

This is an edited transcript of the April 29, 2015 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled – [Jana Sedivy on How to Boost Your Marketing Results with Simple Market Research](#).

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.

Market research for solo entrepreneurs is a hands-on process. It's designed to help you unearth powerful new insights, market your services more effectively, and create the kind of value that your ideal clients crave most.

My guest on the podcast today is [Jana Sedivy](#). Jana is the founder and principal of [Authentic Insight](#), a consulting practice specializing in market research and strategy.

Jana is a recognized expert in market research. Over the past 17 years, she has served a wide variety of organizations ranging from the famed Xerox PARC (where she worked on technology which was a precursor to today's "Internet, of things"), to Fortune 500 companies, and even high-stakes technology startups in Silicon Valley.

Jana is well aware that far too many of her fellow solo professionals are finding it difficult to land new business that they need to grow their sales. One of the major causes of their struggles? A lack of basic market research.

Today, Jana will introduce you to some simple and cost-effective ways to address this important problem for your business. During the course of today's interview, she reveals how to gain crucial market insights from ordinary client conversations, how to discover a potential client's true business priorities and sell to them, and how to get creative and leverage a low-cost research platform that you've probably never even considered.

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Effective sales and marketing strategies are rooted in understanding customer needs, but how do your customer's think about and prioritize their needs? Today, you'll learn how to pull back the curtain and reveal the truth. I hope you enjoy this interview.

Welcome to the podcast, Jana.

Jana Sedivy: Thanks for having me.

Stephen Lahey: You've had an interesting career. Can you tell us about your life before self-employment and why you decided to start your own solo business a few years ago?

Jana Sedivy: I started my career as a really technical person, and I have a computer science and physics background. I actually thought I wanted to be a particle physicist at one point.

Ultimately, I started my career as a software developer, but, at the same time, I didn't like technology just for technology's sake, like a lot of IT people do. I was always really interested in how people interacted with technology, so I worked in places that were really innovative and that cared deeply about the people using the technology.

And my journey to self-employment is probably a familiar one to many of your listeners. I was laid off as part of an organizational restructuring. I'm sure that's a common story.

But here's the interesting part for me, which was really fun. The very next day after I got laid off, someone that I used to work with—he had left a while ago and started his own company—he called me up the next day and said, "Hey, I heard you got laid off. Can you come to New York for a couple of weeks and help me out with some research?" So I just said, "I'm on the next flight," and my consulting practice was born, and I've never looked back since.

Stephen Lahey: Interesting story, Jana. Now, I know we're going to discuss how to uncover customer insights that we can act on and create value for our customers, grow our sales, et cetera, and, as you just pointed out, you're a solo entrepreneur like my listeners and me, so let's start there. Just briefly, how have you approached market research for your own company and how has it helped you?

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Jana Sedivy: Well, unfortunately when I started consulting, I didn't do any market research. I just started targeting the kind of people that I had worked with in a corporate environment, which was product managers at large technology companies.

It took me a long time, probably way too long, to realize that this was not the right market for me as a consultant. I actually think this is a challenge for a lot of people when they make the transition from employee to consultant, they just continue doing everything they way they did when they were an employee and it doesn't necessarily translate well.

So I'm sure you encounter that when you help people out with their marketing. People think of themselves as if they were still an employee, but they need to really present themselves differently.

Stephen Lahey: You've just hit on something that's at the very heart of why I decided to launch SmallBusinessTalent.com. I believe that any long-term success, avoiding burnout, making the money you want, enjoying your work long-term – it's strongly tied to what market you choose to serve. Is it really a match, and how do you serve it? All that links back to marketing research.

Before the interview, you and I discussed a few different approaches to marketing research. It's such an important topic, and I think it's badly neglected.

We'll start with a very basic approach. It's something we all need to do, and that's interviewing our existing customers. How can we begin to approach that, Jana?

Jana Sedivy: So, if you've been consulting for a while, perhaps you've developed a practice with your clients where you have a final meeting as you're wrapping up the project and you ask them about what things went really well, what could have gone better, and maybe that's the point when you ask for referrals. But in that same conversation, you should also ask them things like – what made you decide to engage with me, and how long were you thinking about engaging someone before you finally made the decision, and maybe what was the trigger that made you do it, and where do you go to get information about this area? All good questions to ask.

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What you're trying to do is identify what's the burning pain that made them pick up the phone that day and give you a call. If you're, say, an HR consultant, is it that your client just on-boarded five new employees and they ended up having to work through the weekend to get the paper work done? That would be a big insight. You need to know that.

Once you have that information, you might do something like write an article about on-boarding processes and make that part of your content marketing. Maybe it tells you, oh, maybe I could create a package around that pain point. Or if you hear that story from pretty much everyone you talk to, you can make that story front and center on your website. So it can really affect your messaging.

And then you also need to know what their watering holes are. So where do they go to get information? Especially their online resources. Because once you know that, where they're going, what sites your customers are visiting, then you could try to write guest posts there and so forth.

So the interesting thing, too, is asking these questions doesn't have to be done in a formal interview at the end of the project. It's actually even more effective if you can just quietly sneak in a lot of these questions throughout your engagement with them as part of just your natural conversations with them. I think what a lot of people don't understand is that market research is kind of a fancy word for just listening.

So if you're a solo professional services provider, you don't need to launch a big survey or use social media analysis or do something fancy, like a cohort analysis or anything. No, you really just need to be naturally open and curious about your customers' problems, and you just need to ask a lot of questions and then just shut up and listen. I always like to tell people, you have two ears, two eyes, and only one mouth, use it them those proportions.

Stephen Lahey:

A lot of us are consultants of some kind. We probably see ourselves as pretty astute in terms of knowing what our customers are thinking. But you know what you might discover? The more you ask questions and really listen, you really may not have known as much as you assumed you did.

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One of the questions that I started asking every client, after a period of time working with them is along the lines of – what would you like to see more of, less of, or just different in our working relationship? You'd be surprised at what actually comes back to you. Sometimes they'll focus on little changes that you didn't think mattered. So you make changes. But what's really interesting is that you start to see patterns.

Jana Sedivy: Exactly.

Stephen Lahey: And that gives you that lay of the land, so to speak. This context allows you to navigate with your marketing, with your sales efforts a lot more skillfully.

We also discussed before the call, that many important customer business challenges aren't addressed in the short term at all because on their own these customers aren't going to address something that's not immediately urgent. But you've discovered that customers are very open to paying outside service providers, as we are, for a solution to a problem that is important – even though it's not urgent.

You mentioned that those types of issue are great candidates for outsourcing to service providers like us. I thought we should definitely talk about that. So, can you tell us what do you mean by that?

Jana Sedivy: All right. So, I think it was Stephen Covey who developed this idea. He intended it as a productivity framework, but I find it's also an extremely useful way to think about problems as professional services providers. For people who don't know it, imagine your clients' needs that fall into your area of expertise and then imagine putting these needs into a two-by-two grid. So you've got four quadrants, you've got two boxes at the top, two at the bottom, and the boxes define how important and urgent something is.

On the bottom left, you've got things that are not important or urgent—those are the things that people put off indefinitely. And if your clients think that your services fall into that category, then you're going to have a tough row to hoe. You're going to have a really hard time selling to them because they just don't care about issues like that.

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On the bottom right quadrant, you have things that are not important, but they are urgent. Your clients need to do those things, but they're probably not going to spend a lot of money doing them. So these might be administrative things that they might outsource to a personal or virtual assistant, or something like that, but that's about it.

The top of this matrix is a much better place to be for consultants. On the top right, you have the things that are both important and urgent. There are some consultants who offer help in that area, so technical people who might deal with a security breach or something like that. Living in that quadrant can be pretty stressful, but because it deals with urgent and important situations, sometimes you can really charge a high premium because your clients are desperate.

But most people like us, I think we want to be in that sweet spot, which in my mind is the top left corner quadrant. Those are things that are important, but not urgent. So these are the things that your clients—they know they should be doing it, and it's always kind of niggling at them in the back of their minds, oh, I should really get to that, but they're too busy just running their business or doing their regular day job so they don't really have a lot of time to devote to it. But because they recognize that it's important, and they realize, well, this stuff takes expertise, so they're much more likely to outsource those kinds of headaches to people like us, and they understand they need an expert for this, so they're willing to put some serious money towards that.

So when you're doing your customer research, you really need to understand what quadrant your services fall into. I always like to try to find the things that are in that top left, important but not urgent, and I've had to adjust over time to target these opportunities. Unfortunately, when I first started my business a lot of my services were more in the not important and not urgent quadrant. Later, I realized I'm not really getting a lot of traction here.

So, the thing is that you have to think about it in terms of your customer's perception. You might think that it's important, but if they don't, then you're going to have a hard time. We need to find things that they already think of as important.

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Stephen Lahey: Exactly. Well said. Now, you've also employed what I consider to be a really interesting and creative research technique that never would have occurred to me. It relates to using Craigslist, of all things, for business-to-business research.

Why did you decide to use Craigslist, how did you approach it, and what results did you get? Please walk us through that process because I think this will be really interesting for people to consider.

Jana Sedivy: So this is a really surprising tool that I have used a fair bit. I turned to it for the first time when I was working on project and I needed to recruit business analysts. I tried accessing existing customers, I tried recruiting agencies that specialized in finding people for market research, I tried buying lists, and I just could not get the people that I was looking for. And so I turned to Craigslist, well, frankly I was just desperate. I thought, well, I don't have much to lose by just trying it.

To my astonishment, I actually got really amazing results, really quickly, really cheaply. I got people that were way better than what I was getting with professional recruiters who were charging me \$200 to \$300 a person to find. So people may think, oh, well, who are going to find on Craigslist, but I found people that are heads of HR for large companies, heads of IT security—IT security people never want to talk to anybody, but there are some on Craigslist that will talk to you.—business analysts, brand strategists, like high level people, really the whole gamut.

I find it's a really useful way to approach market research as a solo professional because of the curtain of anonymity that Craigslist will give you. Sometimes when you want to do research, you need to ask the dumb questions like what are your big problems. Why do you hire consultants in the first place? Where do you go to read information on this topic? A lot of us are embarrassed to ask these kinds of questions to our existing clients or prospects because we feel we should already be an expert on this stuff, so we're afraid we're going to damage our credibility by asking these kinds of questions. So I find that when you do your research through Craigslist, you can have the opportunity to ask these kinds of questions without worrying about just showing that you're an expert all the time. You can really have that kind of open, tell me all about it kind of conversation.

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The main thing that you need to worry about with using Craigslist, though, is what you would expect – you need to be careful to do a lot of filtering because there's a lot of chaff out there. You want to get the wheat out of the chaff and make sure that you get the people that you're looking for.

So what I was thinking is I'll just get into detail here so that I can explain how to do it so that the listeners to this podcast can go off and do it themselves. I'm going to dive right into the details, if that's okay.

Stephen Lahey: Great idea.

Jana Sedivy: All right.

Stephen Lahey: Now, before we get into this, I know that you're not a big advocate of customer research for customer research sake – you always have a purpose behind it. So, what was your purpose, specifically, when you were doing the Craigslist research, and then what were the steps?

Jana Sedivy: Well, my purpose was that when I started my business I soon discovered that my initial target market was not the right target market. So, I had to redefine my target market.

Instead of targeting product managers, I wanted to target marketing managers, and I knew a lot about product managers, but I actually didn't know a lot about marketing managers. So I thought I need to understand them a lot better. What's the language they use? What are the things that they worry about? Where do they go to read information? What does their day look like? I knew all that stuff about product managers because I had worked with them every day in the corporate environment, but I didn't know that about marketing managers.

Stephen Lahey: What were the steps you took to unearth this information?

Jana Sedivy: Well, first, when you're doing this stuff through Craigslist, you have to offer an incentive for people to participate. For most solo professionals, you're getting hired by fairly high-level people so you need to offer these types of folks enough money to make it worth their time. So, I usually offer something like \$75 for 30 minutes or \$100 or even \$150 for an hour, and you have to

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advertise that compensation on your Craigslist ad. And I typically offer payment through an Amazon gift certificate.

Then the most critical step is to create what's called a screener. This is a really important tool. It's a multiple-choice questionnaire that you get people to fill out to determine whether or not you want to interview them. I usually put that up on SurveyMonkey or SurveyGizmo.

There are two important things you need to keep in mind. You need to keep the questionnaire short, less than ten questions, five is perfect, and also make sure that you don't hint at what you're looking for in the questions. A lot of people on Craigslist are going to try to sneak their way into your research so that they can get the money, so your job is to filter those people out. It's actually a really useful exercise to write the screener, even if you're not going to do research, because it forces you to really concretely define who your target customer is.

What I usually do is start out with a very broad question, like what best describes your profession? Then I provide a list of professional elements that's all over the map. Say, for example, in my case I was looking for a marketing manager, I would include in the list marketing or branding, but then I also include a bunch of red herrings like engineering, finance, sales, accounting. So, if people click those options, then I filter them out right away.

Then usually for people like us, size of company would be an important factor. You usually know am I targeting big companies, 5000 employees? Or, in your case, you're targeting solo professionals, so that's going to be another question.

And then the most important thing is their job responsibilities, not their actual title. It's not their job title because people have all kinds of weird titles these days. It's really what they're responsible for, what kinds of decisions they need to make. And that one really depends on what role you're looking for, so it's hard for me to give specific examples around that. But the key thing is when you're putting those questions, you have to throw in some red herrings so that you're not hinting at what you're looking for. You also have to have it very clear in your mind, what are the things that are most important to you.

And then at the end of the survey, if people have made it all the way through, you ask them for their first, last name, and contact information. You don't strictly need their name, but I find it useful because if I'm not sure about someone, I can look them up on LinkedIn and see if they look legitimate. At the end of the survey, you also need to make sure that it's clear that they're not in yet, so I say something like "Thanks for filling out our survey. If you qualify for the research, one of our researchers will call you and talk to you for five minutes to make sure that you're a good fit. If you are, then we'll schedule the 30 minute interview, and you'll receive your compensation only if you participate in that."

So once you've created the survey, you're ready to post the ad to Craigslist. In the ad, you need to, again, strike a balance between making sure you attract the people you're looking for, but not saying outright what you need so that you don't get the fakers. Again, in my case, I was looking for marketing managers, so I may say something like we're looking for professionals who work in an office environment, just so that I don't get hairdressers or janitors filling out the survey.

You need to post your ad in the jobs, etc. section of Craigslist. That's the official place for this kind of thing. Then you choose whatever cities might seem like a good fit for you. In my case, I do a lot of tech, so I usually hit Silicon Valley, New York, Atlanta, and then maybe a couple of others.

Now, usually when I do this, within a couple of days, I'm going to get 5000 responses. It's crazy. But here's the thing—out of those 5000, you might get 50 who qualify through your survey. Then what you need to do is take those 50 people, most of them still are not right. You need to call them up and talk to them for five minutes. This step is really important, otherwise you're going to waste a lot of time. What you're trying to do is just figure out who's a faker and who is articulate enough to actually answer your questions.

The way you spot fakers is you start asking them, well, tell me a bit about your job. What are your roles and responsibilities? And if they just start saying verbatim what you had in the survey, then they're a faker. So then you kind of, you know, I usually just brush them off and say "Thanks for your time. It looks like you're not a perfect fit for this particular study, would it be okay with you if I

left you on my list to contact if some other study comes up that fits your profile?" Or something like that.

So what you're looking for are people who sound like one of the people whom you typically work with. You can tell, you can trust your spidey senses. If they're using the same kind of language, and the same kind of terms, and it feels like a natural conversation, then those are the kind of people you want to interview.

Usually, out of those 50 people that pass your survey, you might get 10 or 15 that are actually the right person, and that's plenty. You don't actually need more than that. If you just want to get some basic information about your target market, you actually stopped being surprised by the answers to your questions after even six or eight people. So even if you just have ten people, that is probably plenty. And then once you get a good person, you can also ask them, "Do you know any colleagues or associates that might be interested in this kind of research?" so that gives you other qualified people to talk to.

Stephen Lahey: This is a fascinating way to not only get information from the survey itself, but, if you can ask them to give you their LinkedIn profile address, to then do screening upfront very quickly and efficiently just by looking at their LinkedIn profile.

Jana Sedivy: Exactly.

Stephen Lahey: So that's one of the things I might consider. Here's my question, how strongly are we going to screen in terms of getting that kind of personal information versus the responses and maybe an email?

Jana Sedivy: I don't usually need a lot of personal information. Really, I find that I can just tell by talking with someone if they're the kind of person that I want to talk to. So if they sound like one of my clients, then I want to talk to them. And you can tell the difference. Within 30 seconds you can tell whether they're the right person or not.

Stephen Lahey: And from the standpoint of maybe looking at new markets when you're really just not that familiar, this might require more digging.

Jana Sedivy: Yes.

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- Stephen Lahey: Or different market segments like a marketing manager versus a product manager, as you mentioned in your example. They are quite different.
- Jana Sedivy: Yes.
- Stephen Lahey: Versus a brand manager or something like that. It can be quite different, so you have to dig deeper to understand the nuances.
- Jana, I wish we had more time, but you've really delivered a lot of really great specifics. As we wrap up the podcast, I'm sure that a lot of listeners would like to learn more about you and connect with you online and just dig into what you do and potentially how you can help them. How can they do that?
- Jana Sedivy: Great, well, you can visit my brand new website, which is AuthenticInsight.com – and actually for the listeners of this podcast, I have a special link that I set up. If you go to AuthenticInsight.com/SmallBusinessTalent, you can sign up for my newsletter there. I've started working on a product that describes this way of recruiting participants through Craigslist, so if it's something that you're interested in, sign up through that link and let me know if that's something that you're interested in and then I can follow up with you later. And I'm also on Twitter. My Twitter handle is @JanaSedivy.
- Stephen Lahey: Yes, visit AuthenticInsight.com/SmallBusinessTalent, and go ahead and opt-in to get this really interesting free information. Thank you so much for that special offer and for joining me on the podcast, Jana.
- Jana Sedivy: It's been a real pleasure. Thanks for having me.
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