

Homeschool 101

Podcast 545: Homeschool Trade Association

Episode Transcript

Seth Dunham: You know, it's not all about greed, right? It's not like we want to grow so we have more money so we can buy more cars. It's. . . we want to be better for our end users, our customers, our homeschool families. Like, we want to be better for them, for you, if you're one of those folks

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, "IEW." My name is Julie Walker, and I'm honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So Andrew, this is one of those Homeschool 101 podcasts, and I thought it would be interesting today to our listeners to know that there is such a thing as a homeschool trade association.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, it doesn't rate up there with any of the really large trade associations, but it is a humble group of humble workers trying to humbly serve each other and the whole homeschool community better

Julie Walker: It's a humble group led by a board that I'm on. Did you know that I'm on the board of the Homeschool Trade Association?

Andrew Pudewa: It's not quite as humble as I would've thought then. I did know because you're the one that was telling me about it. I mean, I knew that it existed. I just thought it didn't really do anything.

Julie Walker: Well, and we're going to learn more about what the Homeschool Trade Association is all about today. And of course, we have with us the president of the board. Is that your actual title, Seth, president of the board? What is your title?

Seth Dunham: Something like that. Just El, you know, El Presidente is, is fine.

Julie Walker: Okay. We'll go with that. Right. But Seth is also the CEO of Notgrass History, and of course, we love Not Grass. We've had them on our podcast in the past and just love their approach to teaching history. So Seth, tell us about the Homeschool Trade

Andrew Pudewa: No, let's find out just a little bit about Seth.

Julie Walker: Oh, sure. Okay, good

Andrew Pudewa: And I'm curious if you remember when we first met?

Seth Dunham: Oh gosh!

Andrew Pudewa: Because it's been some time, and like ships in the night, we pass at conventions and wave and smile. And you've got kids, I know. I have no idea how old they are. So quick bio

Seth Dunham: By the way, when we met, gosh, I think we ate together somewhere at a conference, but I don't remember how long ago or where. But bio. Gosh, I've been in the homeschool industry since 2011, I think. Somewhere around there we started homeschooling our daughters and had the opportunity to work for a homeschool company, and I took it.

I was real excited. And so been married, just celebrated 35 years, three days ago. And our twins, twin daughters' birthdays were on our anniversary. We were m- they were... We were married two years when we had the twins. So they're 33, and we've been married 35. So we have three daughters. Two of them are 33, and one is 26. And loving life, living in South Dakota, except for the cold winters. It's been really hot, but we're surviving.

Andrew Pudewa: And you have grandchildren?

Seth Dunham: Yes, I have Winnie and Weller and Janae. And guess who's pregnant with twins? One of my twin daughters.

Julie Walker: Oh.

Seth Dunham: Due in November,

Julie Walker: Oh, wow.

Seth Dunham: twin girls, so pretty exciting.

Due in November.

Julie Walker: Oh dear, Seth

Andrew Pudewa: Well, Seth, do you ever look in the mirror and think to yourself, "I look way too young to actually be a grandfather"?

Seth Dunham: No, I don't. I feel way too old.

Andrew Pudewa: I was going to, I was going to recruit him for the club.

Julie Walker: Yeah. Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: Years, years ago, I formed a club called the Looks Way Too Young to Actually Be a Grandparent Club. And I enrolled other people. It's a one-time \$10 fee, and then if you pay, then you have the right to enroll other people and take their \$10.

So it's like a multi-level, but no levels. And then at a certain point, I'm not sure exactly when, I looked in the mirror and I thought, "I do look old enough to be a grandfather." So I had to resign from the club that I founded. But I don't know, but I think you could possibly join. You may just have to check the mirror and be honest with yourself. So let me know if you do that and if you successfully recruit anyone to pay you \$10. Although I,

Seth Dunham: I will work on that

Andrew Pudewa: It was years ago. It should be \$20 now,

Julie Walker: It should be \$20.

Andrew Pudewa: The benefits are high, the dollar value is small.

Seth Dunham: Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: Anyway, well, that's great. So you are now with Notgrass. And of course, John was kind of the brain behind the whole idea of the Homeschool Trade Association.

Julie Walker: John Notgrass, I'm just going to clarify.

Andrew Pudewa: John Notgrass. And I remember when he came up with this idea and I thought, "Well, that's going to be a pretty small club. What are we going to do?" But now it's not so small, and we're doing stuff, so tell us a little bit about it.

Seth Dunham: Yeah. Gosh, that was back in 2016. and I had met John and I was working at Demme Learning at the time, and Ethan had said, "Hey, you know John Notgrass?" And I said, "I know him, not well, but I know him." And long story short, a group of us met in St. Louis in 2016. We debated for hours, came up with bylaws, et cetera, and formed the Homeschool Trade Association.

And now I get to be, continue to be a part of that, so it's pretty exciting. Essentially we're growing. We're still growing. I think we're anywhere between 65 and 70 members now. And these are all leaders in the homeschool industry. The purpose, it's... the purpose of it really is, is to pull together. . .

Well, think of it this way. No one consultant could provide the expertise and experience needed to help a business in the homeschool industry to really thrive. But the combined knowledge and experience of the leaders in the homeschool industry together can. So in a nutshell, it's more than a network. It's like a shared brain trust. And, and we bring together these really awesome industry leaders that, I mean, everything from, you know, ed tech to e-commerce resellers to curriculum writers and publishers, all the different diverse companies within the homeschool industry together, and we leverage all of that experience, all of that expertise to grow together and to be better together.

So the whole purpose is to build healthy businesses, better businesses, thriving businesses that can reach their unreached potential, in a nutshell. It's a lot of fun.

Julie Walker: A lot of this experience culminates in our annual convention. And before we get to that, because I think this lineup is pretty exciting, and I do want to let our listeners know what we have planned for November. In addition to more grandchildren on the horizon in November, we're doing a big event in November.

But year-round, there are other activities, I wouldn't say activities, opportunities for these members of the Homeschool Trade Association to benefit from membership. And can you just speak to that a little bit?

Seth Dunham: Yeah. So we do various webinars on different topics. Everything from marketing to operations to human resources, organizational development, things of that nature, for our members so that they can join those webinars. And we'll usually have a special guest who's what you would deem as an expert in that area or really, really, really good at it.

So those are great. We have forums where we can communicate with each other. We have the directory. So what's really cool is people who you may have otherwise been difficult to get connected with or to reach, you can reach, as a member, which is really fun.

And we also have the HTA AIM report, which is—AIM stands for Assessment of Industry Metrics. So there's a lot to unpack there. But in a nutshell, think of it this way with, with the AIM report as one of the benefits of being a member. Good decisions help your industry or your business thrive. It helps your families, it helps your employees, it helps their families, it helps your family, it helps the people you serve, your customers.

Bad decisions do the opposite of that, right? And good data makes for good decisions. Bad data makes for bad decisions. And so with the AIM report, you get industry metrics like benchmarks within the industry that you can't get anywhere else, doesn't exist anywhere else. So you can get an idea of what's, what's the average company of my size growing on a quarter-by-quarter basis, how much is their revenue growing.

It's completely anonymous, so the data is aggregated by a third party. And so it's very secure. But at the end of the day, I could say, “Hey, my company grew 5%. I'm real excited about that.” But then I might look at the AIM report and go, “Everybody else grew 11. Well, shoot. I wish I would've done better.”

Or it could be the opposite. But you don't know those things, without the AIM report. So everything from revenue growth to unit sales volume to revenue per unit, all sorts of data points. It's like a 35-page comprehensive report that provides benchmarks in the home school industry that can't be found anywhere else.

And it gives you the tools that you need to make better decisions. And as a result, guess who benefits? Like we said, your customers, your family, your employees, their family. So those are some of the things, in addition to the conference that we do every year.

Julie Walker: So I think of, Andrew, your talk... Well, you have lots of talks, but one of them that I'm thinking of is the "However Imperfectly" talk, and you talk about the importance of the educator filling themselves and how important that is. And by doing that, they're able to be better teachers, to be able to serve their students or their children better because it's you, not them. It's about the teacher.

And I kind of feel that way about this organization. I think the businesses that are a part of the Homeschool Trade Association, I mean, some of our, quote, "direct competitors" are a part of this organization, but we are there to help each other. And as we become a better company, we are able then in turn able to serve our customers better, and I appreciate that opportunity to do that.

And I was thinking when you were talking about the AIM report and where you can't get this data anywhere else, and the various large language models, AI, where you can go, "How much does Notgrass gross every year in revenue?" Well, it doesn't matter who you go to, they're going to hallucinate, right? AI models, they make up data.

But to be able to have this, this opportunity to, you know, share that data anonymously... And we have members, and when I say we, I'm talking about the Homeschool Trade Association. We have members, companies that have one employee, and we have companies that have 50 or more employees. So they're, you know, the size, it doesn't really matter how big or small. We just, come one, come all to the Homeschool Trade Association

Seth Dunham: Yeah. We have every, every, we have hundreds of employees even, companies with hundreds.

Julie Walker: In the hundreds, yeah

Seth Dunham: yeah, all the way down to one

Andrew Pudewa: But that come one, come all, you're not inviting anybody who's interested.

Julie Walker: No, it

Andrew Pudewa: You have to be, like, a member of the thing?

Julie Walker: So, well, Seth, talk about the annual conference, and then talk about membership and who can actually join. And, you know, one of the questions that you had for me is why are we inviting the president of the Homeschool Trade Association to be part of our podcast when, as you are kind of hinting, not everyone who listens to this podcast would necessarily be invited to participate?

And I think the main reason I wanted to let our audience know is that there is this organization that is helping us help them, and we're not in our own little vacuum just talking to our little island. But we are talking to other homeschooling entities and are trying to learn from each other.

'Cause it's, you know, that's just, that's an act of humility, right? To say, "We don't know everything, so let's learn from those that know more than us." So we're very much

Seth Dunham: It's not all about, you know, it's not all about greed, right? It's not like we want to grow so we have more money so we can buy more cars. It's: we want to be better for our end users, our customers, our homeschool families. Like, we want to be better for them, for you, if you're one of those folks.

And so, yeah, the members are typically the leaders- leadership level of an organization. So an organization can join, and all your leaders can be a part of that. And so generally speaking, like at the Homeschool Trade Association conference, the HTA conference, these are all the leaders in the homeschool industry that come together.

And it's magical. And what I, what I mean by magical is I came out of the corporate world and not in the homeschool industry. And generally speaking, we looked at our competitors as we must kill them so that we can grow. Like we had to grow at their expense. They must die, therefore we can thrive.

And so nobody looked at a competitor as somebody who they would ever help or assist in any way because they were ultimately, they were the enemy. We had to get them out of our way so that we could grow. This is very, very different. And it's awesome. Like, I've never seen it happen like this before, and I...

It just has happened. And what I mean by that is you get all these leaders together, and like you mentioned, Julie, there's competitors in the room, but the guard's down. And the way we look at it is we don't have to, we don't have to succeed at the expense of the person next to us, at the expense of our neighbor. We can all rise together. And if we all rise together, we don't just support the individual companies, we support the homeschool market as a whole. We make it better. We make the products better, the companies better. We serve our customers better, and we support the homeschool industry as a whole, which means we're supporting the families who make up the homeschool industry.

So, it's pretty neat to see that happen. It's been really special to watch, the guards come down and everybody's just in it, and they say, "Hey, I've experienced that problem. Here's how we solved it. I think it would help you do that." We see that constantly in our... especially at the conference, which is really, really cool to see.

Julie Walker: So tell us about the conference, Seth. We have a hotshot keynote this year.

Seth Dunham: We do. We have the great Andrew Pudewa, whom we love and respect and admire, will be with us and speaking, and I'm very excited about that. And we have a couple of other, really, really good speakers as well. So the conference is November 5th and 6th in St. Louis, and we've already got...

I would have to look to get the exact numbers, but we've already got, I think, probably double the registrations for the conference that we had this time last year. so it's looking really good. And basically, the theme of the conference is Human at the Helm. In other words, what we're going to look at really, when it comes to the conference are a couple of key areas, and it's going to be really about AI.

We're going to talk AI. And essentially it's a force multiplier, not a replacement of our intellect, our soul, who we are. How do we, how do we recognize its perils, but how do we also leverage it to help scale our business and be smart with it? And so, there's that aspect.

We're going to look at burnout. And we're going to talk through that. I've got a guy coming who's written a book on burnout, which I'm mostly through, and it's really, really good. and so how to recognize that, how to combat it for yourself and for your team as well. And, healthy leaders make for healthy companies, and so we want to really help our leaders be healthy.

And so it'll be pretty awesome. We have three really awesome speakers, Andrew, Vikrant Bacra or Batra, sorry, Vikrant. he goes by Vik. Everybody calls him Vik. Brilliant, brilliant guy. And, he has started and owns AI-driven firms and a marketing firm as well, and is an expert in that arena, especially in how to leverage AI to scale your business without losing your humanity in the process.

So, really, really good. really good guy, and then we have, Julian is his name. Godbarge, Julian Godbarge. He wrote the book. It's called Burnout and Learn. excellent book, which I've, mostly through, not all the way through, but mostly through it. Really, really good. As well as the great Andrew Pudewa.

So we've got an incredible lineup of people, speaking and, and lending us their great wisdom, for the conference, so it's going to be really good

Julie Walker: So did we answer the question, Andrew, that you asked? Who can join the Homeschool Trade Association?

Seth Dunham: Any organization in the homeschool industry. So what I mean by organization, if you're a curriculum developer, you're a publisher, you're an ed-tech company, you're an academy, you know, any company or marketing firm, any company that supports the homeschooling industry as their primary method of operation, so to speak, can join the HTA.

And then the membership levels basically just go on how many, how many people you want to be a part of, have a membership access to the Homeschool Trade Association. And I always recommend, like, if you have a leadership team of three, get the level that allows all your leaders to be a part of it. Because the truth is, if your leaders grow, your company grows. They are the lid. You might be, but they are as well. So, however big that leadership team is probably a level of membership that you should choose

Julie Walker: What were the biggest reasons you decided to homeschool your daughters?

Seth Dunham: Oh, boy. I'll make it really short. They were seventh grade, public school. I was public schooled. I never really considered homeschool, and they'd ask once, "Hey, Dad, can we be homeschooled?" And I'm like, "No. Why would we do that? we're not homeschooling. That's not what we do." And I thought they wanted to homeschool because their best friend was homeschooled, and she got to get done early every day, and they thought it sounded cool.

And so I was just... Dismissed it. And one day I picked them up from school, the twins, and, and on the way home, they were very quiet, which was unusual for seventh grade girls. And I said, "Hey, you guys okay back there in the back seat?" And they said, "Dad, we have to talk." And I said, "Well, okay. What's going on?"

And long story short, in a nutshell, they said, "You want us to be good girls. You want us to be pure. You want us to be kind and compassionate. And all of these things that you, you, you and Mom really want from us, we're going to fail. We're going to flop, and we're struggling, and we don't know what to do. We need to get out of this environment."

And I went, "Oh, my gosh. How did we miss this?" And I went into the kitchen. We sat in the driveway for, like, 45 minutes. I went in the kitchen, and I said, "Angel, we have to homeschool." And she said, "What? Are you crazy?" And long story short, within a month we pulled them out of school and started our homeschool journey. And best decision we ever made

Andrew Pudewa: Wow. I love it. Yeah. And that the kids knew before it was too late.

Julie Walker: Yeah,

Andrew Pudewa: We have to get out. Yeah. That's-- They were, they were wise.

Seth Dunham: I still get goosebumps

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah

Julie Walker: Amazing. Well, thank you, Seth, for being a part of our podcast today. looking forward to the conference, and again, that's November.

Seth Dunham: Fifth and sixth. Mm-hmm

Julie Walker: In St. Charles, specifically, Missouri. Yeah, so right in the St. Louis area, and no field trips to go see the arch or anything crazy like that. We just to go hang out and have great conferences, both attending and participating in conference.

I'm thinking of that word conference, Andrew, that you use,

Andrew Pudewa: Francis Bacon, yeah

Julie Walker: And eat good food and just hang out with friends. Looking forward to it.

Seth Dunham: Yeah, it's going to be great. Thanks for having me.

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you will find our show notes and relevant links. One more thing: would you please rate and review our podcast? This helps other smart listeners like you find us. Thank you.