



Crescent Cove Conversations

featuring

Dana Hayes, Jr.
CEO of Predactiv



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What is it and why was it created?

Fundamentally, people do business with people. Our founder series is a place where we can show the person behind the business. It will tell the story of how and why the business was started. Our series will be personal and pointed. Our founders are impressive people. Sometimes, they are following a calling to right a wrong, fill a gap, be of greater service, but in all cases, they have a great story to tell.

We look forward to you listening to their stories and learning more about these entrepreneurs.

Crescent Cove Conversations: Dan Hayes, Jr., CEO of Predactiv

In this series, Crescent Cove invites insights and life lessons from the founders and leaders we've worked with over the years. Acknowledging there is no 'secret sauce' to success, these vignettes explore the human dimension of high-performing individuals and the companies they lead.

Dana Hayes, Jr. is CEO of [Predactiv](#), a data and technology company specializing in transforming and activating data assets through a proprietary AI-driven platform. The Predactiv Data Platform features real time consumer insights, analytics, audience creation, and activation. The core of Predactiv's platform is its proprietary real-time global digital behavioral dataset. Predactiv collects and analyzes vast amounts of online data to help businesses understand customer intent and optimize marketing strategies.

Dana sat down with Crescent Cove to talk about the role of storytelling in advertising, what it means to be a force for good, and why you should always say 'yes' when Google asks you to share your location.

Crescent Cove (CC): Where are you calling in from?

Dana Hayes, Jr. (DH): Well, Predactiv is based in Palo Alto, but I live in Chicago. I was born and raised here, specifically in the northern suburbs. I'm the oldest of six, and still close with all of my siblings – we are all here in Chicago, and see each other often. We're all married with children, so the family has gotten big.

I completed my undergraduate degree at DePauw University, which is affectionately referred to as the "Harvard of the Midwest." Following undergrad, I attended the University of Chicago, Graduate School of Business for an MBA.

CC: I thought Notre Dame was the "Harvard of the Midwest?"

DH: Yes, so I'm told. Anyway, I had a great experience with the liberal arts education, and I became fascinated in how media and marketing can inform and persuade consumer behavior.

Then, after college, my first job was with Leo Burnett Advertising, one of the largest advertising agencies in the world. If you're not familiar with Leo Burnett, he was a pioneer in advertising, creating iconic characters such as Ronald McDonald, Tony the Tiger, Toucan Sam, and the Jolly Green Giant, to name a few. It was an incredible advertising agency in Chicago in the face of New York's Madison Ave, the "Mad Men."

CC: It's a great show.

DH: It is. Anyway, Leo became really big in that era – the late '60s and early '70s. His company was headquartered here in Chicago, and in 2002 it was acquired by Publicis Groupe. It's now the second-largest agency holding company, behind WPP. They're soon to be leaped over, though, with this proposed Omnicom-IPG merger expected later this year. That's a major consolidation. The newly formed conglomerate will be the world's largest agency holding company. Huge.

But back to Leo Burnett – he was this unbelievable leader, a builder of business. "Reach for the stars," was his famous saying, and I've always found that to be inspiring. Don't just get it done or check the box. Reach for the stars. Be ambitious in business. It's great advice not just for business, but for life, too.

Leo Burnett's business was 50 years old when I joined, and he had passed in the 70's, but his legacy was certainly there, and it was inspiring to me.

CC: What is the role of storytelling in advertising?

DH: Well, that's what advertising is, really, it's storytelling, coupled with the important component of targeted media. And that's where I've spent most of my time, at the intersection of storytelling and targeted media. I was not a creative. I focused on the business side

“ In this business, you meet big players—presidents of networks, major executives, presidents and future presidents. ”

of advertising, because I believed that getting the story in front of the right audience is what it's all about. Think of all the innovation around Apple. Think of the high-quality engines associated with Honda. Think of any of the famous brands today. They are built with the power of advertising. I find it fascinating. And something else – consumers want storytelling.

CC: Human beings think in stories, don't we? We understand our time on this earth with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

DH: Yes, exactly. Look at this weekend – it was Superbowl Sunday. You watch the ads, and people enjoy the commercials almost as much as the game. My family and I will watch the big game, but we tend to talk more about our favorite ads.

CC: Do you have an all-time favorite Superbowl ad?

DH: I just love the Budweiser Clydesdale horses. You don't see them as much as in the past. I mean, they're pushing beer, so how on earth do you get Clydesdales in there? It's incredible and very American. They've been a sponsor of the Super Bowl for years. That's one that pops to mind, for sure.

CC: Did you see the recent Volvo ad?

DH: No, but tell me about it.

“ If consumers understood the value proposition, like accepting a cookie or identifier in exchange for better content and offers, it would go far with adoption. ”

CC: It's a play on Volvo being the safest car on the road, but not in the way you expect. It's about a pregnant woman taking a walk, and she doesn't get hit by the car because the Volvo has such amazing brakes. All of my friends who are fathers sent the ad around in our group chats.

DH: Targeting. Clearly, they had it figured out. If it was on the right media platform, whether Instagram or NBC or something in between, the targeting makes a huge difference.

CC: Tell us more about targeting, and how Predactiv does it. Would you say that's your superpower?

DH: Predactiv's superpower is leveraging consumer signals, which come from the online behavior (i.e., sites you surf, articles you share). We also have a core competency around leveraging data science and Gen AI to create high quality data products. Let's say you were looking to plan an Italy trip out of your home city. We pick up signals from your online engagements—places to stay, eat, visit, things to see culturally in Rome. We then leverage AI and data science to build segments and sell them to United Airlines, Italy Tourism, Apple Vacations, Amex, wine companies, etc. It's all about breaking down the interest and intent signal in an anonymous way.

CC: Has the industry done a poor job of educating consumers?

DH: Yes, especially on opting in and out. Privacy laws are getting tighter in the U.S. Europe's GDPR set the precedent. Pre-election, some states—California, Colorado, Connecticut, Virginia, and there are a few others—are currently pushing privacy laws. It'll be interesting to see it unfold.

If consumers understood the value proposition, like accepting a cookie or identifier in exchange for better content and offers, it would go far with adoption.

CC: How did you get connected with Jun and Crescent Cove?

DH: We met through a debt refi process. We are in the predictive data and technology space, and Jun immediately understood the concept and the business model – our value proposition. He's super smart. He liked the business and the team, and that's what led us to

choose Jun and the team at Crescent Cove. We're doing a closing dinner in a few weeks in San Francisco.

CC: Within your industry, what is something no one is talking about but should be?

DH: It's what we mentioned before – privacy and consumer education. People are thinking about it, but they have no control over the situation. Privacy and consumer consent is a big deal today, and we take it very seriously. But, it will become an even bigger deal tomorrow. Companies have to stay informed of changes in legislation in each state. It's not easy. Think about it: fifty different states, fifty different privacy laws. If you're United Airlines and you want to run an ad, how do you manage that? That's the biggest challenge.

Google was going to shut down third-party cookies. Predactiv was ready for it. We waited three years to find out what Google was going to do. Six months ago, they took a U-turn—they decided not to deprecate cookies after all. They felt people just weren't ready, the mid-sized publishers weren't ready. The DOJ was also watching. That's one to keep an eye on in the regulatory and consumer privacy space.

Basically, Google has committed to saying, "If cookies get deprecated, it won't be Google doing it—it will be the consumer." That's smart on the whole, but here's what I worry about: It's a Google world. If that's the statement, I can live with it. But if they make it so biased, if they push consumers to "take control and get rid of the third-party cookie" in a way that benefits them, that's a little disingenuous.

CC: Let's talk briefly about public policy. Do you have thoughts on advertising's role there?

DH: I'll tell you advertising certainly has influence on public policy. I was on the Ad Council— a nonprofit in New York City with board members from ad agencies, media and data companies, and creative leaders. It's a "Who's who" in advertising and media. They created campaigns like Smokey the Bear, "This Is Your Brain On Drugs," and "Love Has No Labels."

Every couple of years, they do a spring daytrip to the White House, and it's a fascinating experience. I remember one time Biden came in. He was vice president at the time. He was supposed to talk for five or ten minutes, but he ended up staying over an hour, because he became genuinely interested in what we were saying about advertising and media. In this business, you meet big players—presidents of networks, major executives, presidents and future presidents.

I feel like my career in media and advertising has provided access to incredible experiences—Olympics, Super Bowls, White House visits. There's a role for advertising in public policy, for sure.

CC: Would you recommend the industry?

I was inspired by how advertising persuades consumers — buy a product, take a trip to Italy — and if that interests you, it's a great business.

DH: 100%. My three kids have already graduated college and chosen their paths. I love mentoring them, but I'm their Dad. But for friends, or friends of friends, if someone says, "My son doesn't know what to do" or "My daughter wants to get into advertising," I definitely talk to them about the industry.

You have to like it. I was inspired by how advertising persuades consumers—buy a product, take a trip to Italy — and if that interests you, it's a great business. Agencies work you hard and don't pay well initially, but that catches up to you. You grow.

CC: You've been at Predactiv for eight years and CEO for six and a half. Do you personally interview every prospective employee?

DH: Yes, and I've done so since long before the pandemic. I get a lot of positive feedback for spending time with candidates. They may feel intimidated at first, but as you can see, I'm pretty conversational. They like that. I do it for two reasons: first, if I were interviewing you, I'd want to give you the opportunity to ask anything—about the market, the company and our culture, our values. Secondly, by the time someone reaches me, they've been through all the gates. I'm the last check. I want to make sure the candidate is a good fit with our organization.

CC: What advice do you have for candidates in the face of rapid innovation, like LLMs, DeepSeek, etc.?

DH: It's not just our industry. It's everything. I would say study the industry hard before interviews. Ask really good questions. That's what forms an opinion. Are you all in on Predactiv? Are you prepared for the media vendor side? You can tell who's done their homework and who hasn't. Some try to wing it, but you really can't fake it. Study hard. The tools are in front of you. I didn't have the Internet when I was job hunting. So go learn. Be interested. Be inquisitive.

CC: On your website, you say Predactiv wants to be a 'force for good.' What does that mean?

DH: Great question. While the inspiration for "force for good" is simple, the phrase really represents who we are at Predactiv.

“Force for good” started during the pandemic, when we launched our “Data for Good” initiative designed to advance change in our society. We leveraged our data asset by creating audience segments for important causes, donating a portion of our revenue accordingly. Recently, for example, we donated proceeds to organizations supporting aid for the California wildfires. Likewise, in the past we have supported organizations for veterans, foster children, suicide prevention, and more. I’m very proud of our support for these important causes.

Similarly, Predactiv employees give back to their communities by joining together at least once a quarter and donating time by working at food pantries, senior centers, and other local non-profit organizations.

Aside from our charitable work and donations, we’re good stewards of consumer data, not only adhering to privacy and compliance standards, but raising the bar and setting the standards. We are consistently in the top 1% of data companies across consent, compliance, and sourcing transparency.

Finally, the phrase “force for good,” to me, is very powerful. The Predactiv Data Platform is a “force for good.” The power of our

platform is truly unmatched in the industry. We have built a solution, in the form of data, technology, and expert decision science to help our customers truly unlock the value in their data, without all of the heavy lifting. Our “power” is a force for good that “empowers” our customers.

CC: Speaking of things that matter, what is happiness to you?

DH: Professionally, I love my industry, people, and the work. Some people want to retire at age forty-five; I like engagement. People, coaching, seeing promotions.

Success breeds success.

Personally, happiness is seeing my kids grow into adults. One out of three is married. No grandkids yet, but soon. When your kids are older, they transition from seeing you as “the hammer” to becoming more like someone they want to spend more time with. It’s different and wonderful.

And outside of work, it’s time with my extended family including the siblings – the Hayes Sibs – and their families. I love being outside, travelling, working out, skiing – water or snow – and, of course, golf.



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Dana Hayes, Jr.

CEO of Predactive

Dana Hayes Jr. is an accomplished executive with extensive experience in leadership roles across various companies, currently serving as Chief Executive Officer at Predactive since April 2024. Previously, Dana held the positions of CEO and President at ShareThis from January 2017 to April 2024. Additional experience includes serving on the Advisory Board of Screen6, where Dana contributed to the establishment of cross-device identity standards in adtech. Dana's background encompasses roles such as Group Vice President of Global Partner Development at Acxiom, Executive in Residence at Abundant Venture Partners, and Chief Revenue Officer at Travora Media. Dana also served as SVP Sales and Marketing at Tribune Interactive and Interim CEO of quadrantONE, leading the establishment of the business. Educational credentials include an MBA in Marketing/Finance from The University of Chicago Booth School of Business and a BA in Communication from DePauw University.



Crescent Cove is a technology-focused investment firm that is dedicated to supporting entrepreneurs and founders. Established in 2016, Crescent Cove leverages its global network of relationships and insight across markets, emerging industries, and technologies to build businesses and accelerate value creation across its portfolios.



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