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This is an edited transcript of the January 22, 2013 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview featuring Susan Gunelius: [‘Author / Entrepreneur Interview: Writing Effective Marketing Copy’](#).

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. Our guest today has over 20 years of marketing, branding, and copywriting experience. Over the course of her career, she's spent more than 10 years directing the marketing programs of some of the largest companies in the world, including divisions of AT&T and HSBC bank. Today, she's the president and CEO of Keysplash Creative, a marketing communications company, and she's also the author of 10 business books including “Kickass Copywriting in 10 Easy Steps,” “30-Minute Social Media Marketing,” and “Content Marketing for Dummies.”

In addition, our guest writes about marketing, branding, and copywriting for Entrepreneur.com and Forbes.com and her marketing content can be seen on a variety of business websites including MSNBC.com, Businessweek.com, and many more.

She's a member of the Network Solutions Social Media Advisory Board and owns one of the leading business blogs for women, WomenOnBusiness.com. Lastly, she speaks about marketing, branding, social media, and copywriting at events around the world and she's frequently interviewed by television, radio, online, and print media organizations about marketing topics.

Today, I'm excited to welcome Susan Gunelius to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast. Glad you could make it, Susan.

Susan Gunelius: Thanks so much for having me, Stephen!

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Stephen Lahey: Well, you're so accomplished that the introduction left me a little bit winded. Maybe I just need to get in better shape or maybe you need to accomplish less, I'm not sure which.

Susan Gunelius: [laughs] Well, hopefully I'll accomplish more and it'll get even longer.

Stephen Lahey: I think you will. That's my prediction. Well, anyway, you have accomplished so much over the course of your career. Can you tell us, though, a little bit about how your career path led you to start your own business? What prompted you to take the plunge?

Susan Gunelius: Sure. Well, I had a somewhat unique catalyst to going off on my own, but I spent the first decade of my career in corporate America. In 2004, I got pregnant with triplets and gave birth to three babies and going back to work in the corporate world just wasn't something I wanted to do. About a year after I had my kids, I made the decision to leave the crazy rat race of the New York City area and my husband and I moved our family down to Florida. About a year after that, I got an itch to start doing something and I ended up writing a book about copywriting.

To make a really long story short, it just sort of domino-effected into my own business and 10 books within about 10 years and one thing after another. It was just kind of a domino effect. It's really all because I spent time researching and planning and spending time on the social web and learning how to build my business from home since I couldn't travel with three babies.

Stephen Lahey: That's challenging, especially when you're trying to run your own business, so, to me, that's impressive.

Susan Gunelius: It's chaotic, that's true.

Stephen Lahey: Yes. Perhaps it's a controlled chaos which is somewhat similar to business only with younger employees.

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Susan Gunelius: [laughs] Absolutely.

Stephen Lahey: In any case, I know we're going to talk about copywriting and you just mentioned your first book was on copywriting. More specifically, we're going to talk about writing effective web content. Can you tell us how your approach to copywriting for your own website played out? Your website, by the way, I'll mention right now again is KeysplashCreative.com. Very nice site. How did you approach that? How did all of that play out and evolve? Also, just in general, what results have you seen from the web copywriting that you've done for your own business and the lessons you've learned? Three questions in one, I guess.

Susan Gunelius: I just try to, on my own website, stay really focused, really simple. It kind of coincides with my approach to marketing, copywriting, and messaging, which is honest, transparent, and very simple. I don't like heavy sales letters. I don't like any kind of in-your-face marketing. It's all a lot more transparent.

I think that just by nature with how the web, communications, and the ability that people have today to research and get more information about anything and everything in a split second, consumers demand more honest and transparent communication, so that's certainly what I do on my website. It's very simple. This is what I can deliver and hopefully you'll like it. If you're looking for someone who does real hard, aggressive sales letters, then that's definitely not me and that's fine.

I think that what I do with my clients is listen to their goals and then try to create messaging that will help them reach those goals by communicating effectively with their customers. That's one of the things I don't think you necessarily get with any copywriter because I don't think they necessarily listen to your long-term goals. It's very short-term tactical and I think that's a mistake. Hopefully, that's something I bring to my clients.

Stephen Lahey: Well, it occurs to me, as you say all that, that in selling and marketing professional services... Professional services, by their nature, if you're

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talking about consulting or business coaching, involve a relationship. To me, if you're going to start a relationship, it's best not to start it with hype, overpromising, and so on. Although that may work for selling vacuum cleaners, I don't know, but I don't think it works very well for selling professional services.

Susan Gunelius: I agree. In the long term, it won't. That's one of the things I focus on is long-term, strategic, organic growth. My specialty is absolutely business-to-business copywriting. I can do it all, but business-to-business is my absolute niche and specialty because I have so much experience in that area. You're absolutely right. It's the relationship building that's so critical and it needs to carry over into a powerful, integrated marketing strategy. Messaging is important in every aspect of that integrated marketing strategy, so it's something that needs to be prioritized and, too often, it's not.

Stephen Lahey: When you think about someone, let's say they're a consultant of some kind. Almost anybody who sells true consulting services, whether it's IT consulting or management consulting, inevitably most of these people have a very boring website. It really doesn't sell much of anything. I think there's a fine line between saying, "This is who we are," and, "This is what we can do for you," and exaggerating. I think you have to be very careful. It's a very subtle conversational tone that you have to set, but, at the same time, you do have to sell so they can see what benefits you can bring. What lessons have you learned about, should we say, the art of subtlety and selling the first stage of a relationship?

Susan Gunelius: You need to understand your brand promise. What is it that you bring to the table? Then you also need to understand your customers. What do they need? What do they want? Your competitors, what are they already delivering? Then find your niche, find the gap, and differentiate yourself in that way.

At the same time, you also have to realize that it's not about you. No one cares what you want or what you can do, frankly. It's what's in it for me. In

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copywriting and marketing, we use the acronym WIIFM: what's in it for me? That's absolutely, 100% the most important thing.

Far too often in small business messaging and websites, you'll see huge sections devoted to "I'm in the Chamber of Commerce." Honestly, no one cares. They want to know, "What are you going to do for me?" It's hard for business owners to get out of their own way, basically, and realize that what you think might not matter at all. The only thing that matters is what the consumer thinks. Making that leap is challenging and that's where an external copywriter or brand manager can be useful because they can help you get out of your own way and see that, "I know you feel really great about the fact that you've been in the Chamber of Commerce for 20 years but that's not what's going to bring you business." I think the things people need to understand is what matters to your customer is what's most important.

Stephen Lahey: It may not matter what I say, what matters is what's in it for them. I totally buy into that. What role do testimonials play, or what role do you think they should play, on a professional services website?

Susan Gunelius: I think that testimonials on a professional services website are fantastic but they need to be trustworthy and quantifiable. Basically, if you just put up a testimonial with a person's name and no last name or the person's name and no company name, it's useless because anyone could write one of those. Anyone can make them up and people do, unfortunately, far too often. You need to be able to prove it.

That's sort of where social media can come into play as that social proof that you need. Even if you're not active in social media, which you should be, you should at least include the person's name, company name, and a link back to their website to prove that, yes, this is a real testimonial. I'm not just making it up.

Back to social media again, this is where things like LinkedIn, which is so important to business-to-business marketing, are important for people to

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gather recommendations and social proof through LinkedIn activities. Really any social media activities are so critical these days.

Stephen Lahey: How would you say professional service providers should assess what social media venues they should put their time into? It would be tempting for some people to say, "I'm going to be on Facebook. I'm going to be on Twitter. I'm going to be on Quora. I'm going to be on LinkedIn." Of course, what happens then is you're spread a mile wide and an inch deep.

Susan Gunelius: Well, it's funny because that's actually the exact reason why I wrote my book "30-Minute Social Media Marketing," to show people that even if you only have 30 minutes a day, 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes midday, 10 minutes at the end of the day, to spend on social media, you can make a difference, positive growth in your business.

The reason is you can't be everything if you're small business owner. You can't be everywhere at the same time. You'll listen to social media marketing so-called experts and they say they need to be everywhere. It's impossible. It's not realistic. You can't be.

What do you do? Well, you have to spend some time and go out and find where your target customers are spending time online already and start listening to what they're talking about. I offer tons of tools in my book, but a couple places you can go to are WeFollow.com, where you can look for people by keyword. You can track hashtags related to your business using Hashtags.org. You can use a tool Monitter.com and track keywords related to your business. Find out where people are spending time, listen to their conversations, start to join the conversations so they see who you are, see your name, and get to know what you bring the table.

Then you can slowly start bringing them to your own branded online destinations. I always recommend a blog for your core branded online destination because it's so search engine friendly and Google loves them if they're updated frequently. You can drive a lot of traffic to your website. Where do people go these days if they're looking for a company? It's not

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the Yellow Pages. They go to Google, so you need to be there. If you're not, you'd better believe your competitors are.

You choose to focus on the tool to start with. Choose to focus on the tool that you actually enjoy or else it's going to be torture to use it every day. It should be a tool where your customers are already spending time. Then you should slowly work to integrate other tools as your business grows, as you can afford to hire people to help you, as you can afford to pay for tools that will help you streamline activities.

As your resources scale up with your business, you can pursue different social media activity. You can't be all things at first. It's ridiculous to even think that you possibly could be. If someone tells you that you need to be on every single social media site, don't listen to them because it's impossible.

Stephen Lahey:

I couldn't agree more. When you're talking about this, it occurred to me that some people are probably saying, "Well, I have a presence on LinkedIn, I have a presence on Twitter, and so on. Not much is happening. My blog, well, I haven't been all that active. I haven't necessarily seen a return on my investment." What occurs to me is to be mindful, listen to your clients, and *ask them* where they are online. It's a question of the Woody Allen principle. Eighty percent of success is showing up, to paraphrase Woody.

Susan, what would you do if you were them? A busy small business person who just felt so time starved and was confused about where they should put their efforts?

Susan Gunelius:

It actually depends very much on what tool you would enjoy. I always say start an account and it can be an account that's not even for you. Start a Twitter account, keep it private, and play around with the tool for a bit. Start a free blog on WordPress.com and play around with it a bit and see what tool you can actually see yourself doing for 10, 20, 30 minutes each day. Break it up into five-minute intervals throughout the day.

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Find the tool and say, “I’m going to sit down and use this right now. I’m going to pull out my phone and tweet something right now.” If you hate it, you won’t do it. Don’t set yourself up for failure. Play around with them and see which one you enjoy. You might find that you’ll grow to love it and might not be able to stop using it. That’s what usually ends up happening because people like to communicate with each other, so it can become fun.

For business-to-business, certainly, you’re going to want to try to focus on LinkedIn, of course, assuming your customers are there. Do your due diligence first. Figure out where they’re spending time. Twitter is another really great one.

Again, blogs are so great because they create entry points to your website. Where, again, do people look for your business? They go to Google. You need those entry points. You need the backlinks. I call it the compounding effect of blogging because imagine you have a website with 10 pages. That’s 10 ways for Google to find your site. Imagine you write one blog post a day for a year. Now you have 365 plus 10 ways for Google to find you.

Imagine you write, what I call, share-worthy content, content that’s so good people want to share it with their own audience and they want to talk about it. Imagine that you spend time and really try to write some great, share-worthy content on a blog, you spend time socializing on LinkedIn, Twitter, what have you, and you’re slowly building a bit of an audience. It doesn’t happen overnight. If you want this to be long-term, organic, sustainable growth, which most business owners want, it’s not about quantity of followers, it’s about quality. It’s better to have 1,000 followers who like what you say and are going to share your content with their own audience than 10,000 followers who hit the Follow button and you never hear from them again.

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If you spend time creating this share-worthy content, people are going to share it, they're going to blog about it, they're going to tweet it. Suddenly, there are so many more incoming links to your website, more ways for people to find you, either from their own travels across the web or through better search engine results because Google is ranking your site higher now because all these sites are linking to you. You must have good content if all these people are linking to you. At least that's what Google's algorithm thinks.

Together, all these things create this compounding effect where you're going to get more traffic and more, hopefully, targeted traffic to your website over time. It doesn't happen overnight.

Stephen Lahey: It's a holistic approach that you're taking about here. Thinking in terms of, "Should I start with a blog? Should I start with LinkedIn?" isn't nearly as meaningful as thinking about your overall brand promise, who you're really speaking to, where they are, and how you can speak to them very directly. Better to speak to them in a way that says, "I want to be everything to you," than, "I want to be everything to everybody." It's very specific. It's targeted.

Susan Gunelius: It's focused. It's about finding focus.

Stephen Lahey: Exactly. That's one of those things I love about your website. It is very focused. It's matter of fact, but it's also very persuasive. You're walking your walk in terms of the philosophy you've just described. Again, transparency. I'm a real person, here's who I am. You want people to understand who you are because you're not for everybody, but the more you differentiate yourself by being who you are and by being having this style you have versus what you think might appeal to people, the more the right people are going to want to work with you.

I think that sounds like that's the overriding theme to whatever you're doing on your blog, on LinkedIn, on Twitter, or what have you. Even though those tools obviously have different ways of being used, the theme

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is focus on who you are, who they are, and how you come together -- where those two circles meet, if you will.

Susan Gunelius: Exactly. It's all about that social proof. These days, we don't have to spend thousands and thousands of dollars to go to all of these different networking events. Of course, the events are great, they're fantastic, there's nothing like face-to-face networking, but let's face it, small business owners don't have that kind of budget. We've never lived in a better time for small business owners to have a more level playing field because we can get in on the conversations and get in front of our target customers online. Being able to communicate with them effectively is that little piece of the puzzle that people need to learn.

That's where copywriting can be helpful. Of course you're not going to want to have a copywriter writing your conversations because they should be authentic, real, and from you, but certainly writing your web copy, even writing your blog posts. I write blog posts for so many clients because they aren't great writers or they want someone who can understand the brand and translate brand messages and brand promises in a way that it doesn't sound like you're selling the company. You're instead sharing information about your industry, about trends, but also indirectly spreading the brand promise. That's where copywriters who know what they're doing can be very useful.

Stephen Lahey: When you think in terms of some of the folks you've worked with most recently in the business-to-business space, and particularly I'm thinking of professional services companies versus companies that market tangible products, I would have to say that standing out from the competition in a real, believable way is probably one of their most important challenges, at least with the copywriting that they're doing.

Susan Gunelius: I think that is definitely a big challenge because I think that it goes back to what we were talking about before, the focus. It's scary to pick your focus and stick with it because there's always that fear you're losing other business.

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A lot of my clients have trouble not taking a stand, basically, and saying, “This is who we are. This is who we're going to be. This is what we're going to sell as our brand promise.” Instead, the message has become more watered down because they're afraid to take that stand and they're still trying to be all things to all people.

Trying to convince them to take that stand is always an ongoing battle with clients. It's scary and I can't blame them. All you can do is try to advise them the best that you can. If they don't want to take a stand and they do want to continue to have that less focused messaging, then you just have to try to pick out the most action-oriented, most what's-in-it-for-me messaging that you can and lead with it and make sure that those messages are at the top of the page.

Stephen Lahey: Just thinking in terms of all these different outlets for social media exposure, I am still kind of hung up on the idea that it really helps to own your list. For example, my Facebook followers are there but I don't own Facebook, so they're on Facebook's turf. It's the same thing with LinkedIn. I do think that email is still very important. How do you convince a client to utilize email capture when probably many of them are thinking that sounds intrusive, is it really necessary, or is email dead? How do you convince them of the importance of that?

Susan Gunelius: That's absolutely true. Everyone has this perception that email is too intrusive. I get way too much email every day. The thing is, as long as you follow the law, have people opt-in to your email list, send them useful, valuable information, and give them an easy way to, and again, this is the law, opt-out in the future if they want to unsubscribe from your list, as long as they feel that they're in control of what they're getting from you, then you're going to be okay and as long as you're giving them useful, valuable information.

It's when you're just sending junk that's not useful to them that it's going to be a problem. Less is more. Again, find your focus and make sure you

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send them things that are truly useful or else you are going to get lost in the clutter. Finding those ways to stand out, even through headline writing, the email subject line writing, is a big part of it to convince people to click through and open the email. “What's in it for me? There's something in here that I want.” Learning how to write headlines is a big deal, too.

Stephen Lahey: In my experience, ask your clients, “What would make it worth your time to read about? What would be valuable for you to read out?” They'll give you some ideas. You don't necessarily have to follow everything that they say to the letter. People don't always know exactly what they want until they see it. By the same token, if you don't ask, they're not going to give you that valuable feedback.

The second thing is a lot of those people you talk to directly as clients would be more than happy to evaluate and give you feedback on your email newsletter. They won't consider it a nuisance if you've been a valuable source of services for them. You'd be surprised.

Susan Gunelius: You're taking the time to track your efforts, too. What's working? What are people clicking on? If they are unsubscribing, make sure you've got a little form, after they hit the unsubscribe button, that asks why are you unsubscribing, so you can find out what information is doing well, what's not, what do I need to fix. You may not be sending the right stuff. If you're not tracking your efforts, then you don't know what's working and what's not.

Stephen Lahey: Exactly. Lastly, if you had any advice to give perhaps a solo business professional, just someone with very few resources, where to start if they don't even have a blog. Are there certain platforms you would recommend? Is there anything you would point them toward in terms of a starting point? It sounds like a blog is so central to everything. It's sort of the hub of your messaging.

Susan Gunelius: Sure. Well, it's because you control it and it's connected to your website and it's so search friendly. Using a blog as your core branded online

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destination, all roads, everywhere that you hang out online should lead back to that core branded online destination.

One of the things I recommend in “30-Minute Social Media Marketing” is to go to WordPress.com, create just a little pretend fake blog for yourself, keep it private, just play around with the tools, get to see how it works, and then start your own blog related to your company using WordPress.org. It's very easy.

There are freelancers all over the place who can help you set up a new blog. I'd be happy to send you links to different freelancers that I know or places you can find freelancers who do WordPress design if you need some help, but it's very easy. Trust me. If I can do it, anyone can do it. Then start your own blog.

Then, at the same time, get on Twitter, LinkedIn. LinkedIn, in particular, you can join up to 50 groups with a free LinkedIn account. LinkedIn groups are critical to expanding your connections because you can connect with anyone that is in a LinkedIn group that you're in. While LinkedIn is a bit more closed and you're supposed to actually know someone to be able to connect with them, although you don't have to and there are ways around that, you're supposed to, but not if you're in a group with them. If you're in a group with someone, you can connect with them. You can send them messages. You can talk to them.

This is the way to expand your network in LinkedIn and find your customers and start communicating with them. It's very valuable. At least, if you are a B2B service provider, you should be looking for LinkedIn groups and joining the conversations.

Stephen Lahey:

I couldn't agree with you more about both WordPress as a platform. WordPress software is very easy to use and I'm not a techie, believe me. I don't know HTML. There are various things that you get with WordPress, because it's such a popular platform, many different widgets and apps and so on that you can use to make your blog function better -- and that's

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wonderful. And, absolutely, LinkedIn is a miracle for business-to-business selling. It's a phenomenal tool and if you're not using it to its fullest, you just have to.

We've talked about a lot. I know we're coming up on a hard stop here. Our time is almost up. Is there anything else you'd like to offer? I know you mentioned to people that they might reach out to you if they would like to ask a little bit about resources and so on. Perhaps people would like to interact with you. Can they go to your website, KeysplashCreative.com, and use the contact form? How would you recommend that they get in touch?

Susan Gunelius: Sure. They can find me on KeysplashCreative.com or they can email me at susan@keysplashcreative.com. On Twitter my handle is @susangunelius. You can find me on Facebook, Susan Gunelius. You can find me on LinkedIn, Susan Gunelius. One of the benefits of having a last name that almost nobody else does is I'm easy to find.

Stephen Lahey: That's spelled G-U-N-E-L-I-U-S?

Susan Gunelius: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: I got it right. I've been practicing.

Susan Gunelius: [laughs] It's hard one. It's like Cornelius but with a gun instead of corn. It's easy to remember.

Stephen Lahey: Ha! I like it even better now. Well, I am very excited that you got to spend some time with us today, Susan. I'm impressed by anyone who can write 10 business books. I'm also very impressed by someone who can run a business and raise a family while doing it. You're the total package. I think if anybody wants to look into help with their copywriting, if anybody wants to look into help with their marketing strategy (because you're not just a copywriter, you're a marketing strategist) then they need to contact

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you. That's my unsolicited testimonial. Get in touch with Susan at [KeysplashCreative.com](http://KeysplashCreative.com) if you need help!

Finally, if you've enjoyed this podcast, sign up via email on our homepage and you will get alerted whenever we post fresh podcast content. From time to time, you'll receive exclusive, useful content for email subscribers only.

Thank you again, Susan. I really appreciate the time that you've spent.

Susan Gunelius: Thank you so much. It was great to be here with you today.

Stephen Lahey: Thanks again to our listeners for being with us today. Best wishes for your success!

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