

Daniel Roth **Editor-in-Chief, LinkedIn**

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm here in New York and joined by Dan Roth, editor-in-chief of LinkedIn. Described by Business Insider as 'the most powerful business journalist on the internet', he is the first person to hold the post. For the last eight years, he has led that drive to becoming a publishing platform for senior level influencers, including Barack Obama and Richard Branson. Previously a writer at Forbes, he led the launch of the short lived business magazine, Conde Nast Portfolio in 2007 before moving to Wired as a senior writer. Dan later spent eight years at Fortune where was their digital managing editor and oversaw their technology coverage.

Dan, thank you for joining me.

Thanks for having me.

Editor-in-chief of LinkedIn. Is that the best title there is?

I think so! It's a great one. So you should know, I joined LinkedIn a little bit over eight years ago, and there was no editorial team. There were no editorial titles. So when I came in – this just shows you the ambiguity and how much we're making this up as you go – my boss at the time said, "What do you want your title to be? We were thinking copy editor." I was like, "Well no, copy editor actually means something very different in the media world. Why don't we go with..." I think executive editor was where we started, and then over time I got promoted and had to come up with my next title for the promotion. So I'm the editor-in-chief of LinkedIn.

What's the next title?

I don't know, I've got to figure it out! I'm kind of done. It was a mistake. I should have planned one ahead.

Now I've no doubt it involves a huge amount of responsibility, insight analysis and what have you, but what is your job? What do you do?

Great question. LinkedIn's mission is to connect the world's professionals, make them more productive and successful. And we do that in a variety of ways. The role of the editorial team is to give professionals the news and views they need to talk about the things that matter. And so we are focused on high quality, professional news and opinion pieces, and ideas about how to manage your career, and what trends are going on, what kind of topics you have to pay attention to, and then getting that right news and ideas to the right professionals around the world in many different languages. And we don't do it with the purpose just of reading the news and just so people can say, "Yes, I saw that headline." We want them to contribute back. We want people to take the ideas that have been trapped in their heads in cubicles around the world and get them to write and share what they've learned, or what they're seeing on LinkedIn. So the editors are, we talk about the... it's kind of an approach we call the three C's, or at least I call it the three C's. I don't think anyone on my team ever does, which is fine. And the three C's are: you can either create content, curate content, or cultivate voices. The team is comprised almost entirely of business journalists who've come from places like the Wall Street Journal and Le Figaro and Les Echos and papers in Germany whose names I would mangle if I brought it up right now, and in Singapore and around the world; China, Japan. And they are great. All of us are great at creating. We were born to create, we can write and share and shoot video, and that's a lot of fun. And we have done that our entire professional lives. When they come to LinkedIn, the change comes from thinking not just about what you're going to create, but how you use your time wisely. So it might be writing, it might be sharing, it might be creating videos, but it could also be curating incredible conversations going on on LinkedIn already. And you see some topic that's blowing up somewhere, and you pull it together in a package on LinkedIn, and then you share that back out. Or you curate data. We have insane amounts of data about where the professional world is going. Curating that data into lists like, we have a top companies list, which tells you the companies where professionals want to work today. Top startups, top voices, who's doing incredibly well on LinkedIn to start conversations. So we curate that. And then the last C is cultivate. And cultivate is reaching out to people, either one on one and asking them to contribute, or it could be reaching out to people en masse. So as an example of that, when Thomas Cook shut down and stranded so many people, we started reaching out to Thomas Cook employees, because we can do that on LinkedIn, and saying, "Why don't you come on and share how this is having an impact on you? Tell us about what you're doing about it, what you're doing for your colleagues, what trouble you're in." And then we reached out to people who were in the travel industry saying, "Come on to LinkedIn and share your thoughts about what Thomas Cook could have done right, or could have done different, or how you're navigating this landscape." And our goal is to get, again, you want to get people talking, you want to get people sharing. I'm sure we'll go into this, but my entire career has been spent writing stories and picking up the phone and calling people and asking them to tell me their stories, and spending an hour on the phone with me and I'll use like one quote or, you know, one paragraph. Now what we do is reach out to tens of thousands of people at a time and get them to share their stories on LinkedIn in their own voice, talking to their own network or their own peers. And then we, the editors, can then take the best of those and curate them back into packages for other people. So that's the idea. The three C's, you want to get people the information they need, the high quality information they need, about where the world is going. And then get them to share their own ideas back.

I mean, one of the things that I find most valuable about LinkedIn is the newsfeed where I can see what my connections are liking and commenting on, because usually, because they're curious like I am, it's usually something of interest to me. I've in a sense harnessed a team of curators on my behalf. Even just them liking something, your algorithm will pick that up and then bring that to my attention, and it's often of interest.

That's great. Well, our algorithms are incredible and we have a team of some of the smartest people I've ever met creating these algorithms. None of this would work if the members who join LinkedIn, and are posting on LinkedIn, didn't do it with a purpose in mind. And I think the big difference is that when you come to LinkedIn you are doing it for professional purposes. So people are sharing content that has to do with their jobs, or their careers, or big trends that are going on. They're not posting pictures of their kids and vacations and big social issues that they want to tackle. There are other places for that. They come to LinkedIn to talk about the kinds of things they would talk about in the office. So it starts with... what people are sharing on here is good to start, and then the algorithms kick in, and then there are the editors. So we work, editorially we work very closely with the algorithms. It's a very human and machine approach to try to get, again, this quality, professional news and views in front of the right people.

So what does your job involve, then? Other than managing the team that do this? How do you go about doing it?

My job is when you get to a certain level, you spend almost all day in meetings. So that is primarily what I do at this point. But my job is really just to set the tone and to make sure that we are covering the right content. So the editors are broken out into various teams. We have a team that just covers daily news. Every day, what's in the news? What are we seeing that's trending on LinkedIn? What's trending off of LinkedIn? Who are we going to reach out to today? What are we going to write?

So that's about identifying the stories, because I never see on my newsfeed that LinkedIn has posted something happening. I'm just trying to think of to what end you're doing that curation.

Yes, if you hit the search bar you will see a list of top news, and those are all curated news items.

I see, a human being has decided that.

Exactly.

Of course, I see.

There's something called the Daily Rundown which is a morning agenda-setting newsletter that's published now in... oh man, I hope I don't mess this up! We're in nine languages and 56 countries. Reaches about a 100 million people a day. It's by far the world's largest business publication at this point. That's written by the team based off of what they are seeing on and off LinkedIn, in terms of the conversations that you as a professional should know about. And maybe I'll just kind of take a step

back and talk about this, like what you should know about. That is a very different approach for a social media company to take. And it's because of this professional... we have a professional lens around everything we do. There was a belief, that led to my hiring, which was that if you are a... if you're trying to connect opportunity, if you're trying to get ahead, you have to know about things that are going on outside of your network and outside of your company. If you are a freelance designer and you want to get into some company, if you go to lunch with someone and they bring up something going on in the news, you're expected to know about it, or maybe you can see something that makes you think, "Oh, I'm going to reach out to this person in a different industry, they could really use my skills and so I'm going to sell myself and tell them why they should hire me." That's unique to being a professional. You have to constantly be thinking about who you want to reach out to, what you want to do, what will get you ahead, what will get you connected. And so some of that comes from staying informed and knowing the topics, trends, people that you should know about in order to keep moving forward. And there's a real role that editorial plays in helping pop the filter bubbles that social media is so good about forming. We're very good about saying, "I only follow these people, I only care about these hashtags, only show me this stuff." Editorially, we think a lot about how do we pop those filter bubbles? How do we show people stuff going on outside of this perfect world Dave curated, and introduce them to new ideas that might help them expand in new ways. So a lot of that is bringing this serendipity into your world.

And it gives LinkedIn a meaningful purpose other than being merely a connection of connections, in a sense. Because ultimately, and you shouldn't have to apologise for this because you are a commercial operation, but it is about the 'stickiness' of LinkedIn isn't it? I've got to go back, and me just reviewing a list of my connections, a static list, is of no use to anyone, really. There has got to be something for us to do something with that, and that's the bit where I think it works incredibly well.

Right. Well, this is another big difference in this company versus other social media companies is that advertising is just one part of our business. So you talk about the stickiness. Yes, we want people to come back to LinkedIn. We want them, we really want people to feel like it's a utility. That this helps them do their jobs, or run their businesses, or get that next job better because of what they have found, what they've shared and what they've seen on LinkedIn. When they come to LinkedIn, they might update their profile because of this. They want to stay current. And when you update your profile, and when you share ideas, it helps recruiters and hiring managers understand how you think and where you're coming from. I talked to a guy recently who was in the sportswear industry and he had left his job, or maybe he lost his job, and he just started writing articles about the backstory of the footwear industry. And they were great stories. And he got hired from doing that, to become the CMO of another sportswear company. And he had this great line where he said, "Writing is the new resume." And to him, this idea of, if you're a recruiter, if you're a hiring manager, trying to find this perfect person. Seeing how someone thinks is often way more important than just seeing where they've been.

And I also think the strength of a person's network is an incredibly important decision now, when you're thinking of hiring someone. It's not just about their

resume and their education. I do this myself when I'm hiring. I'll go onto their LinkedIn profile and see the quality of their connections.

Yes. It's a great call. I think that we are increasingly hiring people who bring their own set of skills and people with them. You want to know that they are connected to the right people, that they are doing the work that is required to stay current, and to make sure that they're interacting with other people. Because no business is an island anymore. Even if you're running a small business in a small town, you are still competing with Amazon, if you're in the retail business. In the digital age, you are competing with everyone all the time. So you want to bring people in who have an understanding that they have to stay connected and have to stay on top of their game. So it's a long way of saying that if the editorial team can help people stay on top of these topics and trends, if we can get them to share and if we can help them feel like they are staying informed, it's great for LinkedIn's business because the utility of LinkedIn is much higher. But it's not a question of, hey we've gotten you to stay here all day and you're coming to LinkedIn and you're hitting refresh a million times a day. That's not what the business is about. The business is about making it feel like this is something in the morning, you get your cup of coffee, and you feel like you have to check in with LinkedIn because that is how you are going to be successful today.

Yes. They used to be two types of LinkedIn users, back in the day. Those who would connect with anyone and those who were quite discerning. To be honest, I started as the former. I used to connect with anyone. I've been very, very discerning now and reduced my connections from 3,000 six, seven years ago to 400 now. Because I'd rather have a smaller, more meaningful list of genuine connections. In fact, I don't like it when someone says, "I have 3,000 connections," or whatever. But I think there's also a different type of LinkedIn person now, those who are *engaged* on the platform and those that aren't. I mean, I have some colleagues that I'm connected to but I wouldn't know because I've never heard from them in years. And then I have lots of people who are doing very, very interesting things. I mean, clearly, one is going to reap some rewards and the other one isn't.

Yes. About seven years ago now, we started something called the Influencer Programme, where we brought on really top people in the professional world, and you mentioned some of these in your intro, but we asked them to start writing original content on LinkedIn. It was our first push in original content. When we did that, we also introduced a follow button to LinkedIn, because for people like Richard Branson or Mary Barra, the CEO of GM, Arianna Huffington, the list goes on, for these people, they are here to talk about what they are seeing in the world, about the meetings they're going to, about how they have run their career, the mistakes they've made along the way. But they are really sharing out versus connecting. And so we started this follow button. We now have that ramp to everyone. If you want, on LinkedIn you can say, "These are my connections. These are the people I have met in real life." That's the way we encourage people to do that. I mean, you can do what you want, but I think you have a better experience on LinkedIn if you are connecting with people you know, or people you want to know. That's the way I kind of think about it, as people you expect to be able to meet in the real world.

Otherwise your news feed just gets diluted with a lot of people's updates that you don't even know, and aren't going to do anything. And also the algorithm might prioritise my photocopy and repairman who I've connected to on LinkedIn, over the CEO of a potential client, whose update I did need to see.

Yes, the algorithms... that should be less true over time. The algorithms are really much more geared towards showing conversations. So if a conversation, if your repair man says, "Hey someone, come and hire me, I'm great at repairs," that kind of content is going to travel a very short distance, versus if you were following someone who shares a headline and says, "I think it's crazy that this happened at Thomas Cook, here's my take on it." An opinion piece like that around professional news that generates a conversation is what's going to spread. And increasingly, that's what the algorithms are looking for. It's what we discover people want on LinkedIn. So even if over the years you've built a LinkedIn network and there's connections on there that you're like, "I'm not really sure. I don't remember why I connected with this person. I'm not sure how they ended up my network." Maybe it's someone you worked with years ago, and they are not starting conversations that are appealing to you, you're going to be seeing less and less of them.

I picked up a trick a couple of years ago from a friend and he said, rather than constantly reviewing your connections, pick one letter a day. So start with the alphabet. So I did D today, so anyone with a surname beginning with D, I went on my connections list and you either disconnect from them if there is not meaningful relationship, or more importantly, you reconnect with them. You go on their profile, see what they're up to. "Hey, do you fancy a coffee?" It's just an interesting way to make sure that you have a smaller number of people you're connected to, but with a more meaningful relationship.

I've never heard that. That's genius. The way I do it is, in my feed I will constantly see if someone shares something and I'm like, "What? Wait, why am I seeing this in my feed?" Just flagging it, not for me. I can stop following this person. I unfollow a lot of people all the time so that my feed, which is the way I start my day, and I check it multiple times throughout the day, is exactly the kind of conversation that I'm hoping to discover so that I can keep up with what's going on.

What's the next challenge then with the platform? What's top of your to do list?

I think that our focus right now is very much on making sure that we are expanding internationally, globally in ways that are meaningful to our members in each of those countries. So we just launched a daily rundown in the Netherlands. We are about to launch in the UAE. We just launched recently in Singapore, an edition that covers Pan-Asia in English, and we're just kind of working our way around the world, making sure that we are bringing people in each country the kind of content that is really professional news and views that's relevant to them. The next step is to start diving deeper into more segments that are really important. So we have an editor who covers healthcare in the US. We've got someone who covers finance, we have a small business editor, and we have a bunch of these editors who are really focused on who are essentially the editors. They are focused on these areas and they do the three Cs – create, curate, cultivate – for those particular areas. You'll see us push more into those specifics, because while getting this general business news is really

important and it's helpful, and as I said, you want to pop these filter bubbles, there are also key insights going on in your particular industry or your career that you kind of have to know about as well that are really important for you, but it might not be important for someone who is not in your industry. So one example of this is, I have an editor who just covers what we call the beyond professional or the frontline workers and he's really focused on restaurant workers, on food service, and on retail workers. Totally different kind of news and views that we talk to and listen to from them, versus what we are hearing from and talking to doctors about. So you start developing these segments and going deep into them and understanding what works for them, make sure we have the right content that makes them feel like they're getting ahead in their profession on LinkedIn through the content they're seeing.

LinkedIn has become huge, but it seems to have avoided the controversies that have dogged Facebook and Twitter. Is that because the users, as you mentioned earlier, are a professional community that have frankly more respectful for one another?

It has a lot to do with that. When you come to LinkedIn, you write and share on LinkedIn, you are doing it from your professional identity. Your boss sees what you write and share. Your employees see what you write and share. Your future employees and recruiters who are going to go after you are seeing what you are sharing. I think that understanding that there are repercussions, that you have skin in the game around what you're saying, is what has kept us out a lot of the controversies. There have also been incredibly smart decisions by the senior leadership at LinkedIn that I think showed that they understood where the world was going. That helped a lot too. One of the biggest ones is that we don't accept political ads, and that was an early decision, and it was a decision that turned away revenue that we could've gotten, but the thinking was that that's not why people are here. They are not here for politics. They are here to discuss these professional topics. The more we can do to set the guard rails and say what is expected of you on LinkedIn, the more appreciative members are and the more careful they are with what they say and what they talk about. So you'll frequently see on LinkedIn, someone will share an article and/or share a post and you'll start seeing... and let's say that it's about some kind of a topic that you wouldn't discuss typically in the office. You'll start seeing in the comments people saying, "Why are you sharing this here? This isn't what LinkedIn is about. Don't put this here."

It's the so-called barber's or hairdresser's problem, isn't it, that you never ask about religion or politics when you're cutting someone's hair because this is going to go down badly.

Yes. That's exactly it. So you have people saying like, "This is the barbershop, please don't talk about this." And that's gratifying, and it makes my job a lot easier. In editorial when we have the daily meetings to cover what we're going to cover for the daily rundown or for trending stories, we know where our guard rails are. Now, what's interesting, and it might be interesting to your listeners, is that those guard rails are different in every country. And when we first started expanding globally, I didn't fully appreciate the need to stay much more focused on principles rather than explicit rules about what we cover. And so when the editor in France pushed back on as you describe it, the Barbasol discussion, no religion, no politics. And she said, "Actually in

France, politics is what we discover around the workplace. When we go to lunch every day, people talk about politics. We like arguing about this. This is a workplace discussion.” So in France, Macron is one of the most popular writers and sharers on LinkedIn in France, and he creates incredible conversations, and so you’ve got to be, I had to loosen up what I thought was important and people in France really love it. It’s one of our most active countries.

It’s the problem that Facebook had for example, when they look at it from a kind of tech bro/Silicon Valley perspective, when they banned pictures of women breastfeeding, because that’s not something that should be banned, and from their cultural lens they thought people wouldn’t want to see that – but of course they didn’t take into account the fact that other people viewed it differently.

Yes. There’s a great book that I recommend to my whole team called *The Culture Map* that talks about how you manage people globally. It’s written by an NCI professor, and it’s a really interesting way to think about your own cultural biases and how these cultural nuances play across. It’s really about how you manage people globally, but it also helps you understand, it help me at least understand, where what I thought were universal truths that definitely were not universal, and universal ways of managing people that are definitely not universal. So I recommend that.

It’s a big learning curve, isn’t it? When you realise that you have blind spots and you can’t know what they are or otherwise they wouldn’t be blind spots.

That’s exactly right.

It’s a Donald Rumsfeld thing when he said there were ‘known unknowns’. I don’t know what the capital of Columbia is, but I could Google it. The unknown unknowns, the blind spots. That’s where the problem is.

That’s exactly right.

Now you’ve been called ‘the most powerful editor in business journalism’. Do you recognise that description? Because I mean, there is some argument that it might be the case.

I think that, first of all, I am very appreciative to Business Insider for giving me that title, and they have the world’s best headlines, and I really benefited.

I noticed that you’ve made that description into a badge, which you are very proudly wearing on your shirt today.

It’s a tattoo! You’re seeing through my shirt. I think it is a reflection of the power and focus of LinkedIn more than it has anything to do with me. My entire career has been spent in business journalism. This is a dream job for me, because all I’ve ever wanted to do was business. I mean, since high school I’ve wanted to do is business journalism, and to get to a place where you can help... programme is the wrong word, but you can help steer conversations to hundreds of millions of professionals around

the world is incredibly gratifying. We talk about this idea that with, it's the old Uncle Ben line., 'with great power comes great responsibility'. We have to think really carefully about what we are writing about, what we are sending notifications about, and how we are working with publishers, and understand that there is a user, a member, in one country or one industry or one point in their professional career who might see the news on LinkedIn differently than someone at a different point, and so we try to be as transparent as possible. All the editors are really required to... we have bylines on everything that we write. There are easy ways to get hold of us on LinkedIn. We have the full masthead under the LinkedIn editors page on LinkedIn, and I want to make sure that we are as clear as possible about what we're doing, why we're doing it and how to get a hold of us if there's some issue. But it requires a lot of humility to do something like this for so many people, when you are constantly running... you talk about the nuances, we are constantly running into issues of nuances. You just have to be super careful.

I mean, you referenced it, it was Business Insider that said that you're the most powerful editor in business journalism today. I mean, we've had Henry Blodget sitting in that chair. I've had Matt Murray of the Journal. I've had Lionel Barber, the editor-in-chief of the Financial Times. Should they be frightened of you? Should they fear that LinkedIn is taking eyeballs away from them, that you're going to usurp them as a platform and actually steal their lunch?

Yes, I think that we are all in competition with each other and with everything out there that is on our phones. This is not a LinkedIn issue. This is an issue of the funny video that you've seen on TikTok last night, or watched *Succession* instead of reading the Wired article next to me, and I really wanted to read the Wired article and instead I watched *Succession*. So the battle for eyeballs is incredibly intense. So in that way I think that it's a battle for people's attention all the time. Is LinkedIn in direct competition with business publishers? I would argue very strongly we are not. Our goal is to get people to the right destination, to get the right news and views that they need. A lot of what we do is focused on working with journalists, making sure they are building the right audiences and reaching the right people and make sure they get their headlines or find the communities that they need to find on LinkedIn. So we have a publisher partnership programme where we are working with, I would say multiple dozens of newsrooms around the world, where every day the LinkedIn editors are working with these editors at the New York Times and other places and we say, "What's trending on your sites? Here's what's trending on LinkedIn. Do you want to come and share something that you have on this?" So you'll see often, CNBC for instance, will have a piece up about something going on with interest rates or with the jobless numbers. And we say, "All right, we're going to curate this trending story around the jobless numbers. Why don't you share what you're seeing? And they'll share a piece and that'll drive a huge amount of traffic back to CNBC or to Business Insider to the New York Times.

So a rising tide lifts all boats?

Absolutely. If we can get people here and get the right audience to them, then that's great for them. And however they want to monetise it, they should be monetising it. But our goal is to get you the right audience, not just a big audience. And so frequently I'll sit down with publishers, and at the very beginning we say like, "Don't

come to LinkedIn for massive numbers of clicks. If you want to work well on LinkedIn, what you should be thinking about is how do you get exactly the right readers.”

Fewer but better quality clicks.

Yes. So if you’re running the CMO Journal, you are looking for CMOs on LinkedIn to come and click through to the CMO Journal. If you were running a B2B publication, we can help you get the right people in that particular industry reading your particular publication, but – we talked about this earlier – our goal was not to keep people on LinkedIn all day with this. We don’t measure anything like how long people are...

Dwell time.

Dwell time. Exactly. We are successful if people come back to LinkedIn frequently, but not if they live here. If you live on LinkedIn, you are not doing your job.

In terms of stereotypes, in terms of typical LinkedIn users, how many different types of users are there?

I think about it much more around where you are in your career journey, so there are some LinkedIn users who are very new to working. They need certain kinds of information that’s different than if you are 20 years in, or if you have retired, and you’re thinking about what your second act is. There are people who are managing large enterprises, and they need very different kinds of news and views than if you are running a ten-person, three-person shop. So I think about it much less in terms of like how deeply involved you are in LinkedIn than where you are in your professional life, what you’re doing, what kind of a business you’re running, what kind of business you’re in. Because from where I sit, and where the editorial team sits, we have to just think about getting you the right headlines or opinions, or even better getting you talking about those. So we’ve got to find the right hooks to make you feel like, if I come and share this information, or share these ideas, or share why I think something went wrong, or how I’ve messed up in my own career or my own company, that it’s worth it for your time, that the ROI is high enough, that sharing that on LinkedIn is worth it. So that’s how we think about it.

But as you mentioned earlier, LinkedIn hosts two million posts a day. I mean, how does your team ensure that people like me see that content? Is that purely algorithmic or is this some kind of editorial involvement? Now you mentioned earlier about working hand in hand with the algorithmic data team. How would you actually do that?

That’s a great question, and it’s been one of the most fascinating parts of this job, is working closely with the relevance engineers and learning how that works. I’ve learned a lot about working with engineers and how to find a common language.

Are they like the ‘pre-cogs’ in Minority Report, that they’re in that pool and it’s just like a brain with wires coming out, connected to LinkedIn?

No, they're actually normal people! Yes, that's really great. So we will have conversations about, a lot of conversations that we have are around what constitutes quality. And I remember when I first got to LinkedIn, someone asked me that, all right, well you're an editor here and I come from purely traditional journalism.

Because it's a deceptively simple question, but it's actually quite profound.

It's really hard. Yes. I'm like, well it's...

I'm glad you're going to answer it, not me. I'm glad I'm sitting in this chair.

So you start coming up with, you try to come up with rules around what counts as quality. It's a very difficult decision. What we've done over time is use editorial signals. Instead of trying to define it as rules, which is what we did in the early years, is that we started using editorial signals to help train models. So as an example, if the relevance engineers want to say, "How do I know who is high quality?"

Relevance engineer?

Relevance engineers.

Wow.

People who are just focused on building the machine learning, that will go into figuring out what's in your feed.

Wow.

So what's in your feed is purely governed by that. The editorial team will not have any role in... we have a very small ability to recommend content sometimes, but 99%, 99.5% of what you'll see in your feed is coming from the algorithms. And this is true in any company, is that the relevance engineers and the feed product managers have their own metrics that they're trying to hit, or they want to shape the system in a certain way. And so what those metrics are will really determine the experience for the end user. And I can't speak for how any other company does it, but for us, we're very focused on this idea of making sure that people are seeing great conversations and seeing high quality conversations. Now that's where the editorial team can play a very big role. When you have editors, we spend all of our lives, as you said, you spend all your life reading and talking, and we believe that we have things to share, and we're worth hearing, and that we can talk to the right people. And you're just that person in the party, whose like, "Tell me more." Just a sponge for information and then you want to get it out. So the relevance engineers will take the signals of what we say is interesting and this is a good conversation and we just mark stuff. And we have a system for building these top news, these trending news items. We have our own CMS. All of those are signals that the relevance engineers can use to help them define what's high quality, who we pick as influencers, how we pick certain people for showing up in these. In our top news module, we'll always have three, five, seven great voices who are weighing in on that news item. And they'll look at those, those signals also, so they can say, "Oh, this is a high quality person. This person is

sharing good news. I have information about what counts as quality.” And so we are one signal of many they can use, but we’re an important signal.

So the system rightly rewards engagement that gives gain. The more you actually take part in giving into LinkedIn, the more likely that you are to get your content promoted, noticed and so on.

Oh yes, absolutely. And no matter where you are in your career, or whether you are someone who is an extrovert and is used to sharing, or someone who is an introvert and doesn’t like doing it, it is important, I think, in our day and age, to be able to have cogent thoughts and to be able to write or pick up your phone and just shoot a quick video. But to be able to explain how you think is essential. I think that if you want to get ahead, no matter what you want to do, knowing how to communicate – and this, by the way, is like millennials, gen-Z, this comes naturally to them. I think it is when you get into gen-X, baby boomers, where you start seeing a little more hesitation about being open and sharing. But you got to tell the world how you think.

I think it rewards extroverts, all of our platforms these days. If you don’t say anything, then people don’t know you’re there, frankly.

That’s exactly right.

It’s a serious issue. I mean, you mentioned about Thomas Cook earlier, about how you’re using real editors to connect people with actual content. It’s not just algorithmically generated. I remember seeing that you were getting FinTech experts to discuss Brexit recently. How do you go about doing that, then? Do editors reach out to certain individuals and say, “Can you write something for me on Thomas Cook or Brexit?”

Absolutely. So that’s what we spend all day doing, is reaching out to people and asking them. And we can do it either in a targeted, but less white glove way of doing it, where we just say, “All right, let’s find everyone who is in the FinTech industry who is based in London, who has shared in the last 30 days.” And we’ll reach out to them, send them an email and it’ll come from an editor. And the editor, it’ll say something like, “Hey, my name is Emily Spaven. I’m an editor at LinkedIn in London. This is a huge topic going on right now about whether FinTech stick around in London or not. Can you write and share your opinion here, maybe five ideas for conversation starters for you.” So that’s one thing we’ll do, and those generate a lot of great conversations. The other thing we’ll do is reach out to individuals and say to them, “If you weigh in right now, you will get attention. And this is a topic that we can see that’s trending on LinkedIn. Come in now and share your thoughts.” So recently, Steve Schwarzman, the CEO of BlackRock, came on and talked about his take on WeWork and WeWork pulling its IPO. People in the finance industry want to hear what Steve has to say about BlackRock. That did incredibly well, it got passed around, it got picked up by the news. So we encourage people to just come in and talk to their networks. Let me give you another example of the power of that kind of weighing in also. There’s been a real sea change in how, I mean you asked the question, do we reach out to people? Yes, we reach out. But more and more, everyone from senior executives to junior level people, realise that they have to be

connecting, that there is a demand for them to be heard. So as an example of this, the CEO of Siemens, this is I guess about a year ago now, when there was the Davos of the Desert, remember Saudi Arabia was hosting a conference, and was right after Khashoggi was murdered, and all of these executives started pulling out of it. The CEO of Siemens pulled out, and instead of doing it quietly or putting out a press release, he went onto LinkedIn and wrote an article saying, "Here's why we're pulling out of this conference, but not just why we're doing it. Here's how I decided that it was the right thing to do." And it was a really raw, very open and honest article.

I read it.

Did you read that? And he explained it. He says, there's a line in there where he says, "I don't know whether this was the bravest decision, but it was the right decision at the time." And to hear a CEO offer that kind of authenticity and to open themselves up to say, "I don't know if I have all the answers," is really revealing. And you can see in the comments, all of these Siemens employees, either thanking him or pushing back. And that's the kind of world we're in. You expect to hear from your CEO, you expect to hear it from these executives and you expect that they will listen and talk to you when you push back on them. So we as editors, we will often reach out to these people, but in the old days, when we first started on this in 2012 with original content, it was a much harder sell.

CEOs would often hide behind press teams and press officers and gatekeepers, and you'd never connect with them. I mean, one of the things that's so interesting about LinkedIn is, you can literally go straight to the person. I work in thought leadership and I think that one of the things that's most interesting about LinkedIn and other social media platforms, but particularly LinkedIn, is CEOs and leaders can't segment audiences like in the old ways. So for example, the CEO of Thomas Cook, 20 years ago, would have been able to write something for the staff newsletter, something for the customer newsletter, something for the shareholders, something for the regulator, and you'd optimise the message and so on, for each audience. Now if you're on LinkedIn and you create a post, everyone's reading that, your own competition, your own staff, the regulators, the media, everyone. You've just got to be totally authentic because you can't optimise messages for certain segments of your audience.

I think that's exactly right. And one of the things that we give people is metrics on everything that you write and share, that tell you who is reading and looking at your pieces, so you can see what companies people are coming from. You can see if there are regulators reading or watching your videos, you can see that your own employees are reading and watching what you're doing. And it becomes very obvious, very quickly, that it is one message that is seen by everyone. You're exactly right. You can't segment anymore. You can't think that you can talk to one part of the world, one way and another part of the world, another way. And if you can't segment and if you can't hide, then you got to be honest, because that's the only way to defend yourself. You have to, what are you going to try to remember a hundred different messages you left? You got to think, "Why am I doing this? Can I stand up for myself?" And you have to be open when you make mistakes. If you look at an example from this week, I don't know if you're following what's going on with Rent the

Runway, which is a subscription service for dresses and apparel. They had a massive logistics snafu that has caused them to get dresses and goods late to their subscribers, and they had to stop taking any new subs. That's not a great position, but the CEO has been very open and honest about these mistakes and saying, "We own it," and reaching back out to people and truly the only thing you can do today, you just can't hide anymore.

The whole nature of leading a business has changed. Just in the old days, you just had to run the company. Whereas now you also have to be the ambassador, the chief spokesperson. I mean, the media themselves don't really want to hear from some spokesperson. And I also think that people following CEOs and leaders on LinkedIn don't want to read something that's clearly been ghostwritten for them by some press team. It has to be the real them, warts and all.

Yes. My team also manages the influencer programme, which is still an invite only programme for, even though anyone can write on LinkedIn, we have a special programme for people who are leading companies or movements or great authors, journalists, academics...

I brought some cash, by the way. If I slip it in your back pocket, then please invite me. I'm desperate to do that.

One of the things that we do with the influencer programme is really work with influencers to help them understand what works and what doesn't on LinkedIn.

It's like the blue tick on Twitter, it just means you're *someone*.

You think so?

Yes.

People like it. So in my old line of work and when I was in traditional media, and I would edit op-eds that would come through fortune.com, as an example. You would end up in these kind of fights with senior leaders that are writing these op-eds and you're pushing back and saying like, "This isn't very good or this feels like it's very fake or this was clearly written by your PR people or by a committee." And they would get mad, and we'd say, "You've got to write it this way."

The criticism would have been true though, of course.

Of course.

It would've been written by a committee.

Right. But now they publish it on LinkedIn and we don't edit anything. So we don't do any kind of editing. We'll make suggestions. We never do any editing and they put it up and then they immediately get the feedback. And the feedback comes in the form,

it's both qualitative and quantitative, and you could see very quickly in your numbers that you're not getting the views for this article, that maybe it was written by a committee or written by your PR team.

Because it's too insipid. It doesn't contain any genuine spicy, provocative thoughts.

Exactly. And people are just, they have a... we talked about it, there were a million things you can click on today, every hour. You are not going to click on something that is boring or insipid, or feels like it's protective or fake. There's no need. We're very busy, there's a lot of other things we could be doing during the day if we need that content. And when these senior leaders get the feedback and they see, and this is usually, if you've gotten this high in your profession, you are incredibly competitive, and you now are looking at these numbers and saying, "Why did this do badly compared to my last article?" or, "Why did this do badly compared to someone I went to business school with?" And suddenly, they then come to the team and say, what can I do to be better? At that point, you can say like, you've got to be more authentic. You have to actually say what you're thinking. You have to write or share this yourself. This is, by the way, one of the reasons we're seeing videos doing incredibly well on LinkedIn. And the video that does well tends to be this kind of handheld video. You were holding the phone, you're falling out of the frame sometimes, the sound quality is not great, you're cutting in and out.

But it's more real.

But it's more real. People are like, "Oh, this person's actually doing it. This wasn't a committee writing it." That kind of stuff works really well right now.

What's the end game for LinkedIn? Global domination?

Absolutely. It was getting on this podcast, so we're kind of done! I don't know if there's any end game. I mean, our mission is to connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. That's every one, that's every professional in the world. So we are doing a lot more right now around reaching out to people who don't have networks. So thinking about how does... LinkedIn works really well if you have a network, if you know how to connect to the right people, if you are forming these small bonds. But what if you are the first person in your family to go to college? What if you never went to college? What if you're in the US, you have just immigrated here, you are making your way, and you come onto LinkedIn and there's no one for you to connect with. How does LinkedIn work for you? You're trying to start your business. How does LinkedIn work for you? We have to solve those problems. If we are going to meet what our mission is and has been, then it means working for every professional, not just for certain professionals. So that's a huge challenge and that gives us a lot of room to work with. There are a lot of things that LinkedIn might look differently over time, it might act differently over time. It's got to serve all these needs, and we're learning constantly what those needs are.

What's next for you then?

Next is continuing to do what we do. I mean, every day we're reinventing what we're doing. We're constantly thinking about, is this the right use of our time? Are we reaching the right people? And so we're going to continue to expand into different markets, different countries, different segments. I've recently started hiring some really amazing writers and editors like Jessi Hempel from Wired, and George Anders, who came from Forbes. So we're thinking about how do we make sure that their voices get built out, and we have a great playbook and we're just going to keep expanding.

Dan, it's been a hugely interesting conversation. Thank you for your time.

Thanks for having me on!