

BREAKING THE BARRIER

EPISODE 14

Going Viral Is Luck. Partnerships Are the Plan:

20 Closed The Trust Problem, Faith as Your OS

WITH BAHIGH ACUNA

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EPISODE NOTES

Thank you for joining Breaking the Barrier. In this episode, Nick Madden sits down with Bahigh Acuna, a tech entrepreneur and go-to-market strategist who spent time building Spotify, Ancestry and Amazon and now helps companies enter new markets, structure partnerships and put AI to work. Bahigh was Spotify's first man on the ground in Mexico when music streaming sounded like a scam, and he walks through how trust gets built: launch partners, a sharp definition of the customer, and the cultural layer most companies skip. This conversation is about earning trust before you ask for anything, and about a faith that runs as the operating system underneath the work rather than a separate life beside it.

Trust Comes Before Proof

Launching Spotify in Mexico meant asking big brands to partner with a product that had no users yet.

"How many users do you have? Zero. We have zero right now."

Eighteen or nineteen of twenty doors closed; the one that opened, Coca-Cola, understood music, and the launch became, in his words, the biggest in Spotify's history.

Website

sentventures.com/breaking-the-barrier



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Partners Beat the Algorithm

Hoping to go viral is not a go-to-market plan.

"Do you just pray to the algorithm God to be viral? You're leaving it to luck."

His answer is a launch-partner playbook he has carried through every company since: know what you give the big partner and what you get back.

Keep an Empty Chair for the Customer

Most founders lose sight of who they are actually building for.

"There's an empty chair. Because that empty chair represents the customer."

At launch, Spotify's customer was a music lover between 15 and 24 who went to two concerts a month; the other clusters followed later.

Write the Press Release First

Amazon's work-backwards method starts from the finished story and reasons back to the work.

"You start from the press release. You write the press release."

Then he built a customer barriers analysis to decode why the hardest customers are hard to reach and convert, because if you crack it, then you won.

Move Fast, But Not Blind

A launch-day translation blunder that went viral changed how he thinks about speed.

"I've changed my mind a little bit, not, you know, not move slow, but definitely be more intentional, be more strategic."

Done is still better than perfect, but he agreed with Nick that a few more days would have saved a lot of pain, and you cannot launch a market without its cultural layer.

Storytelling and Sales Stay Human

AI will take the accounting, the analysis and much of the dev work, so what is left for the founder?

"I think storytelling and sales, that is not going anywhere right now. Nobody wants to speak to on AI, even if it's flawless."

Creativity, taste and the ability to sell a story become the premium skills, and authenticity is what people will pay attention to.

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Integrity First, Then They Ask

In San Francisco tech he never hid his faith, but a friend's advice shaped how he carried it. (A friend's line, quoted by the guest.)

"You just manage yourself with high integrity."

Like Arthur Brooks: competent and honest first, and forty-five minutes in people learn he is Catholic, which lands with more impact than waving the flag.

Faith Is the Operating System

Asked how his faith shapes the way he sees AI and entrepreneurship, he refused the idea of two separate lives.

"I think my Catholic faith is in my OS."

Anything he does, he operates under it; there is no business self over here and a faith self over there.

Do Your Best, Then Surrender

His mother's rule, repeated since childhood, now closes his day. (His mother's words, quoted by the guest.)

"Do the best you can. And everything else, just leave it to the Holy Spirit. Whatever you can't control."

The last thing he does at night is hand over whatever is on his mind, so he can sleep and wake up ready to be the best husband, parent and professional he can be.

You Can't Manufacture Energy

With four kids under six and a full client load, energy is not a resource he can count on.

"I found that you can't manufacture energy so much."

So he is ruthless about prioritization and focus: one thing today, two more only if it is done, and everything else on the list can wait.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Trust Before Proof

Where are you asking customers or partners to believe in something they have never experienced?

2. The Empty Chair

What would change in this week's meetings if that customer had a chair at the table?

3. Integrity Before the Flag

Do the people you work with know your faith first from your conduct or from your words?

What would managing yourself with high integrity look like in your hardest room this week?

4. One Operating System

Where does your business self make decisions your faith self would not sign?

What is one decision this week you will run through the same operating system as your prayer?

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