end of the stick, even though I know that I'm helping them and giving them the mentorship. It's just so fulfilling to me on this side. How has that experience been for you?

Mike: I would say it's similar in that regard. Knowing that you have that much of an impact

on somebody is almost a little scary, I think, because it's so direct. The individual that I'm working with has a Facebook profile, and as soon as we get off the call, here he is updating his status about how awesome it was, and he's telling his friends about it.

I'm like, "Wow! This is cool! This is very fulfilling." A part of me wants to just go over there and say, "Let's get this done. Let's do some hands-on work here. Let's make some of these ideas you have a reality."

"Give education and teach and train and bring everybody up."

It's like you feed a man, or you teach him how to fish. I think it's so much more important to teach the man how to fish because not only can he feed himself, but he can then teach his neighbor how to fish.

It's way better than all this "give, give, give, give in terms of dollars." Give education and teach and train and bring everybody up.

Yanik: That's great. That's a powerful statement.

Before we wrap up, Mike, is there any place that you want to send people so they can maybe hear about your software or any other exciting new projects you've got in the works?

Mike: I didn't prepare anything special. I guess I should have thought about that. www.PayGlide.com has some basic information about the new e-commerce tool itself.

My company's Website is just www.GenericSE.com. It's difficult to say because everyone thinks you're saying some other letters. We have some basic company info on there. It's not necessarily a marketing site, but if there's anybody out there that needs what we do, give us a shout.

Yanik: He does some good high-level tech stuff and integrating very specific and powerful order functions and order architecture and order processes. I highly recommend Mike's company, and what you guys are building for us right now is an entire platform on top of Salesforce, so if anyone wants to go that far down the rabbit hole, they can with you guys. I recommend you guys fully for that too.

So, GenericSE.com or www.PayGlide.com is going to be the new software solutions that runs on top of Salesforce. Any last thoughts?

Mike: Thanks, Yanik, for having me on here.

Yanik: Thank you, Mike. I appreciate it, and it's been really cool. We covered a lot of ground and hopefully you guys were taking some notes here. Thanks, Mike, I appreciate it. Talk to you soon. Bye-bye.