



Podcast #38

Writing for Websites

Hi everybody and welcome to this week's episode of The Marketing Menu podcast with Nicky and Liz.

Hello everybody and hello Liz. Now, Liz, you've been having a very exciting summer. Would you like to share with listeners what you've been up to?

It's one of those summers that you look back on and think 'I can't believe I did all that!'. It's been quite phenomenal. So it started off with the honour of attending, with a client, the Retail Jewellers Awards in London in July where we'd been shortlisted for the Marketing Campaign of the Year. Now, this particular awards ceremony is called the 'Jewellery Oscars'. Seriously, I was wearing a necklace worth £2,500! I needed minders on either side of me, I was so nervous. It was fantastic. Very sparkly, very beautiful. On a serious note, it was such a prestigious thing to attend for my client because they're quite a small, independent retailer.

Yes, I think it's important we stress that they are a very small, independent family firm that has been going for a number of years. So, we've talked before about how entering business awards can be good for business and this was obviously a showstopping event. So tell us more about it?

Well, being seen on the platform with the great and the good of the jewellery world, I mean you're talking about people like Pandora, Swarovski, Bering, really big names and for an independent jeweller to be in the final category was a huge thing. So the actual campaign was called Win your Wedding Rings and it started with a young gentleman and lady who came into the shop looking at engagement rings and the male made a big play about how he didn't want to get engaged, wasn't interested and unbeknown to the lady, went back afterwards and bought the engagement ring and proposed under the Statue of Liberty in New York while they're on holiday and the videoed it. And they came in and showed the video to the staff in the shop, who had the idea 'Why don't we actually run this as a competition?' They opened it up nationally. and had I think it was about 89 entries. There were certain criteria so there were more entries than that but some didn't qualify because they didn't send in a picture or a video. But they ranged from the hugely romantic gestures on a moonlit beach to someone who had a baby with a babygro on saying 'Will you marry my mummy?' But the idea was everyone sent in their story with a video or a photograph, it was posted every day on Facebook at 11:00am and the followers voted. So whichever one got the most likes then got shortlisted, it went down to a shortlist of three and then that was posted on the website so people were going to the business' website and voted on which story they wanted to win.

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Can I ask whether this was an organic marketing campaign?

Completely.

So no money has changed hands at this point, other than the time and the effort to get word out.

No paid ads, no boosts, it was all organic and they increased their followers by 900 in six weeks.

Wow. That's very impressive. So that just goes to show, if you've got something where you can build a story behind the story then that's a brilliant opportunity.

And it fitted with the whole feel of the jewellers, you know, they got that family sort of close-knit feel. It was just a brilliant campaign and it was up there with the great and the good of the jewellery world. So that was on the Thursday and then the following day, I went to 10 Downing Street!

Wowser! No rest for the wicked, Liz

Okay. So the last time I went to Downing Street, I was six and it was in the days when you could walk down the street and have your photo taken with the policeman. But this time I actually walked through the door and it was a huge privilege. I went as part of a delegation of small business owners with an organisation called Enterprise Nation who support startup businesses and we talked to the Prime Minister's business advisor about the issues and the challenges that small businesses face.

Of which we know there are many.

We do. He listened very carefully and was very respectful. And yes, there was some stuff that he didn't know and he was busy taking notes. So who knows? Hopefully, we've affected some kind of change in policy.

Gosh. Wow. Well, it's all happening here at The Marketing Menu with Liz Gordon! Rock'n'roll. Have you got any other big plans?

I'm going to another award ceremony on Monday! It's the Professional Jewellers Awards and it's for Innovative Event of the Year, so fingers crossed.

We hope that's inspired some listeners to think about these things and realise that you too can play a big part, no matter what your size.

I think Helen from Forum Jewellers would agree it's about giving them confidence too because they won the Dorset Business Awards and that gave them the confidence to apply for it.

That's a great thing in terms of building your brand and enticing the right people to work for you and the knock-on is so big, it just creates that feel good factor. Gosh, and we haven't even got round to what we're going to talk about today in our podcast!

Which is what, Nicky?

We're going to be devoting a whole podcast, but we've chatted for most of it, to the subject of writing for the web.

Well, there's enough to talk about isn't there? So, where do we start?

Well, as we always do say listeners, we start with that lovely four-letter word... you need a Plan, as all too often I think people do go about writing for the web almost as a sort of afterthought. I know websites can be very expensive, but they can also be a very cost-effective way of getting your message out there. But I guess it's about understanding your expectations, whether or not you're designing it yourself or whether you're employing somebody else to do so for you.

I think also it's really important to remember that although it's a marketing tool, the language you use, although it should be consistent, it's going to be very different from the way you'd write a leaflet.

Yes, absolutely. You do get more opportunity and I think that's where people may get a little unstuck because they almost want to write too much and I think there is a tendency nowadays to go more minimalist on your content. People's attention spans, as we'll discuss, are very short and they are literally scanning, so they don't want to read a book. They don't want to read all about you and your history, unless of course they've gone there for that information. It's a really good idea to give some thought and consideration about your target market and think about what they really want to see when they're visiting your website. So realistically listeners, do think about what are they expecting to find and, in other words, think like your customer.

Now we can recommend a podcast for that! Try 'what makes your customer tick', which was way back at the beginning of our podcasting journey.

Yes, we're going to have to revisit that, it was so long ago in the dusty archives. Back at number four, if I remember correctly. And of course, we also have on our website the 'Create a Customer Persona Identikit', where listeners can also access that and which might be useful in terms of thinking about what the needs, hopes, wants and fears are for your customer and therefore to try and reflect that back. So, we were looking at a website earlier. Now we just googled someone randomly and we're not going to name and shame them and we've looked at one about printing. So the first line of the website says 'At X, we specialise in' and then there's a paragraph talking about what they specialise in. Then the second line is 'We don't enforce.' And then the third is 'We regulate' and then the fourth is 'We operate' and then finally 'We also'. It's not really telling me as the viewer what it is they could do for me and that's what I'm wanting to find out when I'm looking around the web. I want to know have they understood my problem. Are they going to solve it? Is it going to be done professionally and cost-effectively? And all those other things that might be necessary to think about a printing house. So effectively, I guess what I'm trying to say is people need to think about what it is those customers are looking for and reflect that back almost in their own language. So as I say, you self-identify and you think, okay, they're going to solve all my problems and I need to see how.

Because they've told you what they do but they haven't said this is how we can solve your problem. We talk a lot about selling the features, advantages and benefits of a service. So, it's understanding what issues your customers are having and almost second guessing them before they even get there. As soon as your potential customer lands on your website, they can see that you've got the answer to their issue. So it's putting yourself in the mindset of your customers and saying 'we've already thought of this for you. Here's your answer.'

And you may have different customers, of course. I was involved very loosely in a local authority website, looking at refreshing that recently and I did a bit of Googling in terms of what other local authorities have done particularly well and that had actually won awards. And I stumbled across Birmingham City Council because they had won an award for their website and it was very graphical heavy. You can imagine local authority websites have got so much information, so as much as I'm trying to say avoid putting up too much information, their customers are actually going there for information. They want answers to the situations they're facing, so it needed to be really easy to navigate so people could find that information and what they've done is signposted very cleverly by using a lot of icons and eye-catching imagery about where you needed to go to find out, whether you were on parks and recreation or whether you're looking for having your bins emptied or local council tax issues, whatever it might be. And they've done it very simply, different icons, people click on the icons and then they went into almost a sub-website that was going to be exclusively about that area. So, the Home Page was very much a portal to direct people to different other portals, which it should be, so I think all too often we tend to think our Home Page has to answer everything and you can't possibly do that if you've got multiple audiences.

Whether or not you are writing your own website or designing it yourself or whether you're employing somebody else, you do need to have a plan for every page. Now, obviously most sites do have the basic Home Page, About Us page, then obviously the product or service page and somewhere you do need to describe what you do. Maybe have a page with case studies or testimonials. Now I'm a big one for putting testimonials quite high up on the page because ultimately if your customers are saying you're great, which obviously looks like a genuine testimonial which it does have to be, then that's all one really needs to say. Then you're going to have a Contact Us page. I would also stress that you need to make sure that your telephone number and preferably also your email address is also on your Home Page. I find you have to squirrel around trying to find out how to contact people.

Drives me nuts!

If you're lost in the car, when I'm trying to get to a destination, I'm going to be late or I'm lost and I can't find the number!

It should be at the top right of every page if you can, not the bottom because in some cases this is the first impression that people are going to get of your business. So, it's really important to get it absolutely right.

Don't they say it's something like 89 per cent of people visit the website before contacting you?

Let's just chat about some of the background info that listeners need to know.

Go for it, Liz.

Well, did you know that 79 percent of people only scan a web page? Now you alluded to this earlier, only 16 percent read it word for word.

I'm amazed if it's that high, to be honest. So that's obviously more evidence about getting your content right because you have to give them that right overall first impression.

And reading on the screen is about 25 percent slower than reading a paper document, so it's no wonder people skim,

If people really don't have the attention span, it's essential that we present the information in an easy-to-understand layout, so we need to be thinking about offering short sentences, bullet points, and also bolding out texts which is your important points to get across. Don't use the same number of words as you would on a paper document or report because people aren't going there to read it, unless you are perhaps my local authority website where you are going to find out that all-important information. If you're trying to get across some really important information such as the key features or benefits of your service or product, then only use one paragraph so the message doesn't get lost.

Yes, you don't want to be putting two lots of facts in the same paragraph because people won't see it. I really like bullet points I have to say, to emphasise certain key facts because they can be indented and highlighted, and you can highlight a short point and they're more memorable, aren't they?

Yes, and as you said, it's less about you and it's more about them, so remember at all times to reflect back so they can self-identify.

Now you need to think about what tone of voice you're going to use. Is it consistent with all your other marketing materials? Does it reinforce the brand that you spent so much time and effort building? Remember your website is your shop window and people will expect to find out what they need to know there. Now, when it comes to wording, use language you're comfortable with, so no over-the-top, fantastical words if they don't fit with your image and obviously no exaggerating either or making false claims.,

And no jargon either. I can't stand it when I'm on a website and I don't understand what they're actually talking about. There is a tendency for technically-minded individuals - I worked a little bit in the science community for a while - to talk about the wonderfulness of their products. I just didn't get it. It just made me feel a bit ignorant and I didn't understand really what it is they were describing. I suppose that comes back to having somebody else look at the copy as well, and just check that they actually understand it from an outsider's point of view.

That brings up a good point. People can land anywhere on your site. They don't necessarily land on the home page, so make sure all your pages are clear, have links to other pages and have a call to action inviting the visitor to find out more.

Yes, so those calls to action could be a variety of things. It could simply be 'get in touch'. It could be 'download more information' or watch a helpful video, whatever it might be. There should be something on every page, without being over the top.

Just to make sure that the visitor does something before they actually leave your website.

So listeners, think about the sort of questions your potential customer is likely to ask and this is how search engine optimisation works, so use the language and the phrases that you believe your customer would actually use. Now, if you are running an Adwords campaign, there are tools available where you can actually do some keyword research based on Google Analytics and that can be very useful. Now you can actually set yourself up an Adwords account and then just use the tool without actually benefiting from the Adwords account itself, so it's still available as a background check if you'd like to use that.

Good stuff. Before we go any further, just to remind you that you're listening to The Marketing Menu podcast, which we publish every fortnight on a Wednesday. It's available to download for free from iTunes, Blubrry, Stitcher and TuneIn.

And we're also on Spotify now, Liz, we're hitting the mainstream! So I just mentioned about keywords. As we said before, you do need to put yourself in the mind of the customer to think about what they're going to search for and why.

Another tip when writing web content is to give each page who unique page title. Now that tells your customer what they can expect. Start every web page with a descriptive page title. Like you said before, put yourself in the mind of your customer to think about how they would search for what they really want to find.

Now you could have a stab at guessing what people might search for or you could use the keyword analysis tool, which I mentioned is via Adwords earlier, which will actually tell you the most effective keywords for your type of business.

How can they do that?

They base it on actual search engine results and the competition in your niche. Then when you have this information, you can include that in your page title.

So what other tips can we give listeners when creating copy for their websites?

Well, also consider whether you need to say very much at all on your website. For example, if you were, say a tour operator, do you need to be saying loads of words about destinations when images would speak volumes, so consider whether you could go for a very much more visual representation online than going for words. Bear that in mind according to what it is you're offering.

And this brings up the subject of getting good imagery for your website, not just using photos you've taken yourself on your iPhone.

Absolutely. I was looking at one website at the weekend actually, which was for the [Nest Thermostat](#). Have a look at their website. It's very, very clean. Beautiful images. They make a thermostat look exciting! They make it very efficiently, high quality and they use very few words, but it conveys what it does quite succinctly and I think people need to bear that in mind. If you can think about using parallax websites, which are the one-page alternative websites, do so. So rather than thinking I'm a very small company, I don't have a lot of information, what am I going to say on my About Me page? What am I going to say on this page? Just go for a simple parallax website.

What does that mean?

It basically means that you jump down the content so you'll have little headlines which will pull you down the page. There's a very long page overall. You would never print it out, but effectively it's dubbing down the content, I suppose.

Is that the same as a landing page?

No, not the same as a landing page. Landing pages are very useful though if you're running Adwords campaigns because you really want your advert or it could be a promotional campaign but you want it to reflect the words that you've put in the advert so that people have a seamless journey and they basically recognise that the advert is now represented on the web page in some way, shape or form. If you were thinking about writing a website for your bespoke furniture, then you would want to use those same words on your landing page so people know that it's reflected. So, they will use that to endorse their adverts and effectively not actually on the website.

But the idea is that you have a landing page rather than directing people to your main website?

And then you don't need to host a website and then that can save costs as well. So, think about those options if you feel that a website is a bit too much of an onerous task for you.

But that really puts the emphasis on having your content absolutely right. If you've only got one page and you've got to keep it minimal, you've got to really think about how you're going to get your key messages across.

That's where copywriting comes in and a little bit of effort goes a long way, definitely so gets as many people involved as possible but, as you said before, not too many cooks because that can spoil the broth. But do always ensure that you have different people coming from different backgrounds look at it so they very much see it as others see it.

So, we hope that's given you some ideas, listeners, about how to tackle the issue of getting website content right, it is a bit of a minefield. There is lots of advice out there, but mainly the main points:

- keep it brief
- use Images,
- use video
- always put your customer at the centre of everything you do.
- get other people to check it because you can go a bit copy blind.

So join us next time when we're going to be talking about working with journalists. Now you were mentioning this before about how you're trying to get an article in the local press pertaining to a bigger news story at the moment.

Yes, we thought it might be timely to talk to listeners about how they can build a relationship with journalists, what journalists are looking for when they're looking for stories and they bit my hand off with this particular one because it did tie into a national news story that came up over the weekend. I think business owners get very nervous about approaching the local press with a story and it doesn't always have to be a good news story. This particular one is what would be perceived as a negative type of story. What I'm doing with the client is actually positioning them as somebody who has expertise, giving facts and figures to support the story.

And I think it's also important to mention that, as a small business, you sometimes think you've got to come up with these stories. But in effect, you're piggybacking on something else. So until then, it's goodbye from me, Nicky Matthews.

And from me, Liz Gordon. Goodbye.

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