

CASE STUDY

BicyclingHub.com

How a spare bedroom in Portland became one of the largest online cycling clothing retailers in the United States.

Doug Duguay · Founder & E-Commerce Director · 2002–2023 · dougduguay.com

\$1.4M+	300,000+	#1
Peak Annual Revenue	Orders Shipped to 40+ Countries	Global Google Ranking 'Cycling Jerseys'

THE BUSINESS

Built From Zero. No Playbook. No Investors.

In 2001, Doug Duguay was selling consumer electronics on eBay, making mortgage payments, and racing his bicycle at the Alpenrose velodrome in Portland. A chance encounter at the track — a vendor selling closeout Italian cycling apparel — planted the seed of what would become a 20-year business.

BicyclingHub.com launched on a Yahoo Store in 2002. There was no funding, no agency, no mentor, and no roadmap. Everything — SEO, Google Ads, content strategy, email marketing, team leadership, P&L; management, vendor relationships, and eight website redesigns — was built through relentless self-teaching and an obsessive refusal to accept good enough.

At its peak, BicyclingHub was shipping orders to customers in more than 40 countries, employing a team of passionate cyclists, and holding the **#1 global Google organic ranking for 'Cycling Jerseys'** — outranking national chains with budgets and teams many times its size.

CONTENT & SEO

How a Small Team Beat National Chains on Google.

The insight that defined BicyclingHub's competitive strategy came early: in a market where big retailers competed on price and selection, a specialty brand could win on depth of knowledge. The bet was that the most authoritative, most useful, most human resource on the web would outrank anyone — and it did.

Beginning in 2004-2006, Doug built a content operation that was unusual for its time and genuinely rare even by today's standards:

- Every team member personally tested the products they wrote about — vendor samples supplemented by product the team bought themselves
- Monday editorial meetings established a weekly content calendar driven by keyword research, competitor analysis, and a relentless drive to answer every question a cyclist might have
- Friday team rides kept the content authentic — staff reviews were written from real experience, not spec sheets
- Customer service inquiries were systematically mined: sizing questions became fit guides; care questions became care guides; beginner questions became an onboarding content series
- Vendor representatives came in regularly for product training, ensuring BicyclingHub's descriptions were the most technically accurate available anywhere online
- YouTube videos — some of the earliest cycling product content on the platform, uploaded over 18 years ago — were produced in-house and embedded directly on product pages, supporting both SEO and conversion
- A Blogspot-hosted blog (Yahoo Store had no native blog) drove 6,000+ monthly page views through staff-written content in their own voices

The Result

#1 global Google organic ranking for 'Cycling Jerseys' — held for multiple years. Outranking Performance Bicycle, Backcountry, and every national chain in the US, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Singapore. Built entirely through content quality, not domain authority games.

The broader lesson: content that actually serves the reader — written by people who genuinely know the product — compounds over time in a way that no paid shortcut can replicate. The SEO infrastructure built during this period became the business's most durable competitive asset, surviving algorithm updates that devastated competitors.

PAID ACQUISITION

Google Ads Strategy: Bottom of Funnel First.

From early adoption of Google AdWords, BicyclingHub operated on a philosophy that most advertisers took years to arrive at: **capture buyers who are already searching, not people you have to**

convince. Every dollar was weighted toward high-intent, bottom-of-funnel keywords — people actively looking to buy, not casually browsing.

- Managed \$700,000+ in total lifetime Google Ads spend generating 19,000+ orders across the US and 40+ international markets
 - Peak monthly budget of \$10,000 with disciplined bi-weekly optimization — building and refining keyword lists, eliminating non-converting spend, and doubling down on what worked
 - Expanded internationally, including Japanese-language AdWords campaigns after identifying high-volume orders from Japan — working with translators and AdWords specialists to capture demand competitors weren't even aware of
 - Accepted lower conversion rates on broad category terms like 'Cycling Jerseys' because sheer global traffic volume compensated — a strategic tradeoff most advertisers wouldn't have the data or patience to make
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EMAIL & RETENTION

50,000 Subscribers. Lifecycle Marketing Before It Had a Name.

BicyclingHub's email program was built when most e-commerce brands were still treating email as a broadcast channel. The approach was different from the start: segmented, content-rich, and built around the interests of a passionate cycling audience rather than a promotional calendar.

- Built email list to 50,000+ subscribers using Constant Contact and Mailchimp
 - Deployed segmented campaigns mixing product promotions, staff-written editorial, and cycling lifestyle content — giving subscribers a reason to open beyond the discount
 - Developed abandoned cart recovery, lifecycle automation, and customer win-back campaigns to maximize repeat purchase and lifetime value
 - Used coupon inserts in every Amazon and eBay shipment — a credit card-sized card with a discount code — to migrate marketplace customers to direct brand relationship, reducing platform dependency and building owned audience
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TEAM & CULTURE

Cyclists First. Skills Second.

Every hiring decision at BicyclingHub was guided by a single principle: hire people who love cycling, then teach them what they need to know. The result was a team that could speak to customers with genuine authority — because they were the same customer.

At peak, the team of 6-10 included a Head Content Developer managing blog, email, PR, and social media; a product page content specialist; customer service staff who personally tested women's products; and warehouse and retail team members who all rode and contributed to staff picks.

The cultural standard was high. Team members didn't just write descriptions — they went on Friday rides, attended Monday editorial meetings, brought back field reports from real rides, and turned their personal experiences with products into content that built genuine trust with customers around the world.

The business was also recognized as a **Silver-Level Bicycle Friendly Business** by the League of American Bicyclists, with a near-100% bike or walk commute rate among staff — a reflection of how deeply the cycling culture ran through everything the brand did.

NAVIGATING ADVERSITY

The Perfect Storm of 2013. And How We Responded.

In January 2013, Lance Armstrong sat down with Oprah Winfrey and confessed to doping. Within weeks, BicyclingHub felt it — cycling apparel demand collapsed across the industry as the sport's most visible ambassador became its biggest liability.

But that was only one of three forces hitting simultaneously:

- European gray market competitors had begun flooding the US market with discounted cycling apparel, deliberately avoiding the 20% US tariff on imported cycling clothing — undercutting domestic pricing in ways that were impossible to match legitimately
- Google algorithm updates began systematically favoring large brand retailers over specialty independents, eroding organic rankings that had taken years to build
- Major competitors like Backcountry violated minimum advertised pricing agreements to liquidate inventory — too large for vendors to penalize, too aggressive for smaller retailers to absorb

The response was disciplined and unsentimental:

- Dropped Pearl Izumi immediately when they refused to protect margin — and eventually dropped most brands that couldn't or wouldn't hold MAP
- Eliminated underperforming SKUs ruthlessly, focusing the catalog on what actually sold at healthy margins
- Maintained the SEO infrastructure that had taken years to build, understanding that organic authority was the one asset that couldn't be bought or copied overnight
- Took on outside digital marketing consulting work to maintain financial stability while the business evolved

- Moved to a leaner operating model, reducing headcount and shifting toward drop-ship to reduce inventory risk

The Harder Lesson

Not every storm can be navigated perfectly. Some market forces are structural, not tactical. Knowing when to adapt the business model — and when to pivot entirely — is as important as knowing how to grow. BicyclingHub's disciplined response preserved the brand long enough to relaunch as Cycling Love in 2019 and generate \$400K+ in 11 months.

RESULTS

Twenty Years. By the Numbers.

\$1.4M+ Peak Annual Revenue	300,000+ Orders Shipped Worldwide	#1 Global Google Ranking 'Cycling Jerseys'
50,000+ Email Subscribers	\$700K+ Google Ads Spend Managed	

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

I've Already Solved the Problems You're Facing.

BicyclingHub wasn't a case study I read about — it was a business I built, broke, and rebuilt, making every decision with my own money and my own team on the line. The strategies that drove its growth weren't borrowed from a playbook. They were figured out the hard way, through years of trial, error, and obsessive optimization.

What that means for you: when I audit your Google Ads account, I'm not running a checklist — I'm thinking about margin, inventory velocity, and what that wasted spend actually costs a real business. When I develop your content strategy, I'm thinking about what your customer actually needs to hear to

trust you enough to buy. When I manage your email program, I'm thinking about lifetime value, not open rates.

I've owned the P&L.; I've felt every bad month. I've made payroll when margins were thin and made hard decisions about which brands and products deserved space in the catalog. That experience makes me a fundamentally different kind of operator — and a fundamentally different kind of partner.

Ready to talk about what I can build for your business?

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