

Rise Interactive is focused on Driving Traffic to Websites and Analyzing that Traffic to Make Sure that They Convert to Customers for Leading Brands

**Business Services
Internet Marketing**

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**Jon Morris
CEO**

BIO:

Jon Morris is the founder and CEO of Rise Interactive, a digital marketing agency in Chicago which specializes in digital media and analytics.

Morris started Rise Interactive as a self-funded company with \$10,000, transforming the agency into a multi-million dollar business in eight years. Under Morris' leadership, Rise Interactive has experienced tremendous growth, receiving recognition from the City of Chicago, Inc. Magazine, Five Elms Capital, Fortune Magazine and

The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC).

As an emerging leader in the digital marketing industry, Morris regularly shares his expertise as a guest speaker. He has presented on main stages, workshops and webinars for organizations such as Search Marketing Expo (SMX), Search Engine Strategies (SES), American Marketing Association (Chicago chapter), The University of Chicago Booth School of Business and Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

Morris is also a regular columnist for Inc.com. In his column Rise Above It, Morris writes about small business, management issues and digital marketing.

Morris earned an MBA with high honors from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and a bachelor's degree from Kenyon College.

About Rise Interactive

Rise Interactive is a digital marketing agency in Chicago which specializes in digital media and analytics. Rise manages e-commerce, lead generation and branding campaigns for an expanding list of Fortune 1000 clients. Rise acquires customers for its clients via the web at the lowest possible cost per acquisition.

The agency combines its own proprietary technology with third-party tools to boost efficiency and effectiveness for clients. Its unique approach to internet marketing, Interactive Investment Management (IIM), ensures that a client's budget is allocated to the most profitable marketing channels.

**Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine**

CEOCFO: Mr. Morris, what was your vision way back when you founded the company and where are you today?

Mr. Morris: I founded the company when I was at University of Chicago. The original idea was to teach internet marketing to small businesses. I would put on two-day seminars and people kept asking me if I could just manage their internet marketing for them. I decided the answer was yes. I switched the business model and today I have evolved into a company that helps drive traffic to websites and analyze that traffic to make sure they convert to customers for leading brands.

CEOCFO: What do you know about driving traffic that others do not?

Mr. Morris: There are several ways to drive traffic to your website. Paid search, SEO (Search Engine Optimization), email, affiliate, display, comparison shopping and social media. Our job is to understand our clients goals regardless of channel and ensure that we allocate that budget as effectively as possible. Once we understand what are the best ways to drive traffic to the site, then we implement everything for each person.

You asked why we are different from our competitors but in order to be good at internet marketing you have to be great at mining data. In order to get a job at Rise, every single person has to take an analytics exam and it has a 22% pass rate. When we analyze people who work for our competitors who have taken this exam the

pass rate is less than 15%. Our competitors are actually less analytical than the general public, so that is one huge differentiator. It is the quality of the people that we have.

The second thing is the reason why you need to be great at data mining is you have to be great at answering questions. What is your cost per customer as well as which channels generate the greatest return on investment. Whatever the question is you need data to be able to answer those questions and you need these analytical people to be able to mine the data and analyze it. Each one of our clients gets completely customized reporting that allows us to pull the data in and answer these questions faster. Then we have these analytical people that are going through all the data.

CEO CFO: When you are working with a client do they offer you their budget and ask you to figure it out or do they want to work with you and tweak it and move it along? Which do you prefer?
Mr. Morris: It depends on the client. Generally we have weekly meetings with our clients and there are five questions we have to answer

in each meeting such as what are the clients goals, what is their budget, how are we doing against their goals and budget and why and what are we going to do about it. If we can answer those five questions week in and week out, we are going to improve the return on investment. Some clients are very hands-off and they say, 'Okay, I have full trust and you have it under control so I will let you keep going.' Some clients are very active in going through the data, digging through it and coming up with great insights. My preference is to be a partner with our clients. The more engaged the client is the more movement we get when we need changes and the more movement we get within the organizations so we definitely like clients that are partners on this as opposed to just outsourcing the activity for us.

CEO CFO: Are there particular industries or types of companies that you work with?

Mr. Morris: We are generalists. Our clients range from food to insurance to cosmetics. You name it we probably have helped someone in that industry before.

CEO CFO: When you are working with a client and reviewing the data where does gut-feeling or experience come in or is it just what is in the numbers?

Mr. Morris: There is always going to be a qualitative approach to internet marketing. You want to leverage as much data as possible to remove gut and instincts because whose gut and whose instinct are you relying on? If you have a hundred people that had the same data but at some point you

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had to use your instincts, would you have the same solution a hundred times or would you have very different solutions? That is why I really want data to be the guide to answer those questions.

CEO CFO: What is most misunderstood about digital marketing?

Mr. Morris: What I recognize is not everyone is answering the right question or asking the right question. For example we had a client that was using a competitor to manage their paid search and they are in the home security space and the goal was to generate leads. If you ask the question which keyword was generating the lowest cost per lead, the previous agency would not be able to answer that question because the reporting did not allow them to do so. The problem was not the report itself but the problem was that the internet marketer did not know the right question

to ask. Marketers need to constantly invest in analytics and the infrastructure to answer all these different questions.

CEO CFO: When you speak with a new client what is the 'aha' moment and when do they understand that Rise Interactive has a different and better approach?

Mr. Morris: We generally do an audit for our clients and our perspective clients. We are able to give them very actual insights. When we sell, it is not about this is what makes us great but it is more these are the things that you are not doing right, this is how much money you are leaving on the table and this is how we would go about fixing it for you.

CEO CFO: How do you reach new customers?

Mr. Morris: Multiple ways. We have an internal sales team whose sole job is to generate meetings. We go to tradeshow and have a huge referral network of agencies that refer business to us. We put on our own events and do internet marketing for ourselves. If you do a search for a paid search company, display advertising or web analytics

company, we should be #1 for all those words.

CEO CFO: How do you know what is up and coming that is going to be meaningful?

Mr. Morris: We have to be true to our vision of driving traffic to websites. We analyze that traffic and we make sure they convert to customers. There are all sorts of tools that might be on the periphery but if they are not really involved in one of those three areas of driving and analyzing traffic and making sure they can automatically eliminate a ton of the noise by staying focused to what we do best.

The next thing is I am not a big believer in first mover advantage but I believe in being a second mover. Letting someone pioneer the way, determine if it is real and when it gets momentum, then dive in head first. It allows me to understand if this is real

and what is the right way to do it. That being said I have clients where we constantly recommend being innovative and testing the things and the results, so there is always a budget where we will try something new and we can go analyze whether it is effective or not in a very small amount of risk for us or the client.

CEO CFO: What is ahead for the company?

Mr. Morris: We are focused on being the best at driving traffic to websites. I keep mentioning the heart of this is answering questions. There are thousands of questions just when it comes to driving traffic to websites and the ones that can answer the questions the best will have a competitive edge. We are continually investing in data in building out our own reporting suite that allows us to answer those questions faster and more effectively.

CEO CFO: Are there specific types of data that you would like to get easily

that is still not figured out technologically?

Mr. Morris: There are multiple sources of data, so there is customer data and traffic data as well as site data. The key is aggregating all three of them in a way that you can understand and visualize very quickly.

CEO CFO: How is business these days?

Mr. Morris: We are doing great! Our plan is to grow by 50% to 100% for the year from last year. I look at multiple factors and our retention rate is great. Our customers' acquisitions and pipeline is great. I could not be happier with the success right now.

CEO CFO: Why should the business and investment community pay attention to Rise Interactive?

Mr. Morris: We have been on the Inc. 500|5000 list for the past three years. We should be on the list again this year or real close. One of our key differentiators is manipulating data. For

example, we have technology where clients can send us what they have in inventory, so if they have something in stock or out of stock. Imagine you were trying to buy a TV and one of our clients Abt Electronics. If you went to Google and did a search for a SONY television, their ad would only appear if it is in stock and if it is competitively priced. They send us data every day that tells us what is in stock. They also tell us what they are charging and what their competitors are charging. We are able to ensure that keywords are only turned on or off. We have been doing this for about eight major brands right now and it has improved our return on investment dramatically across the board for single client. That would be one example as we heavily leverage technology or data and growing very quickly. It was profitable since day-one.



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