

This is an edited transcript of the January 14, 2015 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled [The Truth About Content Marketing for Solopreneurs: An Interview with Emily Brackett.](#)

Announcer: Are you a hard-working, self-employed professional striving for small business success? There is help. Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast featuring candid conversations about successful self-employment.

Stephen Lahey: Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast. I'm Stephen Lahey, and I'll be your host.

[My guest on the podcast today, Emily Brackett, is the President of Visible Logic, the company she founded in 2001.](#) Emily and the Visible Logic team work across all media, from websites to logos to print materials, to build cohesive and consistent brand identities for their clients.

In addition to her expertise in design, Emily is a seasoned content marketer. She's used a variety of powerful content marketing strategies to grow her own successful firm and those of her clients over the past 13+ years.

As solo entrepreneurs, we need to create and promote content that establishes our credibility and builds trust with perspective clients. Today Emily is here to help make this process easier and more productive.

Welcome to the podcast, Emily.

Emily Brackett: Thanks for having me.

Stephen Lahey: First, can you tell us about your life before you became self-employed and then what triggered you to become an entrepreneur in the first place?

Emily Brackett: I'm a graphic designer. That was my education, as well. And I think most designers imagine going out on our own at some point. It could be just a one person freelance operation, or it could mean building a design and marketing studio. But I fall into that group of people who just thought someday I'll go out on my own.

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So, I worked at a number of different design firms and marketing firms before going out on my own. Substantially, I worked at three pretty large companies before making the decision. I got laid off from the last one. That's a pretty typical thing, I think. That happens to entrepreneurs. Maybe it wasn't as planned out as they expected. But in the summer of 2001 I got laid off and I said, well, I guess this is the time to do it.

Stephen Lahey: You left the corporate world in 2001, in the summer. And of course what happened in the fall, right?

Emily Brackett: Right. I lost my job in July of 2001 and I gave myself a little bit of mourning time and trying to decide what to do next. And I remember going away for the weekend in early September and really saying okay, this is it. Tomorrow, Monday, September 10, 2001, I am going to start my design firm. So the first day was a good one, but the second day was September 11, so it was a rocky start.

Stephen Lahey: I'm sure it was. We all remember where we were at that time. But you made it through.

We're going to talk about some of the things that you did to become successful, and one of the things that you did is – and this is before they even called it content marketing – you were doing content marketing.

So let's focus on that. You know, although it's a new kind of a phrase, “content marketing”, it's nothing new.

Emily Brackett: That's true.

Stephen Lahey: So can you describe how you view content marketing today?

Emily Brackett: Sure. It's funny you say that because that's sort of how I feel. All of a sudden there became this buzzword of content marketing and I'm thinking, oh, that's what I do, but I had never, you know, I certainly heard it, like other people did, before I even realized what it was myself and, oh, that's actually what I do for a living.

So, I think of content marketing as anything where it's really using your thought leadership, which is I think maybe an expression that's been around a bit longer, showing yourself as an expert

through developing different pieces of content. It can be speaking. It can be newsletters. It can be writing a blog. It can be putting together a video. All of those things that are basically ways to show what your expertise is and the experience you have.

Stephen Lahey: That makes perfect sense. And let's just look at it from a nuts and bolts perspective. A lot of us are solos and we're so busy. We may contract out to others do certain things, but when we hear content marketing, we hear "time suck" [laughs] – and we get scared and we question our abilities to write well, and so on.

So, let's take a look at the nature of basic content marketing and how we can use it to prove that we can be helpful to other people, that we have the expertise to be a resource.

Let me ask you up front – what do we need to establish? Do we need to establish a newsletter? A blog? Both? What are some of the pieces we should probably think about putting in place?

Emily Brackett: I definitely recommend both an eNewsletter and a blog and supplementing that with some form of social media. Those are the three pieces, but the blog should be your cornerstone of where you develop and house all of your content.

You mentioned content marketing being overwhelming, but, like you said, as a solopreneur you are an expert in your field so you can talk about that in whatever way makes sense to you. But I do think that a blog hosted on your own company domain name should be where you house and feature everything. Then you push this content out by eNewsletter and by social media.

Stephen Lahey: Let's talk about the advantages of a blog. What are some of the benefits of regular blogging?

Emily Brackett: The reason that blogging is so important, and this is probably why the buzzword "content marketing" got so much attention, is for SEO, which is search engine optimization. Google has said that sites that regularly publish high-quality content are the ones that they want to show up in their search results. This shows that you're up to date. It shows that you have thoughtful content, you have new content. Your website is not stagnating. So blogging is hugely important for SEO.

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And obviously the purpose of SEO is to expand your base. Maybe right now you have a website that gets most of its traffic through referrals, meaning that you met someone at a networking event, they hear about you, they go to your site.

The advantage of developing a blog then is to open that up to people who may have never heard of you except they use Google and search on something of interest to them and you're able to answer a question for them through your content.

Stephen Lahey: You mentioned social media. In my particular space it's all about LinkedIn. That's where my clients are. Of course, now LinkedIn has a publishing platform. So, Emily, do you think it's a good idea from the standpoint of repurposing our content to focus on social media and perhaps repurpose a blog post on the new LinkedIn platform, for example?

Emily Brackett: Yes, with the content you generate, you should try to get the most bang for your buck by repurposing it somehow. So for certain audiences, repurposing a blog post through LinkedIn is going to be great. You never want to do it word for word, just copying and pasting. You would want to have some different version of it for LinkedIn.

Also, an extremely important tie in with eNewsletters is sending your blog posts out to your eNewsletter list. That's probably the most important two-step process that people can do with social media being a third leg there.

Stephen Lahey: I think social media can be productive if it's used correctly. But in my view, there's just nothing better than someone who has qualified their interest as serious by saying, yes, you can be in my email inbox. It's a big deal today because we're connected through a variety of platforms now, so I think it's a much bigger deal than it used to be before social media. Do you share that perspective?

Emily Brackett: Yes. Completely. The benefit, for example, of a blog with SEO is getting people you don't know to get to know you, but the benefit of an eNewsletter is really connecting with a specific person, not just X number of visitors to your website, but actual people who have opted in. Anybody who has given their email address to you has raised their hand and said I trust you enough to give you my email address, which is huge. And you should take advantage of

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that in a respectful way and create something of value for them. If you do that, it will be a great way to convert prospects to clients.

With an eNewsletter, you can control exactly what you want to talk about. You can control the format of it, how long it is, the tone of it, the look of it. It's completely your show to do whatever you want with it. So that's what's so great about an eNewsletter. People have said, yes, I want it, and given you that entryway into their inbox.

Stephen Lahey: Let's talk about ideas for your blog posts and eNewsletter topics. Where do we get ideas that might be appropriate and valuable to our particular audience?

Emily Brackett: Most people get worried about that. How am I going to come up with topics? And I do think the best approach is to develop a blog post and then go ahead and send it out by your eNewsletter. To clarify, there's probably no reason to assume that all of your eNewsletter readers are seeing your blog posts every time they're published. So, yes, I would go ahead and send them the actual blog post, an excerpt of it, by email.

But to get ideas, it helps to think about the questions that your prospects or clients frequently ask you. If a few people actually ask you, then probably other people have the same questions. That's a big one. Also, if there are questions that you wish somebody would ask you, then turn that into a blog post. Why is this better? Why are you going to end up paying more in the long run for a cheaper solution? Any of those questions that you wish people were asking you, turn those into blog posts

Stephen Lahey: There are a lot of topics that we may be interested in, but the only measure of a good post in my view is whether or not potential clients are interested. Sometimes it's hard to predict what will get traction. I'll give you an example. It's a LinkedIn post I did and it was a simple list post. But I just have this thing about list posts. I'm like, oh man, do I really want to do a list post. Kind of fluffy, I think. But guess what? That was one of my most popular posts. It taught me something. Sometimes keeping it simple, and posting something that's not a complete thought, leaves people room to comment and add their own thoughts. Sometimes I think we can cover a topic very thoroughly and think it's perfect, but that may not be the best type of post because it doesn't really leave people

an option to comment. The reader probably thinks, well, they've obviously thought this through way more than I have time to. Thanks for the information. Right?

Emily Brackett: Yes, that's true. A post like that is informational and shows your expertise, but may not generate comments or the same amount of any sort of visible interaction. Even though it may have affected them, it's hard for you to know that because they didn't leave a comment or ask you a question in return and that kind of thing.

An example of another thing that's beyond list posts that's worked really well for me is looking at something in the news and tying it back to what your own expertise is. And it doesn't have to be hard news. I mean news in terms of current things that have happened. Like I'm a subscriber to Cooking Light Magazine and they redesigned it and I hated it. I do design work, but I don't do magazine design. That's not part of my expertise, but I just decided to talk about that and the amount of traffic I got from that was huge and, like you said, people really weighed in. Random people who were also subscribers weighed in about what they liked and didn't like about the magazine redesign. So sometimes things like that that people are talking about might maybe not be specifically focused on what you do, but you have some opinion that's a little bit more relevant to your industry can be a good topic.

Stephen Lahey: Of course, people have to be careful about doing what everybody else is doing. I can't even tell you how many emails I've gotten over the past couple days that are saying here's how to "Succeed in 2015". I'm just like, really? So you, too?

Emily Brackett: Yes. And you can get carried away with looking at what other people do or even researching keywords. You know, what are the other things that people have ranked well in other searches and that kind of thing. If you go about it from that angle, and sometimes when you do much analysis, you just end up with a blog post that's very flat. It doesn't have any meaning. It's just that you've hit the keywords, but you didn't really have much to say that's interesting.

Stephen Lahey: Right. And one of the pieces of advice that a friend gave me is, Steve, you're posting things which are good from a business standpoint, but where is Steve in there? Writing about my personal opinions, my sense of humor, things like that, was a little bit alien to me a couple of years ago when I started doing this with

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SmallBusinessTalent.com. Now, as I'm starting to share that type of content more often, I'm finding that those are the pieces that get traction. So, experimentation can be good, and people do want to hear from you as a human being. You never know, really, what's going to get traction.

Emily Brackett:

Yes.

Stephen Lahey:

So, I think what you're saying is experiment. Try a number of different angles and tie back to the core subjects you blog about. Right?

Emily Brackett:

Right. My blog tends to be focused on a very specific niche. For me, it's about how to use design to effectively and build your business.

But on social media, for example, and I'm probably most active on Twitter. That's where I really share more content, both others blog posts, my own 140 character posts about topics that are more related to things outside of that narrow core focus, and making connections outside of it. Yes, I have kept my blog pretty much on focus, but on social media I'm able to explore a lot more.

Your audience is self-employed solopreneurs, so you also have a clear opportunity to just be a real person. You're not some faceless corporate entity. People want to connect with a person, so you should take advantage of that benefit that you have, which is you are a real person. You have interests and hobbies and humor.

Stephen Lahey:

Yes. And that's interesting that you talk about Twitter. My initial reaction to Twitter years ago was basically, wow, that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard of. I was wrong, of course.

Emily Brackett:

That's how I felt the first time I used it. I sort of forced myself to do it for about 90 days, and I said this is a waste of time. But I came back to it and now I've been on probably for I think I joined in 2007, so it's been a while. And now it's the number one referrer of traffic to my blog and website from the social media channels. It just works for me.

I'm a designer, so I've tried Pinterest and Instagram. You'd think, as a designer, my product is very visual, and you would think those are good sources of traffic for me. But that's not where my

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prospects are, so they haven't really been as effective. Whereas, Twitter does tend to be used by more of the people who might be buying my services. So that's, I think, another reason why it's worked well for me.

Stephen Lahey: And I think it's important to look at exactly who is on a social media platform that you're using. So, for example, on LinkedIn, my clients are there and they seem pretty active. On Twitter I was actually surprised to find that a lot of my clients are there and they seem pretty active, too. Facebook? Almost not at all.

Emily Brackett: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: Not because Facebook is useless, but just it's not right for me. So I think when it comes to using social media for content marketing it's about probing the particular platform and learning who is there and how active they are. Also, trying to learn how to use the platform in the way it was intended to be used. For example, on Twitter, initially hashtags that made me really nervous. But if you include the right hashtags in your tweets it's a way for people to find you and potentially connect with you. So, for me, getting better results required getting acclimated to the culture of that particular social media platform.

For those who are uneasy with social media, I suggest maybe picking a couple of those platforms and at least getting your toes wet. Because if you don't try it, if you don't experiment, you're just dismissing something without getting the facts – and you just never know, it may actually turn out to be a very good traffic source.

One last question as we're kind of wrapping up. How would you say that search engine optimization relates to the social media content that we create?

Emily Brackett: Well, the connection with social media is not as strong with SEO as it is directly with your blog or your website. But Google does say that they give some influence to your social media profiles, how active those channels are, and that kind of thing. But in terms of SEO, I probably wouldn't make that the reason you're using social media.

If you're focused on SEO, I would definitely work on your blog. I think for social media, the reason is to engage with people and

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expand your visibility. You can send people to your blog posts that you write, post it to any social media channels that you're active in.

Stephen Lahey: I notice that some people have used advertising successfully on social media pretty effectively. Of course, if you're advertising consulting services, then my guess is that's not nearly as effective as advertising a downloadable white paper or eBook or something like that to build your email list. My experience has that if I drive people from LinkedIn to a page on my domain that is focused on opting in and downloading my LinkedIn guide, it actually works great.

Emily Brackett: We've had a lot of luck promoting webinars both for ourselves and for our clients on LinkedIn. If you are selling a B2B service, you can really hone in with the demographic profiles based on job title or geographic location or company name or size on LinkedIn. There are so many ways you can target that and really only pay for people who fit your ideal client profile. So it can be really effective.

Facebook, I think, is a lot more challenging. For consumer products, you might have more luck. A B2B consulting service trying to use Facebook advertising? Probably not the best route. To pick up on something you said earlier, I think a lot of people, they might just choose Facebook because that's where they're comfortable just because personally they use Facebook. But if that's not really the target market for you, then you do need to experiment with the other social media channels for your business.

Stephen Lahey: Absolutely, of course, my perspective is that you probably want to have email opt-in opportunities far more prominent than social media on your website. In fact, on my website you can't easily find where I am on social media, that's how strongly focused I am on getting email opt-ins.

When I do email my subscribers later, I'm letting them know where I am on social media and many of them do connect with me at that stage. I mean, it's about finding that mix that fits your strategy. Whatever the sales process you have in place, you need to look at it, why it works, and then ask – how could social media amplify what I'm doing? That's how I look at it. Do you look at it the same way, Emily?

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Emily Brackett: Exactly, it amplifies. It also helps validate you. If they go to your website, they don't know that much about you, maybe they immediately opt-in to an email, for example, an email list. They're starting to build trust. But I think LinkedIn helps people to feel like you're a real person. There's an actual person there with some recommendations from other people and it all starts building out, especially for solopreneurs, the feeling that this is a real person and that this person is clearly trustworthy. All those little pieces fit together to build that trust.

Stephen Lahey: As we're winding up the podcast, I'd love it if listeners could connect with you online, Emily. What are the ways they can do that?

Emily Brackett: Sure. Well, VisibleLogic.com is the website for my company, and I have a blog there which you can read online or subscribe to it and it will be emailed to you. I am on LinkedIn, as well, and on Twitter I'm @VisibleLogic. My key moniker or handle everywhere is VisibleLogic.

I also encourage people to check out MailontheMark.com which is our eNewsletter platform. We developed that after having tried out a lot of the big names in email marketing and all of our clients felt frustrated by one or more facets of those.

So, we developed Mail on the Mark for a custom branded eNewsletter experience. That's another site that they can check out and it has blog posts focused specifically on eNewsletters and email marketing.

Stephen Lahey: Thank you so much for joining me on the podcast, Emily. I really appreciate you taking the time.

Emily Brackett: Thank you very much for having me.

Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, I encourage you to visit SmallBusinessTalent.com now and subscribe to the podcast by email. When you do, you'll be alerted whenever I post fresh podcast content, of course, but you'll also receive special resources for email subscribers only, including my LinkedIn guide, and much more. Thanks again for listening today and best wishes for your success.

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