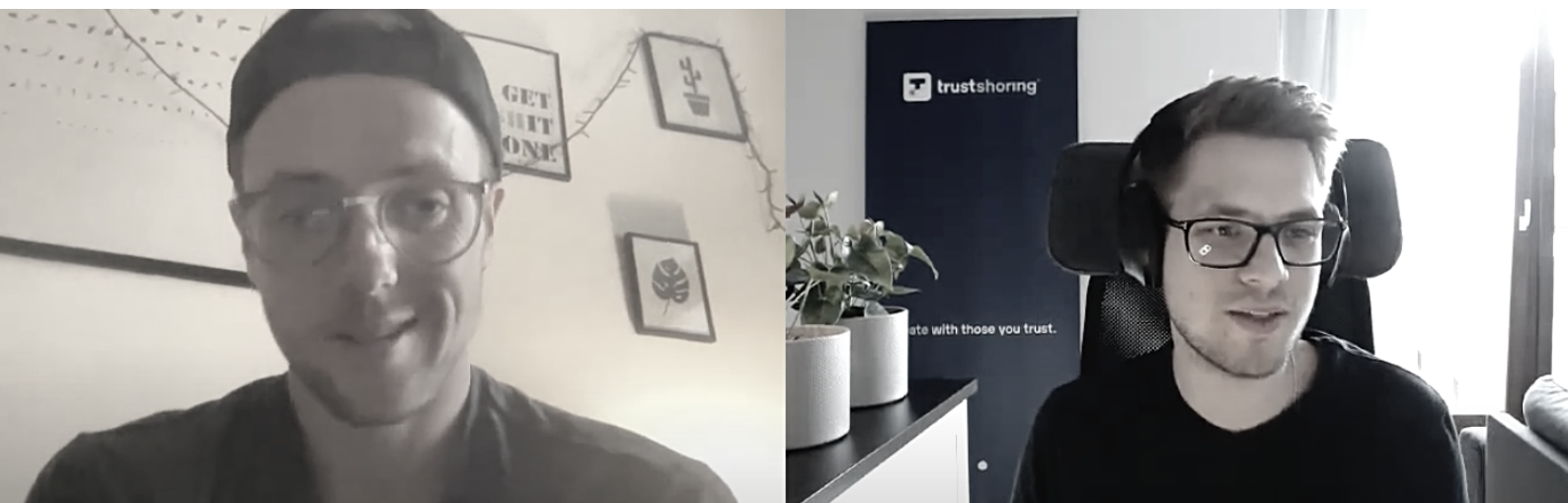


The challenges and benefits of building an entire startup team in Eastern Europe

WITH NICK JORDAN FROM CONTENTDISTRIBUTION



About the guest

Nick Jordan, CEO of ContentDistribution. Over a decade he was building early-stage companies, from founder to employee #8 at a startup that bootstrapped to 200 employees in 4 years. Today he leverages his experience running his SEO agency and helping high-growth technology companies build massive audiences through organic search, all without building backlinks or implementing complicated technical SEO.

OVERVIEW:

Nick is running a 25-person team in Serbia and in this episode he was speaking about cultural differences, English fluency, and other things that are good to know when considering hiring in Eastern Europe.

Topic #1: Where do you start when building a team in Eastern Europe

- What made Nick start hiring overseas?

When Nick left his job and started picking up his first projects, he hired a copywriter who had to execute on content. He brought that person full-time, and she just happened to live in Belgrade, Serbia.

When the company started growing, they realized that it is easier to continue building where employee number one is.

In this case, the decision to build a team in Eastern Europe was occasional but nevertheless very successful.

What Nick says about his first employee from Serbia:

"She started off as a writer about 20 months ago, and now she's leading our 25 person content team as our director of operations."

- Where to look for people?

If you are lucky enough to already have at least one employee from a specific region, the first place to look is his/her network. It is the path of least resistance. Local people speak the local language, understand the culture, and can bring more reliable people.

Nick used this approach, and his copywriter reached into her network bringing in her colleagues from the university who ended up bringing their friends as well.

"A lot of them were actually former teachers where they got their masters in English, and they were teaching Serbians English. So we brought them into our content team."

Topic #2: Differences: language and culture

- How to deal with English fluency? Can this become a problem when hiring overseas?

There is a lot of hesitation when it comes to hiring remotely and abroad, also in Eastern Europe, because of fluency in English the grammar skills. However, people in Eastern Europe start learning English when they are kids through video games or Western media, and the younger generation speaks English pretty well.

A lifehack from Nick: he hired people who have obtained a Master's degree in English so they are fluent in writing, speaking and have less of an accent than you would hear just walking in any city in the US.

"Honestly, they know grammar rules that I haven't heard since sixth grade, and these guys are better writers than I am."

- Are there any cultural differences? Any difference in communication or an approach in the work that people do?

Definitely yes.

1. **Public speaking & asking questions:** A very hard thing for Eastern Europeans is talking in public Slack channels and asking questions and being seen as someone who doesn't have all the answers. Instead, you'll get many people rather DM-ing a couple of people because they will feel uncomfortable asking the same thing in a public chat.

2. Making mistakes: Eastern Europeans often feel like they are not allowed to make mistakes, and mistakes are something bad. However, the best way to get somewhere is to iterate. That means that there are many things that don't work but being wrong is getting closer to being right. Managing a team of Eastern Europeans, you'll have to tell people that it is okay to make mistakes, but they need to learn from them.

And of course, there are some funny cases:

"No one's ever referred to me as "hey boss" before. I haven't heard any Americans ever refer to their boss as boss, maybe in a blue-collar, but absolutely not tech. I feel like it's more common here and it makes me pretty uncomfortable."

Topic #3: Legal aspects of hiring in Eastern Europe (please note that this is not a legal advice)

- **How does hiring overseas look like legally?**

First of all, you need to comply with the local law regarding how much vacation or public holidays somebody gets. However, that's not the hard point.

If you are required to have local entities to be able to hire people and need to have lawyers to open up subsidiaries - this is a tough part.

In some countries, you can hire self-employed people and don't have to worry about opening local entities. But during the pandemic, some countries started to realize that they need to get more tax from some growing industries and have not been affected by COVID, and tech among them.

For example, in Serbia nowadays, you cannot hire a freelancer (self-employed person) on a full-time basis.

You have to be very careful about legal aspects, and the bigger the team gets, the bigger the liability. So essentially, you will need a tax consultant and a lawyer once your company starts to grow.

Nick says: *"I have to go and find competent representation for tax and legal in both Serbia and the US. I know my own hiring rate, I've hired a couple of bad people. I don't trust myself to find the right vendor the first time. The consequences of picking a bad vendor are extremely high."*

Topic #4: Guides, templates, frameworks for working with remote teams

A founder managing a remote team needs to have transparent processes and tracking in place if he/she doesn't want things to fall apart. Great resources for higher-performing remote teams (Products, templates, examples, and SOPs for remote teams) created by Nick's team are provided at strongerteams.com.

"I think that every single remote company ends up reinventing the wheel. They all have to create. Here's how you set up your email signature, and like, here's how you decide whether you use a public channel or the DMs, and there's all this stuff. It all has to be reinvented. We kind of want to create like this, like open source, remote work framework that other people can use, take our knowledge bases and, work on their core business and stuff. Their PTO policy."