GMSB 199

[00:00:00] **Antony W:** Welcome to the Grow My Salon Business podcast, where we focus on the business side of hairdressing. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and I'll be talking to thought leaders in the hairdressing industry, discussing insightful, provocative, and inspiring ideas that matter. So get ready to learn, get ready to be challenged, get ready to be inspired, and most importantly, get ready to grow your salon business.

[00:00:28] **Antony W.:** Hello and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon Business podcast. I'm your host Antony Whitaker, and as I always say, it's great to have you here with us today. Now I'm going to start by saying thank you for all the feedback on the podcast. The reviews that you've posted really mean a lot to me .I do read every one of them, and I wish it was more like social media where I could reply to you each individually to say thank you, but you know who you are. So a heartfelt thanks, and if you haven't already left us a review, then I have a little favor to ask of you, and that is that you rate and review us on the Apple Podcast app. By doing that, it helps other people to find us, and it's a nice way of saying thank you to my guests who freely give up their time to be on the show and share their wisdom and experience with you, the listener. So all you need to do is go to the Apple Podcast app, search, grow My Salon business, scroll to the bottom of the page, select ratings and reviews, and write a review. And we would be very appreciative. So with that said, let's get on with today's show. Now my guest on today's podcast is Richard Kavanagh, who amongst other things is the founder of piiq digital.com. And I've asked Richard onto the show today because I really want to talk about AI and creativity, and he has a foot in both camps, and I think that he'll bring a really good perspective to the conversation.

[00:01:49] **Antony W.:** So in today's podcast, we're going to discuss AI and creativity consultations and the impact of creativity on salon retail and the piiq Smart Mirror and lots more. So without further ado, welcome for the show, Richard Kavanagh.

[00:02:05] **Richard K:** Thanks for having me. Uh, what an awesome intro, and I can't believe that this is episode 199.

[00:02:12] **Antony W.:** Yes, well all things going to plan. It will be episode 199, so, uh, fingers crossed.

[00:02:18] **Antony W.:** So, Richard, let's just dive in, uh, straight away into this whole AI topic. It I know that you have been in, involved in developing an AI product for a number of years, but for whatever reason, AI has really just exploded into the general consciousness pretty much in the last sort of six months. And everyone all over the world and every industry is talking about AI and the impact that it's going to have. And I think that one of the things that's not spoken about, As much is the impact on creativity, uh, the good, the bad, the indifferent. So I figured it would be a really good conversation to dig into and focus on the impact of AI on the creative process that goes on, uh, for us as hairdressers. so sort of as an opening solver, what impact do you see, um, AI having on the creative side of the hairdressing industry?

[00:03:27] **Richard K:** I think this is a fantastic topic to be talking about, particularly now it's incredibly poignant. Um, you know, with the advent of our, uh, stable diffusion image generators and our large language models like Chat, G P T, Dali, et cetera, um, the technology that's available to the masses in terms of machine learning models and AI or artificial intelligence is really, really exciting right now. And. a lot of people have some fear around it. You know, it feels a little bit scary. It's a little bit, uh, there's, there's a lot of unknown and uncertainty. And I think, um, if I can just kind of draw a little analogy, and it's actually from a documentary that I watched about the difference in perception and opinion, in different countries of, in particular robotics and, in the US and the UK and, and to some degree in Australia and New Zealand, um, there tends to be somewhat of a catastrophical, cataclysmic kind of viewpoint of robotics and artificial intelligence and technology. Oh my God, the robots are going to take over the world. They're going to, you know, they're not going to need mankind anymore and they're going to cut the cord and do away with us, and it'll be Terminator, you know, version 17 and. If you go to, uh, other countries, in particular Japan and to some degree China and Korea, The perception of robotics and technology is quite different.

[00:05:02] **Richard K:** It's seen as a friendly little helper. It's seen as something that is really useful to take on those tasks that you don't want to do, um, to help you run the hi home and at work to free up your time and to make your life easier. And there's not that fear of the robots taking over cause it's like, well, why would they, they're just like little electronic pets and they'll just do what we want them to do and they're going to look after us and help us. And, and it's, and it's all that. So for me, I think I, I kind of have, uh, a pragmatic view of it. I'm uncertain about the future. Nobody knows what future is going to bring. We can only kind of put our own view on it. And, and for me, I think it's, it's both exciting and definitely. I think it's important to be consciously apprehensive, you know, you've got to be a little bit cautious, um, about leaping in with blind faith. in terms of the impact on creativity, my personal opinion is that if used as a tool and not a toy, in other words, if we bypass the gimmickry that's available to us, that's immediately exciting and enticing which is what we see in things like lots of the TikTok filters and, uh, well, particularly the TikTok filters, right?

[00:06:26] **Richard K:** It's right. Really exciting and enticing and it's, it's kind of gimmickry. It doesn't serve any real purpose apart from a little bit of a way of communicating an idea. And if we look to develop and use technology as a tool from that mindset of how can it help us save time? How can it help us improve our efficiencies and effectiveness, then when it comes down to creativity, We can use technology in particular, AI artificial intelligence, machine learning models to take care of the tasks in our businesses as hairdressers that we don't necessarily love doing. You know, if we think about the kind of technological advancements in the hairdressing industry over the past decade or so, you know, the majority of, um, successful salons operate with a computer, a salon software system that they use for booking and client management. many salons, use some kind of accounting package or software, or if they don't, they have a bookkeeper or accountant that does, um, use an accounting software or system to save time and to keep things organized and do those tasks that we just. I don't know about you. I'm not, I'm not a fan of accounting. I have a, a software system that does that and it's so much easier and saves me time and, and helps me, um, in life in general. So in terms of the Salon on business and creativity, if we use technology as a tool, then we will free up more time to have deeper human connections

with our clients, which for me personally, as a lifelong hairdresser and hairstylist, it's the human connections that matter most.

[00:08:15] **Richard K:** I'll tell you, um, I, I just want to share something briefly with you that I just came to mind when I was working in a small suburban salon in Davenport, Auckland, New Zealand, when I was, uh, let's go back to the, the nineties, the early nineties. And, um, this woman came in to have her hair done. She, I hadn't met her before. She had that kind of hair that was coarse, but not a lot of it. It had a bend or a kink in it so that if it wasn't cut well, it wouldn't sit well. And, um, she was a little bit overweight, but she kind of carried herself very small, you know, she, she carried herself in a way that was somewhat apologetic for her personal presence. Anyway, she sat in my chair, I spoke to her. I did a consultation. I looked at her hair type and texture. I tried to suss out how I could best cut her hair to enhance her features. She had a big birthmark on the side of her face, which she kind of gelled her hair down onto because she was really conscious of it.

[00:09:15] **Richard K:** So I decided to free that up, shape it up. Give her a strong little graduated bob at the jawline to enhance her jawline. And I suggested to her that she have a heavy, slightly curved fringe because she had the most amazing almond shaped, bright blue eyes. Her eyes were so like stunning. And so here was this woman who was kind of apologetic for her presence and hiding from everybody, but had these incredible eyes. One thing I noticed as I was doing her hair and I would try to kind of turn her head to the mirror. I, you know, I'd, I'd take my hands on the side of her head and I'd guide her head around to straighten it up to make sure it was balanced. And every time she caught side of herself in the mirror, she would. Look away, she'd kind of avert her eyes. She didn't want to look at herself or see herself, and it wasn't like a big deal. It was just one of those little things that I noticed in the process, you know, anyway, I didn't do anything out of the ordinary. Cut her hair, did a nice consultation, cut her hair the way I thought that would look best, expressed my creativity, not in a kind of wild, crazy creative way, but in a, just a very commercial, human-centered, creative way at that time I had a choice of gel moose or hairspray, so I chose some moose, put that in her hair, got my Denman and my blow dryer, and I blow dried her hair so that it was sitting nice. Finished it off, gave it a little shake, dusted off her neck, whipped off the cape, grabbed the, the back mirror to show her the back of her head.

[00:10:37] **Richard K:** When she checked the back mirror, she looked in the mirror to look at the back mirror, and it was the first time she'd actually looked in the mirror properly during the service. And as she did, she caught sight of herself with her new hair. And as she sat there, she kind of. It held her gaze for a moment, and her shoulders started to come back and her spine straightened up, and she kind of, she expanded into herself and a little smile came across her face as she sat looking at herself. And she kind of got up out of the chair with this new kick in her step. And, and all of a sudden she was no longer apologizing for herself or making herself small. And in that moment, I had a real sense of the magic, the potential that our creative service can have and impact on other people. And, you know, I, I've been really lucky in my career to have traveled the world and I've worked with, my, I've set myself some pretty lofty goals and I've ticked off all my goals in terms of vogue covers and, you know, New York, Milan, Paris Fashion Week, and, working on all the big shows, et cetera, et cetera. But it's that moment there. That's my why. That's why I do what I do always. It

comes back to if I, was to think about a highlight in my career, it's that moment of humble, creative service that changes and transforms the way somebody feels about themselves because they feel seen. And that human connection and that opportunity to deliver creatively, I believe can be enhanced with technology.

[00:12:17] **Antony W.:** Okay, so. As I said at the beginning of this, I have a few notes, but I don't have a lot What, what little notes that I had. You've just completely decimated. No, you, you've, you've, uh, you've changed the order in which I want to talk about things because you are articulate, you are confident, you are well spoken, you make eye contact. You are, you know, um, charismatic. And you didn't start off like that as an 18 year old hairdresser. Okay? You obviously had mentors. You obviously, you know, went on courses. You've been in the industry 20, 30 years, whatever it is, and you've grown and refined and developed as an individual. want to meet you in a salon Okay? I want to meet, I want to, I'm the client that wants to meet you now. Just to be clear, I love technology. I love AI. I love the potential for it. I think embracing technology in our industry is really, really important at every level. The bit I grapple with, and it's sort of an underlying thing that'll run through this podcast, is that if I'd given you the 20 year old, the tools that AI can bring in terms of consultations, in terms of recommendations, in terms of retail, all that sort of stuff, then you wouldn't develop.

[00:13:55] **Antony W.:** Into the person that you have, you looking at that woman, and that was such a beautiful story of seeing this woman in front of you. And she wouldn't look at herself and the birthmark on the side of her face. And, and when, when you finally showed her and uh, spine straightened, and her head went back and, and she, that all came back to the, I wrote down one word as soon as you started talking about that empathy, empathy and experience. And an algorithm can't do that. So.

[00:14:00] **Richard K:** No, you're right. an algorithm can't.

[00:14:27] **Antony W.:** Yeah. And, and so the baseline of a lot of this conversation and talking about creativity and AI and how they work together, I think that sits underneath it for me. It sits underneath it in a lot of ways, but I don't think it's just for me, I think it's for a lot of people. And that's why I wanted to talk to you because as I said, You have a foot in both camps. You are, you, you have a, a strong creative, uh, background, reputation, um, but you are also at the forefront of developing this AI technology. So how do you, before we talk about the tech specifically, how do you balance that? You know, my example of what you've just talked about with that empathy that you were able to do because of years of experience, however many years at that time because of, uh, you know, whether it's two or three years or 10 years or whatever, the experience that you had to sort of understand that what might be going on in that woman's head and how you should treat her and what you should suggest and how you should gently turn her head to face a mirror and understand maybe why she isn't looking at herself. Like what lay behind all that and how you would best. Respond to that, that it takes years to do that. And, so I'm repeating myself now, but, but like, how does AI fit in with that? That's what I grapple with.

[00:15:50] **Richard K:** Well, that's a really good point, man. And do you know what, um, at that point I'd been hairdressing for about six years, maybe seven years. Uh, I

was technically competent, uh, but I was socially awkward. I. That woman never came back to me again, despite the magic moment that I had with her. She didn't buy any retail product from me I probably undercharged her for the service. and you know, I think from a, in reflection, the moment of connection was really powerful. But what was missing from that was a lot. Uh, the ability as a young, inexperienced hairdresser to understand how important the, longevity, developing longevity of relationship is for the business practice of hairdressing. Understanding the importance of. Nurturing not only the creative moment, but also the business that supports that creative moment in terms of offering at-home hair care, offering a rebooking, uh, explaining the why behind any recommendations that were made. And so for me, I lacked the, the, I basically lacked the bandwidth in my early years to be able to pack everything in that I've learned over the years, like you said, through coaching, through programs and courses, through learning. I mean, I've been lucky to have opportunities that have allowed me to put myself under the microscope and really be coached hard on improving my skills as a communicator, as an, uh, ideator, as a creative, and it's only with experience that those things. Are able to be packaged up and delivered consistently. And so what I think technology and in particular AI has the capability to serve us with, is to give that, uh, 22 year old version of me framework with which to have more of those connective moments because it, it carries the things that I, as a young hairdresser didn't have the capability to do to create longevity and good healthy business.

[00:18:17] **Antony W.:** There's a fine line where there, where there's creativity in business. Cause I, I get what you're saying there, and creativity as in doing the hair. And, and I, I, if I'm hearing you right, and I think I am, creativity in the business, which I think AI is going to support brilliantly, is in tracking, you know, when did this person last visit? when did they last purchase retail? Um, you know, it's going to track, it's going to send out reminders, it's going to confirm things automatically. It's going to do lots of that, the rebooking, the reminder, the relationship building thing through sending customized emails, all that sort of stuff. That's one part of what you're talking about, but the other bit, that is the magic that, that, let, let me tell you a little story. Uh, years ago I had, uh, 1998, so a long time ago, I had the opportunity to interview Alexander De Perry. Um, and he passed away not that long after I had the opportunity to talk to him, but I was interviewing him and he said he didn't speak English.

[00:19:26] **Antony W.:** Uh, and so I had a translator that everything I would say she would then translate to French to him, and then she'd translate his answer back to me in English. And, um, it became, it was an unusable interview because of the, the, you know, background noise and the general sort of chaos and the place where we were doing it at the time .But the last question I asked him was, I said, I said, Alexander, what is the single biggest difference between the French hairdresser. And the English hairdresser and before the translator could translate what I'd just said to him, he just went charm.

[00:19:56] **Antony W.:**. You know, he understood every single word I'd been saying but I do think that that. Underpins a lot of success. You have charm. I would like to think that as a hairdresser behind the chair, I have charm. Uh, I didn't come out of the womb like that. It took years to develop a confidence to know the questions, to ask, to have the right conversations, to, to know exactly where to stand and talk to a client and, and how to make eye contact without feeling intimidated, et cetera. And I loosely

put all that under that umbrella of charm because I, I always think that like, you know, uh, I know you've been on Gordon Miller's podcast, um, and Gordon and I have a lot of conversations about AI and stuff over the years, and, and Gordon will often talk about how a lot of people as consumers, don't know the difference between a good haircut and a bad haircut.

[00:20:54] **Antony W.:** Uh, and I argue that point with him. Uh, I, I certainly earn more on the side of the hairdresser mentality with that cause I refuse to believe that. Uh, but, uh, begrudgingly, begrudgingly I will, you know, I, I will bow down to that to whatever degree, depending on the client, but as he says, they may not know the difference between a good haircut and a bad haircut, but they definitely know the difference between a good experience and a bad experience. And they definitely know the, the difference between, and this is what you alluded to with that lady, the relationship that you could, that she didn't come back because you maybe didn't build up that relationship with her despite maybe whether she loved her hair or didn't love her hair or whatever the reason was.

[00:21:36] **Richard K.:** So I've got this idea about that and.

[00:21:39] **Richard K.:** It relates to, I kind of put it in the camp of selling retail, right? Why hairdressers don't like selling retail. Why we as hairdressers often don't like selling retail. And it comes down to this and it, it, it's off the back of your conversation about charm and that human connection and that ability to create a longevity of relationship, right? So let's look at the fundamental core psychology of decision making, how decisions are made. There's a couple of great books, uh, that I have read. One is, uh, by a guy called, um, what's his name? Uh, Orrin Aryeli. Um, and, his, there's another book, called Predictably Irrational. So there's, there's these two great books that I've read about how people make decisions and fundamentally decisions are made. In the, he, he refers to it as the, the reptile part of the brain, right? Like there's a part of the brain that is instinctive, intuitive, um, is feelings based. And every decision that you make is based in how you reptilian brain feels, right? Before you get to the decision making and the logic. And yes, you can, um, you can frame a decision with logic and you can support a decision with logic, but decisions are made in the reptilian brain based on how you feel. And that's based on pure instinct and survival, right? So, um, If we do this little exercise with, I'm a hairdresser, I have a client in front of me if my client so I've got a lot of things to unpack, right? Like I've got to see if we can connect as on a human level. Then I've got to see if we can connect creatively.

[00:23:57] **Richard K.:** Do we understand each other? Do I get what they want and do they get what I want? And do we understand each other in terms of the creative vision of the outcome or the output? Next? Technically, am I going to be able to execute on that vision? What techniques am I going to be able to use to do that? Um, and lastly, am I running late?**.:** Am I on time? Have I got a busy day? How am I feeling personally? What's going on for me? So there's a lot going on in that short window of, I guess, consultation, for lack of a better way of framing it, right? That, that initial introduction to the client. Now, if my client likes me, even if I don't quite get the hair right, Then most likely they will come back because I can be charming enough that they like me and you know, here's my, you know, here's not quite there, but it's okay. And by the way, I should say that in my journey, um, outside of the salon on business creating

software, we've spoken to many, many hundreds, even thousands of consumers. And this is going to be a really horrible thing for a lot of hairdressers to hair. But most people we speak to are somewhat underwhelmed by their hair. They're usually not quite satisfied with the result.

[00:24:50] **Richard K.:** But they go back cause they like their hairdresser and they develop a relationship and there's trust, right? So if I'm a hairdresser in my reptile brain, the one thing I want to protect. Is that relationship, is that person coming back? I don't want to jeopardize it. I want, I don't want to do anything that risks them not liking me. cause if they don't like me, they don't come back. If they don't come back. I don't get money. If I don't have money, I don't eat. If I don't eat, I die. You know, that's what the reptilian brain does. Without us even knowing it makes those decisions. Like it goes whoop, straight down the, to the death and destruction before we even know what's going on. Not consciously, unconsciously. And then so if I try to make a, a suggestion or a recommendation for something that's not on the table, that hasn't been talked about by the client, that hasn't been initiated by that client, if I tried to introduce adding something into the mix, I risk at an unconscious level jeopardizing our relationship, damaging the connection. And therefore the, my crocodile brain goes, don't do that cause you'll die. So before I can even get to the logic of why I should be making suggestions and I'll frame this around recommending retail, recommending at-home hair care because recommending at-home hair care, we all know logically that our clients need to care for their hair.

[00:26:15] **Richard K.:** That we should recommend the things that are going to work best to protect the work that we've just done. And all the money that they've just invested in their hair, we know that it's better for our business, it's better for our clients, it's better for our creative output. We know all of that stuff logically, but unconsciously, our crocodile brain says, don't do it cause you'll die. And so we don't want to risk anything that could potentially jeopardize the relationship. So no matter how much we reframe it, it feels uncomfortable. And for some people they can get past that, like that's not there for them. Right. But that's only a very small percentage of us.

[00:26:49] **Antony W.:** Okay. So let me ask you that, cause that's interesting that when you were behind the chair, hairdresser in a salon, were you good at retail?

[00:26:58] **Richard K.:** Eventually, not initially.

[00:27:01] **Antony W.:** Okay, so, so what was the catalyst? What change at, because I was good at retail. and I loved retail. I loved, I loved, I loved for all the reasons that you just said that, Hey, I've got something that you're just going to love. You've got to, you've got to see this stuff you've got. And I would just talk, it was, was no formula. It was no script. It was that I genuinely liked those products. And, and I think, I think we've got to be careful saying that hairdressers don't like retail, you're dead. Right. A percentage of them don't, I don't know what the percentage is. Um, I'm probably even going to say maybe it's the majority, but I, I would be careful about saying that all hairdressers don't like retail. Cause I, I used to have some hairdressers work for me who were fantastic at retail. But I think the more we say that, the more we say that, then the more we, we give, you know, credence to that, that it's not a cool thing to do.

That it's not a good thing to do that. Oh, I'm not meant to like it cause I'm a hairdresser. I'm a creative, I'm not meant to like it. Um, I, I have a, I.

[00:28:02] **Richard K.:** Yeah, I get what you're saying. I get what you're saying and, and I, I think, you know, my point is that I've explored the psychology of why there is a, a big percentage of hairdressers who don't want to fulfill their obligations to their clients by recommending them at home hair care. Um, despite all of the logic that says, It's a good idea and it's a great thing to do. I like you. I fell in love with recommending retail. I loved it when my clients walked out. I loved the process of formulating a hair care plan for them. And, you know, saying, listen, you, your scalp needs this. Uh, we need this weight of moisture product to help soften and close the cuticle. We need this much protein to help strengthen the hair and protect the color. You should use this on a daily basis as, as a leave-in. And this once a week as a deep mask. You know, I want to show you how to care for your hair. Cause I, I have all this knowledge that I want to give you and share with you. I want to give. And so for me, that was the mi It wasn't like a conscious mindset shift and I don't know what it was like for you, but I never sold retail for a long time until I became really comfortable about sharing my knowledge and the why, the why, why, why. Here's what's going to help you and why.

[00:29:19] **Antony W.:** yeah. And I would, and I'm playing devil's advocate here, okay. Because there's one part of me that goes, uh, and we haven't even started talking about, about peak, et cetera. Uh, but, you know, but your AI tools are going to help in that process of the hairdresser, or of the client buying retail by bypassing the hairdresser to whatever degree. And yet, I want. I want to meet you as a client. I want to meet this guy who's passionate and who's educated, and you know, who's charming and who, who loves what he's got, and will show me and educate me. I want that. I don't want someone to give me an iPad and to fill out a series of questions and then say, this is a shampoo and conditioner for you.

[00:30:06] **Richard K.:** I love that you've said this. I love that. I love that because you're a hundred percent right. I agree with you wholeheartedly. And why? So, so here's what I tried to do with AI and technology, was to create something that took all of the best practices that I'd learned, not just from myself, but from observing the best hairdressers and what they do and how they operate and the things that they do that serve them. To allow them to have that time and space to connect that time and space to be expert and to share their insights and knowledge. And I wanted to take all of the, I wanted to look at the things that they did well that served them and look at the things that held back most of us and held me back throughout my career at times from experiencing that full, beautiful, creative connected flow state with my clients, right? and I wanted to find ways to use technology to close those gaps, to create opportunities. For the hairdresser to shine to create opportunities for the hairdresser to connect and share knowledge without them having to do extra work. To do extra thinking, to do extra learning, to do extra, extra, you know, in fact, Take away all the extraneous extra stuff that you should do.

[00:31:27] **Richard K.:** Stop shooting on yourself. Let the technology do the heavy lifting to allow you the time and space and the freedom to be truly connected and to showcase your expertise. Right. So, I I'm going to jump very quickly to explain how, cause that's a, a lot of the why. So what we did was, if you look at AI currently in the

world, right? Chat, GPT Dali, um, you know, the, these stable diffusion, uh, image generators and other types of, even the generative adversarial networks or GaN technology and, and all sorts of, there's a lot of interesting tech stuff happening in the AI space. They are, let's talk about chat G P T, cause that's the one that most people know, right? It's a really clever tool that can write stuff for you. And it's awesome, amazing tool. What it does is it takes all of the information that it's been fed, so all of the stories and words and articles and whatever, and it, it basically distills that down into a, a process that allows it to guess what the next most likely word in a sentence, in a certain context would be, right? What it's doing is it's averaging everything out, so it's very much an averaging machine, so it's spits out a very acceptable and quite interestingly structured average result, right? If you had a high-level expert creative writer, they look at what chat gpt spits out and goes, that's pre mediocre. It's average, right? Clever in that it can create something. But that something is basically average because it's the sum average of everything.

[00:33:12] **Richard K.:** What we wanted to do was say, hang on a second, let's not do this averaging stuff. Let's take machine learning, artificial intelligence, and create a model that replicates high level expert insight so that that expert insight can be distributed to a larger mass of people. Because let's face it, it takes decades to develop the kind of skills required to deliver that expert level ex experience, right? Not everybody needs it, but at a certain point throughout the journey, if you can use technology to distill that expert level insight and information, then. It makes life easier for everybody. So that was what we set out to do five years ago.

[00:34:07] **Antony W.:** Yep. And that is piiq

[00:34:09] **Richard K.:** Yeah. That's the hair app, that's what we do. So that's what the AI that we develop does. So, the customer experience is that they open their phone once they get a, a link from their hairdresser, they open their phone, the camera opens, it's scans, their hair and face, and the AI assesses hair type and texture length and curl color. Is it artificially colored porosity, elasticity, et cetera?

[00:34:30] **Antony W.:** Right now back up a little bit because that's the bit that you've been eat, sleeping, and breathing for X years, and a lot of people have not heard of it. So, uh, it's piiq, P.I.I.Q, but pronounced P P E a K sort of thing for pronunciation. and so that is, you were talking to me about this before we started recording, so, so just explain to us what is, you've just dropped both of those names in there, piiq and the hair app. So just explain to the listener what is piiq and then what is the hair app and how the two, uh, work together.

[00:35:04] **Richard K.:** Yeah, sure. Um, so we piiq is the organization or the company that we founded to develop a software solution to solve a specific problem in the industry that consumers had. And the problem that was posed was by a gentleman by the name of Richard Matthewman, who's one of my co-founders, who's still on the board. Um, and he would go to his fantastic hairdresser every three and a half weeks for his cool haircut. Paid $85 for his haircut and every three and a half weeks, his hairdresser said, oh, what product do you use in your hair? And he said, Kevin Murphy, night Rider. And his hairdresser went Cool. And that was the end of the conversation.And he said, why? He didn't ask his hairdresser, but he asked in the

context of this workshop, this, this brain, um, think tank. First of all, why doesn't my hairdresser, why can't I buy my Kevin Murphy from my hairdresser? Because I like the product I use, but I don't like having to go somewhere else to buy it. And I would rather give him the money than go and give it to somebody I don't have a relationship with.

[00:36:18] **Antony W.:** Yeah.

[00:36:19] **Richard K.:** The second part of it is if he doesn't or can't for whatever reason, sell me the product, I like. Surely he's got something similar that he could show me. And why doesn't he? So is this a problem that happens elsewhere to other people? Um, is the first part of the question. Second part of the question is if it is a problem that happens elsewhere to other people, what impact does it have on consumers and professionals? Are like. So what's the impact of the problem? Lastly, is there a way that we could use technology to help solve this problem? And so it was a two day, two day workshop with about 35 of us there. And I was the only hairdresser and all of these things that these guys kept coming up with, these ideas and these concepts and these kind of paths that they kept going down, I just kept sitting there as a hairdresser going. No hairdresser is going to do that or adopt that. That's just not it's not practical in the context of working with a client and being connected in the human connection that we need. And then I had a little moment, I had like a woo, what if, and I scribbled down um, kind of a couple of drawings on a piece of paper and I walked over to a woman in the room and I said, imagine if your hairdresser had an iPad and they handed you the iPad with these this on it. and she said, oh man, I wish my hairdresser would do something like that. It would make it so much easier to communicate, cause I often get lost. I often don't know what to say.

[00:37:50] **Antony W.:** So what was on the, the iPad? Was it a, a series of que consultation questions or something?

[00:37:55] **Richard K.:** Um, it was more than a series of consultation questions. It was, It was questions about personal style that weren't related to here. Right. So ,Mark Hayes I heard him say this thing, which really resonated with me, and it was, it was about a year or 18 months into our journey of developing this product. He said, if, somebody asks me what will suit them, the first thing I want to know is who they are. Because who they are is much more important in terms of what will suit them, then what they look like or what their hair's like.

[00:38:31] **Antony W.:** Yeah.

[00:38:32] **Richard K.:** And one of the key things that I've learned right across my career, and I think we touched on this earlier in this kind of, this idea of connection and charm and being able to identify with the person that's in your chair is. Being able to see them and see them through the lens of, who they are in the world. Archetypically, like what is their persona or archetypical style?. And there's been some really interesting university studies around style tribes, and we've done quite a lot of, uh, work on, collating 130 identified style tribes from, university study and putting them into 15 groups of pers personas we call them, which are these visual archetypes that all share similar hair types and textures within the context of these personal styles.

And so what was on that iPad was like a kind of a series of. Sort of pictures where the person, like the idea was that the person could kind of swipe on or add a bunch of pictures, if you like, of certain lifestyle and personal style elements that created this idea of this persona for them, and then allowed them to, um, understand their hair type and texture through the eyes of the hairdresser.

[00:39:53] **Richard K.:** Right? And so those two things have been the biggest parts of, um, the development of our software products, including the Smart Mirror to be able to unpack what's in a hairdresser's brain that happens at a sort of subconscious level, at the best performing hairdressers, and put it into an interface that serves the consumer, the client, so that they can see what's going on in the hairdresser's brain, but also serves that young hairdresser or that young version of me that maybe doesn't have the framework or the language to be able to. Efficiently and effectively articulate or communicate the why behind what I'm suggesting or recommending.

[00:40:35] **Antony W.:** Okay, so when we're talking about the hair app, We're talking about the Smart Mirror. and I'm coming back to this because I know it confused me, so I know it's going to confuse some of the listener. the Smart Mirror is a physical workstation mirror that sits in front of the client, that has what on it? It has, hair images that also has product recommendations. It has.

[00:41:02] **Richard K.:** Yeah. So it has a bunch of stuff, so that's a good question actually.

[00:41:06] **Antony W.:** Okay, so can I, I'm going to use a phrase which I know you use, uh, to sort of summarize what that does. And that is guided consultation. Is that right? Am I using that in the right context for this here? That you now have within the smart mirror, you have a, a journey to take a client on and that, for want of a better phrase, and that is a sort of guided consultation to take the hairdresser and the client through in a seamless sequential, I dare say, obvious, not, maybe not obvious, uh, way to get to an outcome as quick as possible. Would that be a fair description of that?

[00:41:45] **Richard K.:** Yeah, yeah. That is a fair description. So what we created in the software was a framework with which to offer best practice consultation.

[00:41:53] **Antony W.:** Yeah. Okay.

[00:41:54] **Richard K.:** So a framework that a hairdresser could use, guided to create the ideal perfect consultation. Okay. So, Designed the software, designed the Smart Mirror, uh, developed the software initially, specifically for the Smart Mirror, with the aim and intent to have a software that was available across multiple devices for people who didn't want to have the software. the Smart Mirror itself.

[00:42:20] **Antony W.:** Got it. Okay. Now separate to that, separate to the Smart Mirror is um, the hair app. How does, how do the two, how are they separate and how are they the same thing? How do they work together and.

[00:42:34] **Richard K.:** Good question. I love it. So here's how they're separate and here's how they're the same thing. So, you know, I started this, this conversation talking about a software solution, right? So we created a software, we had to get money to do that and create an organization and a structure. So we created a company and we decided that we would come up with a new and novel name for that company. So we called it Peak, P I I Q,

[00:42:56 **Antony W.:** Where did the name, where did the name come from? P I I Q. What is it? Is it some acronym for something we don't know about?

[00:43:03] **Richard K.:** So if you look at the logo, it's uh, a visual palindrome. In other words, it's the same backwards as it is forwards, right? So it's like, um, a p looking at a p in the mirror and there's a little pause symbol in the minute, in the middle. So it's pause to reflect.

[00:43:21] **Antony W.:** Okay, got it. All right. I knew there'd be a story behind it, so sorry. Carry on.

[00:43:26] **Richard K.:** We wanted to come up with a new word, right? And it's a word that people go, what, how do you say that? Pick ping pig.

[00:43:32] **Antony W.:** Yeah,

[00:43:33] **Richard K.:** So, you know, I wanted to get it hooked in people's heads. Anyway, the Smart Mirror. So the software was our first thing. The, so the Smart Mirror was a solution to an interface problem, right? A device to run the software on. When we were ready. So the pandemic hit, we had to kind of, we had to shut everything down and try and navigate our way through that. And then we came back out of it and we started kind of getting things on track again and working on the software for every device. When we started launching, or soft launching that, I should say, when we started testing it in the market, um, and doing all of our user acceptance trials, people started getting confused. Isn't peak a mirror? What is, how is, what is the, this is a software called Peak, but isn't peak a mirror? Is it a mirror? Do I need the mirror? And there was this conversation happening, right?

[00:44:26] **Antony W.:** Yep. Yeah.

[00:44:27] **Richard K.:** So I would explain it by saying, so there's a mirror, which is like an iPad or a tablet or an iPhone, but it just happens to be a big giant one that's a mirror. It's got an embedded camera, lights, et cetera. There's a software and the software runs on the mirror and it can run on everything else. And they're like, yeah, but is what is the software? And I'm like, what's, think of it like a hair app. And they're like, what do you mean? I'm like, what's an app for hair? And then I had a a little moment where I was like, Hey, I should just call it the hair app. And I looked it up and nobody had an app called the Hair App. So we snafued that name and we rebranded the software component into the hair app.

[00:45:07] **Antony W.:** So the hair app can either run through, piiq the mirror, or it can run through your phone or iPad or whatever. Is that Correct?

[00:45:19] **Richard K.:** Correct.

[00:45:19] **Antony W.:** Okay. All right. Good. Good.

[00:45:21] **Richard K.:** So the hair app is a software in the form of an app. It's a web app, it's a native app, it's an Android app. It's whatever sort of app you want. It can run independently on any device, and it can also run on the Peak Smart Mirror.

[00:45:37] **Antony W.:** Yeah. And it's, and it is the same guided consultation series of questions,

[00:45:43] **Richard K.:** Yes.

[00:45:44] **Antony W.:** Whatever.

[00:45:45] **Richard K.:** Yeah. So I think if I look at like the journey of how did we, how do we get to the best outcome of a saving time? And B, giving clients the tools that they need to be able to explain what they want and why they want it, and to understand what they can and can't have and what they should and shouldn't have. Giving hairdressers a tool that will help their business be better and their, their customer experience be better without interfering with their expertise or creativity or taking anything away from them. The Hair app works in this really nice, kind of symbiotic way, basically. Um, a hairdresser has the hair app and they run it, whether they run it on the Smart Mirror tablet or their phone in the hair app is this little personalized link that they add to their outgoing appointment messages. What happens in that link is a client experience, a personalized client experience. That's a guided consultation. Or a guided pre-consultation, if you like, before they get to the chair. It's like a consultation assistant. Imagine if you had the best assistant in the world and you gave them a bunch of questions and asked them to go out and get, sit down with the client. Ask them about their hair history, their hair habits. When was the last time they had a color? How much time do they spend styling their hair? What's their work environment like? You know, do they prefer practicality or style? What's their personal style like? Um, how often do they wash their hair? Do they go to the gym? Do they, you know, do they work out? Uh, and then build a little Pinterest board and on that little Pinterest board, add notes to every picture. I really love this color. I love this length, but also touch their hair. Assess their hair type and texture, make sure that their hair condition and then set expectations for them while they're talking to them about the pictures around, oh, you know, that picture's got, that person's got really thick, coarse hair and you've got fine porous hair. So you could have the same haircut but it would look a bit different. Or you know that person's hair is quite different from yours, so it's never going to look like that, for example. Or, um, you know, that person's face is not like yours at all. This person's face is a lot more like yours. And so you should be looking at styles like this.

[00:47:53] **Antony W.:** Yep.

[00:47:54] **Richard K.:** So imagine that you had that assistant who could do that for you. For every client, that's what the hair app does and the client does that in their own time, either at home or in reception, and they just have that experience. They do it on their own device. It's very personal, it's very personalized. And the key component of the experience is, so when we go, we'll go back to AI cause we've been talking about AI and technology and how it's going to help. I wanted to ensure that we use technology as a tool, not a toy, not a gimmick, not something to take away the magic of the hairdresser, but something to create more time.

[00:48:29] **Richard K.:** So the AI that we developed, if you think about like what are all of the kind of, if you are going to decide what cutting technique you're going to use, what cutting tools, um, what cutting method and approach you're going to use, what color products you can and can't use, what strength of developer you should use, what haircare regimen, what styling products, every decision you make to serve that client is based on their hair type and texture and condition, right? So if you think about like the entire customer experience or the hair consultation, for lack of a better word and I don't think consultation is the right word, but it's premised on understanding. Where the person is located at, where they're at right now, what's your starting point? What's your hair type, texture condition? Where are you at right now? How then can we draw an appropriate journey for you to get to where you want to get to? And that's the where the hairdresser comes in. So the AI does the assessment and then helps the client to, uh, see what hair care regimen they should use, what insulin treatments they should request in terms of like hair care, and then guides them through building a mood board.

[00:49:42] **Richard K.:** So as, I'll give you an example of a real life in use situation, right? Let's say I've got, um, I've got Joanna coming in and she's booked online and she's booked for half a head of foils, right? So. In a normal situation without the hair app, I would look at my appointment column. I would see Joann as Joanna's in for half a head of foils and she's, uh, going to have a cut and blow dry. So I'm going to walk over to Joanna and in my head is half a head of foils, right? I'm prepped psychologically to talk to her about her color service, thinking that she's going to have half head of foils. Joanna opens her phone, she scrolls through the picture. She goes, I've got a picture here somewhere. There's a picture of her in her undies. There's a picture of her boyfriend's cauliflower. Get rid of that. You don't want to see those and you can't unsee them cause you've already seen them and now you're embarrassed and you don't want to say anything. But anyway, she finally finds the picture that she had saved of the hairstyle that she wants, and it's a, a beautiful, dirty, dusty pastel pink with a, root stretch. And you're like, wait a minute. That's not half a head of foils. And so then you've got this whole conversation of being at odds initially psychologically with what your expectations are and what her hopes and dreams are.

[00:50:45] **Antony W.:** Okay.

[00:50:47] **Richard K.:** So let's frame that with the hair app. Here's what happens. Joanna builds her mood board. She puts in the picture that she had found and screenshot, and she uploads or she finds one in the hair apps library. She puts some notes on it, says, I love this dusty pink. She's booked in for half a head of foils, but before she's even arrived. I've got a notification from the hair app that Joanna has completed her profile. I look at her profile and the first thing I see is her top rated color

and her top rated cut with notes on the color picture. I see that the hair app has recommended her a haircare regimen, which I can adjust and change if I want to or talk to her about or not. I can see that it's assessed her hair type and texture, and it's been pretty accurate and I can see that she works in a creative environment and that she goes to the gym and I can see all of this stuff. So I'm going to her from the perspective now of, okay, so she wants this beautiful, dusty pink with a root stretch. I know she's booked in for half head of foils, but I've got 90 minutes, so I'm just going to explain to her that to achieve. So you know, I'm going to get clear. This is the color you want to go for, it's achievable, it's going to take these services to get there, and it's going to cost this much. So I'm now starting with this really comfortable, confident connection with her.

[00:52:01] **Antony W.:** Okay. I

[00:52:02] **Richard K.:** Clear about the outcome.

[00:52:014] **Antony W.:** I get it. Um, I just want to go back. We've gone way over time, but that's okay. Um, no, not at all. It's been really interesting. Um, I just want to go back to your friend who started this whole journey of going to the barbershop or going to the salon and the guy saying, what product do you use? And him telling him the name of the product and obviously he didn't sell it, so he just a shrug of the shoulders and that was it. I know the answer to this question. So the next thing within the hair app is you can buy that product, can't you? And the salon gets a commission even though the salon doesn't necessarily stock that product. Am I correct in saying that and how does that work? Just briefly?

[00:52:38] **Richard K.:** That's a, that's a good question. And yes, that is one of the features of the hair app is that in certain markets where the, we have a relationship with a distributor who can deliver and fulfill to direct to consumer, then we enable that feature. Some markets and some brands it's not available for, but yes, uh, if the client has recommended a product in the hair app, they can click purchase the distributor or brand ships it direct to the client.

The salon gets a margin slightly less than if they'd purchased the product, had it on the shelf and sold it directly to them. But they don't have to touch anything. They simply just get a notification that the client's purchase the product, client's happy, they've got their product. Hairdresser gets the margin they can choose from any one of 64 brands that are in there.

[00:53:26] **Antony W.:** And you, you get a margin as well on that.

[00:53:29] **Richard K.:** We currently don't take a margin on the sale of the products because we just want to, the things that we want to facilitate, we want to un kink the hose. You know, there are clients who want products. I mean, that was the initial issue, right? There are clients who want products. There are brands who sell beautiful products. I believe that the salon is the right place to buy those products, and I believe that the transaction should stay in our industry. I believe that the revenue from at home

hair care is essential to the health of our industry, and that I believe that we need to keep it in our industry as much as we can.

[00:54:06] **Antony W.:** Yeah. Good, good way to wrap that up.

[00:54:08] **Richard K.:** this has been fantastic.

[00:54:09] **Antony W.:** It's been, um, Very insightful and I, you know, I like sort of challenging how you think and how the tech works and what the implications are for the industry long term. And I, I mean, I think piiq is great and I had a quick look at the, hair app and I will put, I'll put these links, um, onto our, on the show notes for today's podcast and on our website. and just before we are wrapping up, whereabouts can people connect with you on Instagram or any other social channels to find out all about it? Because as much as we've dealt with a lot of it, we've created a lot of questions that other people will have. So where can they find out more about it?

[00:54:43] **Richard K.:** My Instagram is my name, Richard Kavanagh, and that's probably the best place to find me. I spend a bit of time there. Um, Sharing little snippets and tidbits of insights and knowledge about the industry and my opinion more than anything. Um, and also, you know, there's all the information is there, so there's links in my bio. I've got a, a bunch of really great tools that are completely free of charge that people can access through the link in my bio on Instagram at Richard Kavanagh, there's a pricing for profit calculator. There's a retail profit calculator, there's a customer experience score chart. There's a whole bunch of tools that we've built to help hairdressers understand their business from a kind of a 30,000 foot view, and to get out of being stuck behind the chair and create a better, more profitable business.

[00:55:30] **Antony W.:** Great. Okay. Uh, well on that note, we need to wrap up. If you've been listening to this podcast with Richard Kavanagh, and have enjoyed it, do me a favor, take a screenshot on your phone, share it to your Instagram stories, and don't forget to subscribe and leave us a rating review on the Apple Podcast app. uh, so to wrap up Richard Kavanagh, thank you for being on this week's episode of the Grow My Salon Business podcast.

[00:55:52] **Richard K.:** Thank you so much for having me. It's been an awesome conversation and I loved unpacking all of that stuff about AI.

[00:55:58] **Antony W.:** Cheers, mate. Thank you. Until next time.

[00:56:00] **Antony W:** Thank you for listening to today's podcast. If you'd like to connect with us, you'll find us at Grow My Salon business.com or on Facebook and Instagram at Grow My Salon business. And if you enjoy tuning into our podcast, make sure that you subscribe, like, and share it with your friends. Until next time, this is Antony Whitaker wishing you continued success.