

This is an edited transcript of the December 3, 2014 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled [Pam Neely Shares Six Simple \(Yet Highly Effective\) Email List Building Strategies](#).

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.

We've all heard the hype about social media marketing, and it can be easy to forget that *email marketing* still dramatically outperforms social media in the business-to-business space that we all work in everyday.

My guest on the podcast today is [Pam Neely](#), the author of [50 Ways to Build Your Email Marketing List](#). Her excellent new book outlines a simple straightforward approach to building a targeted email list filled with prospective clients.

Pam has been a marketing copywriter and online marketer for more than 15 years now. Over that time she's helped a wide variety of businesses to acquire and retain clients in cost-effective ways, including email marketing.

Prior to becoming self-employed, Pam worked with ad agencies in New York City and small internet companies across several states. She's a proud winner of the New York Press Association Award and holds a master's degree in direct and interactive marketing from New York University.

Pam has owned and operated a wide variety of successful businesses over the course of her career. She may well be a serial entrepreneur. You be the judge: For example, she assembled and sold gift boxes out of her New York City apartment, she ran a used bookstore through Amazon.com, she also built and earned a sizeable income from a series of websites about how to start various small businesses.

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Pam has a lot of Internet and email marketing wisdom to share with us today, so get ready to take some notes.

Welcome to the podcast, Pam. Thanks for making the time to be here.

Pam Neely: Thank you. Great to be here.

Stephen Lahey: To kick things off, can you tell us about your life before you started your own business and then what prompted you to become a self-employed professional?

Pam Neely: Sure. That was quite a while ago actually. It was about ten years ago that I finally left an ad agency in New York City called Insight Out of Chaos. I was a copywriter and a project manager there and got to work on client accounts like True Value Hardware and Balducci's, the grocery store. I also did light email marketing for them. I had joined them right after I finished graduate school at NYU getting my master's degree in direct and interactive marketing. I interned full-time at the very large ad agency Grey Direct while I was in school.

Prior to that I was at a place called A Common Reader Book Catalog for maybe ten years, I guess. Among other things, I built their first website back in 1997-ish. We brought it from 0% of sales to 20% of company sales in two years. And one of the things I'm most proud of is way back in 1998 there was a printed book published of cool websites to visit and A Common Reader got the same endorsement as Amazon.com did at that time because it was just so new that even a little book catalog could compete with something like Amazon.

Stephen Lahey: You have, I think, an impressive background. Your education from NYU, a top school. You've worked with some very interesting companies, and I've actually heard of A Common Reader. That's interesting. So when did you actually take the plunge? It was ten years ago that you started your own gig?

Pam Neely: Basically. Yes.

Stephen Lahey: Who is your ideal client and how do you serve them?

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Pam Neely: I kind of have two different profiles. In one part, I'm a marketing content creator and I work with small to medium sized ad agencies or marketing publications or online Internet marketing platforms and I create content for them. Where I'd like to be more and more is with your sorts of audiences, the really small businesses, the solo entrepreneurs, and helping them both build their email list and basically build their audiences and do marketing in a way that is efficient, gets them high returns, and doesn't take over their business day because they really, in all honesty, they don't want to be marketing people. They want to do the work that they started their businesses to do and so marketing needs to be contained and efficient and as simple as possible.

Stephen Lahey: I love what you just said because it's so spot-on with my audience. They need that kind of help. And I know you provide coaching and I will just say to the audience that your pricing is surprisingly reasonable. I mean given your background, which is just top notch.

Your website is a nice case study, too, on not only how to capture email, but how to do it without hype. That's one reason why I invited you to join me on the podcast.

The second reason I wanted you on the podcast is because I read your book, [*50 Ways to Build Your Email Marketing List*](#), and I think it's excellent. So what made you decide that you would invest the time and energy, the blood, the sweat, the tears to publish your first book?

Pam Neely: It kind of developed along the way. Before I knew it, I was into writing a full book. What happened was that I was working with a copywriting coach, Chris Marlow, who's fantastic, and she has a technique for her copywriters, and this would work for consultants as well, where you pitch people by putting together what's called a bulky mailer. It's a direct mail package that's got a physical object in it. And you basically send that off to all your prospects and you offer an incentive to them in that package to reach out to you and get a free report. Something that they would consider really valuable. So it's a little bit like a lead magnet on a website.

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And so my free report for my mailer was that first very kernel version of [50 Ways to Build Your Email Marketing List](#). It kind of blossomed while I was working on it and then it became a presentation, and so I did a full on library presentation that took about 45 minutes. And then from there it really just kind of wanted to expand further and I took two weeks off and I just plunged into it and I wrote the bulk of it in those two weeks and kind of cleaned it up over the next couple of weeks, and that's how it came to be.

Stephen Lahey: What I'm hearing in what you're saying that there was a targeted reason to create a certain type of content that you were creating. It worked as a lead magnet, I assume, because if there was no response, then you wouldn't continue to use it. And then you expanded upon it, and there's probably no better way to test material than live speaking. You can actually see response. And then you kind of built on it further from there to make it a full-blown book. So there's an iterative process, isn't there?

Pam Neely: There definitely is. I have heard of other content creators talking about how they will look through their Twitter stream, for example, and they see which tweets did really well and then they write a blog post about similar topics. Another approach, is if they have a home run of a blog post, then maybe they make that into a short eBook. And so you kind of allocate your resources towards the content that is clearly of most interest to people.

Stephen Lahey: That makes perfect sense. What people *want* versus what we might think they *need* is sometimes different. I'm guilty of that sometimes when I create content. I think, oh, people need to hear about this. Well, again, need and want can be two different things.

Now, in your book you discuss, quote, unquote, six basic strategies for building your email list. Can you just walk us through each of the six strategies from the perspective of a solo entrepreneur in the business-to-business space, since that's my audience?

Pam Neely: Absolutely. The six strategies, just to give you the basic map, are, **one**, to optimize your opt-in forms, so that's where

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people enter their email address. The **second** one is to use social media. **Third** is to use the Internet, basically the rest of the web. **Fourth** is to use the real world. **Five** is to write great emails. And **six** is to reduce opt-outs.

And the way that all works together is you need to be applying best practices to creating your email opt-in forms otherwise, in a sense, it's like pouring water into a leaky bucket. So you want to get those conversion rates up so all the work you do to drive traffic to those opt-in forms is worthwhile. After that the next three parts of it, the social media, the rest of the Internet, and even the offline world are fundamentally just three really generalized traffic streams of sending people to those opt-in forms.

For the fifth one, creating great emails, we really have to do that, otherwise the rest of the work becomes a little bit hollow. Emails, particularly for like B2B people and for consultants, are a phenomenal way to demonstrate your expertise.

What you really want to be doing though is writing for your ideal customers. And so you can really hone down the content of those emails so that they're super valuable. What you want ultimately is something that's good enough that your ideal prospects will read it, to begin with, share it with their peers, and even save it and refer to it later. That's where you really start to get a ton of business from all this effort.

And the final one is just to reduce what's called churn. It's basically every so often someone unsubscribes and so you want to minimize those unsubscribes. This is really important because churn can eat up as much as 30% of an email list over the course of a year, and so some marketers really struggle with building their list faster than people are unsubscribing. So I talk about a number of different techniques to retain people longer.

Stephen Lahey: So, you went through the six basic strategies from sort of a 30,000 foot view. Now, let's drill down a little bit, at least into the strategies that you consider to be most important to the

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folks listening to this podcast. Let's give them some more detail on the six basic strategies.

Pam Neely:

Sure. Well, for opt-in forms, you ideally would be offering what's called a lead magnet. This is also called a freebie or a free report. And so basically you're offering people something in exchange for their email address. Again, this is some piece of information that your ideal customer or client would find almost irresistible

The big mistake that a lot of people make with their free reports is they write huge 50 page eBooks with kind of like with the more is better mentality. Well, sometimes more is absolutely better, but often a checklist or a gear list or something really simple that people can read in 10 or 15 minutes will get more opt-ins than a huge eBook that you spent a month on. And so that's one thing that I really recommend people do upfront is you don't have to allocate a month's time writing the world's greatest lead magnet. Just do something simple that you can knock out in maybe three or four hours.

Stephen Lahey:

Depending on how good a writer we are, right? It might take me longer than that. So that's interesting. That's a good basic which will certainly boost email opt-in in my experience.

By the way, the opt-in lead magnet I have relates to LinkedIn, but I'm actually going to be launching another one. And one of the lessons that I've learned is as much as I love LinkedIn, and as much as most of my audience finds LinkedIn helpful for prospecting and networking, it's still kind of a niche offering for a lead magnet. It probably doesn't have as broad an appeal as it could.

If people hit my LinkedIn free offering page, most will opt-in when they hit that squeeze page. That's good, but how many people actually go there compared to another offering, something that has more generalized appeal? Probably a lot fewer and I'm going to be finding that out soon.

So, have you seen that kind of situation where someone says, oh, I know that they're going to like this more niche free

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offering, but it turns out that it's a bit polarizing. Any thoughts on that?

Pam Neely: You nailed it. That's one of the best ways to increase opt-in is to offer a couple different lead magnets that are relevant to the content on the page. There are some really cool plug-ins that will let you do that. Plugmatter will and Hybrid Connect. Those are both paid, and really kind of powerful little email list building system themselves, but you can get them for about \$50, \$60. They may be worth the investment if you've got some budget. But they will let you put them, like you mentioned, on any blog post that you wrote that's about LinkedIn, you could offer your LinkedIn report lead magnet. And for a different blog post say that was about marketing strategy or something, you could put in a little checklist or small report that you wrote about marketing strategy. That can literally double, sometimes triple opt-in rates when you start customizing those offers.

Stephen Lahey: And when you think in terms of social media, I'm sure that almost everybody listening is on LinkedIn, some may be on Twitter, many people have a personal Facebook presence, and so on. Let's imagine that I'm advertising my lead magnet on LinkedIn. Should that page be very specific when they get to it as in – welcome LinkedIn friend, please opt-in and get this LinkedIn report. In your experience, does that help to significantly boost opt-ins?

Pam Neely: I would say generally it will help. Really the only way to know anything is to test—

Stephen Lahey: Yes.

Pam Neely: —as a good scientist I have to say that. But there's a subconscious anxiety that people still have online of am I in the right place? Is this for me? Is this relevant? Because we're all super busy. There's a great book called *Don't Make Me Think* that tells us to kind of view all advertising and landing pages like they were a billboard, like you're streaming by at 75 miles an hour, and so everything that's essential on that page needs to telegraph. And so even though your prospects may not focus on and actually read the LinkedIn logo, they'll see it and it will kind of relieve

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almost a subconscious anxiety of have I gone off the path, is this not somewhere I want to be? So that is definitely a best practice I would recommend.

Stephen Lahey: I've seen people use forms in the context of a visually attractive page. A stunning scene, a photo, in the background and a very brief opt-in form that promises a lead magnet. Some of us, just by nature, we like to provide more details and I know that there's a downside to that. Do you have any thoughts on that? As in a form that says hey, you can get your LinkedIn report that will give you this benefit versus a page that says hey, you know you're using LinkedIn but you're not getting the results you want, et cetera, et cetera, and really outlining it. Do you have any thoughts on that other than just to test it?

Pam Neely: I do. If it's highly complex, people like to have more information, so it kind of depends what you're offering. If you're offering something that is fairly easy to explain, if you're offering a how to get more LinkedIn followers paper, that would be something that's fairly simple that you doesn't need a lot of background. If you were offering maybe a contact management system, or like a \$500,000 world class, highly-technical software package, you would want to include details, maybe some graphs, etc.

And another thing that almost always helps is putting in an image of the report itself. Ideally you can make it look like it's 3D. You don't have to do the flapping pages, but at least give it a little bit of shadow so that way they can visualize what they're getting. That seems to help opt-in rates significantly.

Stephen Lahey: Interesting. So let's think about your business, since you're an solopreneur and you're serving solopreneurs. What has worked best for you? And what have you tested that hasn't worked so well as you've approached building an engaged email list of solopreneurs?

Pam Neely: Sure. One thing that has worked really well we've already talked about is to have different kinds of lead magnets based on the content on your site. Another thing that's really basic and a lot of people just don't do is to announce any new

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email newsletters they're publishing on LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter and include a little tagline to say sign up here. And it's a good idea to make that specific so you're not saying I'm about to publish a new newsletter. You want to say something like new report on how to reduce accounting costs by 30%, or something like that, in the next issue of my newsletter. Sign up here. That can get some traction, especially as you start to build your audience.

One thing that I have seen not work so well or can be kind of a rude awakening for people is when they buy traffic and send it to what's called a landing page that has an opt-in form on it. Google AdWords, as I'm sure you know, is expensive and often it will take a couple hundred dollars, occasionally even a couple thousand dollars to get those squeeze pages to be profitable. Many of the solo entrepreneurs and small businesses I work with, they need to be fully aware of that investment upfront to give it time before it gets to profitability because if they aren't expecting that that's just a cost that they need to avoid if they can.

Stephen Lahey:

That makes perfect sense to me. In fact, I'd love to get your input on this. The way I've been viewing my email list is not so much about just surfacing a leads. I'm not assuming that at all. The email that they get from me after opting in takes them to a page where they can download the goodie that probably prompted them to opt-in. The opt-in incentive, if you will. You talked about that. You can have different kinds. But then they're going to get an email which says hey, if you didn't download it yet, here it is.

And then they'll start to get other emails from me. Some of it is going to be podcast content. Some of it's going to be very much directed at that particular audience. But none of it is me assuming that they're going to then pick up the phone and call me right away. I do give them opportunities, but I'm looking at it more as a lead cultivation process. I couldn't imagine paying lots of money for a Google AdWords campaign just to get email subscribers because to me they're not leads yet. They may raise their hands later to become leads, but they aren't leads yet. Am I viewing my email list correctly as a lead cultivation process or do you think that subscribers should be seen as leads?

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Pam Neely:

I would go with lead cultivation because otherwise you're going to push them too hard and they may leave or just disengage. Really what you're doing with your email list is fundamentally you're building an audience. And so for solo pros, it's really important to have that audience because that way it reduces how much footwork you have to do to find new work dramatically.

There is a certain amount of work that has to be done to maintain that audience and keep providing them content. But basically what you're doing through all that work is you're nurturing leads all along.

It's quite learnable and doable to get good enough at that where all your work comes to you instead of you having to constantly beat the bushes and network and do the whole thing to find new work. And so that's really the angle of having an email list, is having enough of a platform or an audience, depending on which word you want to use, so that work comes to you so you don't have to constantly be looking for work.

Stephen Lahey:

I think that it's a lot like farming. It happens over a period of time and there really aren't any guarantees. And the way I look at it is that I'm doing a lot of different things in terms of developing new business, but I'm doing it with a slow grow, long-term mentality because, at least in my business, it's really about trust.

On the other hand, if I was selling something online which really doesn't involve any kind of working relationship or a lot of trust with a person, then sure I might view every email subscriber who signs up as a lead. It's kind of like the vacuum cleaner salesman that knocks on your door. You know you're not going to have any kind of relationship with him or her. And, from their perspective, that's why they're asking all kinds of closed-ended questions and demonstrating, and trial closing, etc.

But when you're consulting, when it's a longer term working relationship, everything has to sort of fit that tone, I think. And if you're going to sell something, sell the idea of giving them something of value right now at a low cost or no cost at

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least to get them to raise their hand and say, yes, I think that would be of value to me and, yes, I'm giving you permission to stay in front of me. And that's about as far as I go with it initially.

I do have offers I email to my list and some will respond and I get clients that way, but I try to minimize that. A lot of what I'm doing goes back to my background in sales where I'm connected with people via email but I'm also connected with them on LinkedIn, I'm talking with them, I'm doing things that are very low pressure. It's waiting until the time is right; and when you see them talking about something on social media or they want to open up a conversation by responding to my email, then they will. Is that kind of patience usually necessary?

Pam Neely:

Well, there's some work there because you're not selling a product. You're not selling a \$49 product. Buy this. You're selling your expertise and your services. But I would hope, frankly, that you would get good returns from your work to build your email list within a couple of months.

One other thing that you could really use your email list for is kind approaching it from the mindset of client education and using your email list and your emails and all the content you create to basically answer people's most basic questions. To kind of pre-sell them, if you will, on why your services are the right choice for them and why the techniques that you use are the best way to go. And so not only can email and the entire content marketing strategy get you more leads, but it can also get you more developed leads and people who are really kind of pre-sold and see their business kind of through your helps. That helps them become much easier to work with and hopefully longer term and higher value clients as well.

Stephen Lahey:

I'm loving everything you're saying here because it's completely in line with what I'm thinking. I think when you're dealing with a starting a relationship with someone and it's not going to be inexpensive, either, part of it is timing that you're dealing with and are they ready now.

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But also just from the standpoint of building scale with your email list. One of the people I respect whom I interviewed on the podcast earlier this year, he wrote a book called *The Small Business Lifecycle*, and his name is Charlie Gilkey. He and I were talking about list building and email marketing and he said, yeah, about 90% of your email list is going to be pretty passive, and you get maybe 7 or 8% of your subscribers who are going to want to engage with you in some way. You may also interact with them on social media. And then the remainder become clients because all the stars have aligned. Now that is not really from an email marketing experts' perspective, although that's part of the approach that Charlie uses and that I use. Does that resonate with you, Pam, or are you thinking, no, that's a pretty cynical perspective?

Pam Neely:

No, actually I would say that's probably a realistic approach. Maybe 5% of your email list actually nets into a paying client. But the other super thing is that you've got all those people that you're helping, even though they never become clients, they may still mention you to someone who becomes another client. It's still worthwhile.

We may be talking around one of the most common questions ever about email marketing, which is how big of a list do I need? Because that really kind of structures how much list building you have to do. And for solopreneurs to get even 1000 people on their email list is kind of the sweet spot. That's when it really starts being worthwhile. That's a lot of people, but there are things you can do like guest post on blogs, and speaking is a fantastic way to get email subscribers. And there are apps that you can run on your iPad that put the opt-in form right on your iPad so you don't have to revert to the printed out pages when you give talks. But the people should be aiming for anywhere from 300 to about 1000 subscribers. That's generally where lift-off happens for email lists.

Stephen Lahey:

That makes perfect sense to me. I'm fascinated by this topic and you've been a really interesting guest, but I also know we're coming up on half an hour so we have to wrap up. And I know a lot of listeners will want to connect with you online,

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they may want to buy your book, get some coaching, and so on. What's the best way to do all that, Pam?

Pam Neely: To buy [the book](#) head over to Amazon. To reach out to me go to my website, which is [PamNeely.com](#). They can sign up for my email list there and get my free report about 115 ideas on how to create different kinds of content.

And of course they can sign up for the list building coaching. That gets them right out of the gate a 30-day completely customized plan for how to build their list with their resources, their time, and the budget that works for them for their niche. I sit down and take a really close look at people's website and their social media accounts and ask them about a dozen questions about who is your ideal client and then I create a 30-day plan of about an hour to two hours a day and give them explicit instructions on what they should do. And then also there's at least 40 video tutorials, and I'm constantly adding new video tutorials, that show them specifically on the screen click-by-click how to do the different things that I suggest for them. And so that's just for a start for the list building coaching.

Stephen Lahey: That's phenomenal. And your website again is [PamNeely.com](#).

Pam Neely: You've got it.

Stephen Lahey: Absolutely. I encourage people to go there, opt-in, and download your free report 115 Ideas for emails, blog posts, videos, slideshows, etc. It's very interesting.

Thank you again for joining me on the podcast, Pam. I really appreciate it.

Pam Neely: My pleasure. Thank you for asking 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

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