

myweeklymarketing.

Janice Hostager: 0:04

I'm Janice Hostager. After three decades in the marketing business and many years of being an entrepreneur, I've learned a thing or two about marketing. Join me as we talk about marketing, small business, and life in between. Welcome to My Weekly Marketing. Once upon a time, I knew very little about storytelling. I struggled with not being focused on just the facts and didn't really understand that stories are all around us. But then I met Sarah Dickinson. Sarah is a writer who works specifically with writing newsletters and knows the impact a good story can make to pull people in and captivate your audience. In this week's episode, she's going to tell us why weaving compelling narratives that resonate with your audience is so important. Then she's going to fill us in on the steps she uses to integrate storytelling in her newsletters. So grab your favorite beverage, settle in, and listen to my conversation with Sarah. Here we go.

Sarah Dickinson: 1:10

Hey, Sarah, how are you today? I am doing

Janice Hostager: 1:13

Thank you so much for having me, so tell me a little bit about your background and how you got to this point. Yeah, yeah.

Sarah Dickinson: 1:23

So I have been writing pretty much all my life. I had my first story published when I was in elementary school and I went to university for creative writing, so I have been a storyteller my whole life. While I was raising my kids, I worked in the digital marketing space for about 10 years and then, when my kids grew up and graduated high school apparently they don't grow children, and don't want me full-time parented when they become adults so I had to find something else to do with my time, and that's when I started the nerdy quill and focused turned my focus to helping other people tell their stories through their newsletters.

Janice Hostager: 2:25

Very cool, yeah, so is your journey different than you thought it would be?

Sarah Dickinson: 2:31

It's been very, very different. My whole life my only goal was to be a mom, and so it never occurred to me that there would be an end date to that, and so doing the

pivot into being a storyteller was never really on the books for me, and I have found a whole new level of joy in doing it, and it's been really exciting.

Janice Hostager: 3:00

That's really cool. So what about storytelling is so compelling for you?

Sarah Dickinson: 3:06

Well, as humans, we are made up of stories. That's who we are and, going back hundreds and hundreds of years, that's how we gave past knowledge on. Right Was through storytelling and our experiences, and that's who we are. That's what makes us up as people, is our experiences and those are our stories, and so being able to help my clients and help people tell their stories and relay their experiences and their knowledge is just so exciting. I'm a lifelong learner. I love to learn, and being able to help people pass on their knowledge through their stories means I get to learn as well. I get to learn all of their things. So it just excites me and I really enjoy it.

Janice Hostager: 4:12

That's very cool. So how do you use storytelling Now? You write newsletters for clients, right? So how do you use storytelling in that capacity? I mean, is it something that you include in each newsletter? Or tell me about the process that you use to put something like that together.

Sarah Dickinson: 4:30

So storytelling in business is really important because that's how we connect as humans. Now, often people will say you know, you need to know what your story is. And storytelling for your business goes beyond your origin story. There's like my origin story is how I've been writing since I was a kid and I worked in the digital marketing space. That's sort of my origin story. The storytelling in your newsletter goes even beyond that. It's sharing your knowledge and your expertise in a way that your people can relate to it. And so I share stories and I help my clients to share their stories in every newsletter, because even the smallest little bit of knowledge that you want to pass on, you can pass that on using a story. It's kind of like, you know when you watch a movie or you watch a television show or there's always sort of a moral to the story, right? And when you were telling your kids, when you would read a book to your kids, or even fairy tales, you know fairy tales start with once upon a time. Well, your story isn't necessarily in your newsletter going to start once upon a time, but there's going to be a moral to that story, and that moral to that story is your knowledge, that little tidbit of information that you're giving to your audience, and the story that you're telling isn't necessarily it isn't your grand back story. It's about, you know, the walk you

took yesterday, or something that you saw recently, or a thought that you had. For me a lot of times it's a movie that I watched because I write a lot of nerdy things, so it's something that's happened in your life or something that's happened that you've seen, something you've experienced that your audience can relate to, and how your little bit of knowledge can relate to that. So your audience can see themselves in that story and how that little piece of knowledge that you have for them also applies to them.

Janice Hostager: 7:11

Okay, okay, so oftentimes I will. I write a lot of emails, both for myself and for my clients, but starting them out can be a little tricky for me. I never really know. Do I open a story loop right away and then close it at the end, or do I? You know what if I don't have a story? What if I hit a wall and like I have no idea what to say here? You know it's like, do you have a method for like, starting out a story, or do you like to get a story, have a story bank somewhere, or how does it work for you personally?

Sarah Dickinson: 7:49

For me personally, I do have a. I keep a story bank, absolutely. I have a notepad on my phone so if I see something or I hear something that triggers a thought, I jot it down. My husband always makes a joke that I can't do anything without relating it to a newsletter. We'll be watching something or we'll be having a conversation and I'll go oh, just a minute, I just have to make a note. And he'll be like really, Sarah, really You're going to turn that into a newsletter. Because I get all sorts of inspirations about how you know a comment someone makes, or you know something I see on TV or, pardon me, I had a thought once when I was going to get a coffee at a drive-through and noticed how long the lineup was, and then decided to go inside and it had this moment of inspiration, bearing the two lineups from inside and outside, and just jotted it down. So then later when I go to sit down to write my newsletter, if I have a total block, I can just go through my bank of things that I've noted down. So that's one of the story banks that I have. I pull a lot from other people in my life. I like to talk about my husband because he is a never-ending source of ridiculousness in my life. He gets into all sorts of antics. Same with my children. Both my husband and two children are neuro-spicy, so they do all sorts of crazy things, and so I like to talk about the crazy things they do and always try and relate it back to mindset or newsletters, and so, yes, I do keep a story bank. The other thing that I do is I will sometimes start in the middle. I will write down what I want, the piece of information I want to get across, and then I will think about okay, this is the information I want to talk about, how does this relate in the real world, what kind of? Especially like, for instance, when talking about numbers with marketing, there's a lot of numbers

that come up, and numbers can be boring. So I think, how can I relate these numbers in a fun way? And so then I'll try and think of what would be a fun thing to talk about that can relate to numbers, and then we'll start in the middle.

Janice Hostager: 10:55

Okay. If that makes sense, yeah, so you like, instead of starting a story in the beginning or not, you do you kind of start in the middle, and then you write the ending, and then you go back and start and write the beginning part of it again. Is that what you mean by starting in the middle?

Sarah Dickinson: 11:14

Yeah, so, rather than trying to come up with a story and fit the knowledge into it, let's start with the knowledge and try to come up with an idea of where does this relates, what might relate, what kind of a story would relate around this?

Janice Hostager: 11:32

Gotcha.

Sarah Dickinson: 11:33

And sometimes when I'm super blocked, the other thing I do is I subscribe to a lot of newsletters because I'm a newsletter nerd and I have a folder in my email that I call inspiration, and when I get a newsletter that has a really cool subject line, I save it in my inspiration folder. And so when I'm blocked, I'll go through and just read subject lines until one of them sort of clicks with me and it'll be like oh, I could write a newsletter about that, or I could write a story around this, right, and something will click with me.

Janice Hostager: 12:17

I do the same thing. Yeah, yeah, it does help to have, and especially if you're drawn to it as an email you're like, okay, well, other people are probably drawn to this subject line too.

Sarah Dickinson: 12:30

Yeah.

Janice Hostager: 12:30

I didn't mean to interrupt you. Go ahead.

Sarah Dickinson: 12:33

Oh no, I no, that's. I was pretty much finished. I was just going to say that. You know, it's not that I steal. I don't steal other people's subject lines, right? But I just

I find inspiration because if I've enjoyed it, then chances are my people are going to enjoy it, right?

Janice Hostager: 12:51

Right, that's a really good way. Have you used chat GPT for some of that as well?

Sarah Dickinson: 12:57

Chat GPT. Yeah, I love Chat GPT for helping me come up with subject lines. Yes, I also love Chat GPT for helping me come up with topics.

Janice Hostager: 13:08

Mm-hmm.

Sarah Dickinson: 13:09

So chat GPT doesn't write any of my content for me because I believe in the human element as opposed to the AI element and the actual content creation. But I love typing in. Give me 30 topics, please give me 30 topics to write about around lead magnets. And then I just get 30 topics and then I'm like okay, I'm going to write about that one.

Janice Hostager: 13:38

Yes, yeah, that's how I've been using it too, and I don't, I don't. I think after a while you can kind of spot things that are written by an AI. Yes, they have a kind of a different pattern to them or just maybe a different type of wording than most of us use on a daily basis or something like that. But yes, I think it's a great way to generate, and I love that you say please when you're talking to it because I do that too. At first, I thought, why am I doing this? This is not even a person, but it's just I do.

Sarah Dickinson: 14:09

I'm very polite to my AI.

Janice Hostager: 14:14

So what is yours? You know you're writing a newsletter for a client. What is your first step? And generate them. Do they give you a topic and then you kind of roll with it, or do you interview them? Or how do you do it when you're working with a client?

Sarah Dickinson: 14:30

So there are a variety of ways that I work with clients. The first thing that we always do is we create a content plan for the month, so we will decide on each

topic we're going to talk about for each week of the month and then from there it just depends on how the client works best. So some clients work best by talking to me and because I don't have the information, they have the information up in their beautiful brains. So sometimes they are more verbal and so what they'll do is they will talk to me for a couple of minutes. You know one to two minutes about that topic and I'll record it and turn that into a newsletter. Sometimes they will send me a voice clip that they have just recorded on their phone while they're out for a walk or they're, you know, doing the laundry or whatever they're doing. They'll send me a quick voice clip about the topic. And then I have a few clients who enjoy writing, but we call it more of a brain dump. They like to brain dump and then send that to me and then I reformat it and grammar and everything and turn that into their newsletter. Okay, yeah, so it just depends on how the client works. Yeah.

Janice Hostager: 16:06

Okay. So when you say newsletter, are you talking about just individual emails or do you work with actual newsletters? And the reason I'm asking is because and I've gone back and forth with my own businesses sometimes I will include where I used to create an actual newsletter for my clients and send it out weekly and it would have multiple calls to action in it, but lately I've been just doing a single like one call to action. There's well, the podcast for the week, basically, and here's the link to it and that's it. But I've noticed that a lot of people now are getting back into newsletters that have multiple calls to action, have a lot of content, information in it and people are, you know, even getting subscribers that pay for content like that. So I'm curious how you do it, just as it depends on the client, or how you typically do it. What do you recommend?

Sarah Dickinson: 17:06

So working with me is what I do. I am in relationship marketing, so my goal is to build relationships with your audience because it is your friends that buy from you. When you have, like, an Avon party or a Tupperware party, the people that are going to come and buy from you. Number one is going to be your friends and your family. Right, you might have, you know, sort of the acquaintance that comes and they may or may not buy, just kind of depends if there's something that they want really badly, right, but the people that are guaranteed to support you are your closest friends and your family. And my goal with your newsletter is to turn your subscribers into that BFF, into that close friend and family, so that when you come into a launch period or a sales period they are already warmed up, prepped, and ready to hit that buy button. So the goal with my newsletters is to build those relationships. So it is generally a weekly and sometimes a bi-weekly newsletter. I very much recommend not doing it less than every other

week because if you do it less than every other week then they forget about you, they don't know who you are Right?

Janice Hostager: 18:36

Yes, yes, I agree with that.

Sarah Dickinson: 18:39

Yeah, and only one call to generally, only one call to action in the newsletter and these are relationship-building newsletters, so they're not salesy. Absolutely, you are going to tell them about your offers or your services, because that's what we're here for, but it's not a hard sell. I like to describe the differences between them. There's a difference between an email and a newsletter. Your newsletter is about building those relationships and providing value and your social proof and that kind of thing where there's an email there to sell. So you use your emails during launch periods when you're promoting things, and you're going to be sending during those selling periods. You're going to be sending those emails every day for a week or every day for two weeks. You're going to be sending a lot of them and those are the ones saying, hey, I have this thing, you need to buy it. Your newsletter is going out once a week. Lots of value. It's going to have some stories and entertainment. People are going to be looking forward to getting that newsletter and to read it every single week. And, yes, it's going to have calls to action, but not six or seven, it's going to have one that relates to what you're talking about in the newsletter. Yeah, so building relationships.

Janice Hostager: 20:16

I love that. That's really interesting. Yeah, for sure. I think it really helps it, and I can tell that you have a marketing background as well, because that really is exactly what you need to do is warm that audience up. so that when you are in your launch periods, that you can relate to them in a way that they already know they can trust you. Yes, so do you work when your clients are first starting out with you? Do you have them do content maps and or content pillars, or do you mostly just get a feel for what they're looking for? Or how is it that you start out with them initially?

Sarah Dickinson: 21:02

Initially. So we will have a, we'll meet and we'll have a conversation and talk about what their goals are for their newsletter, what their goals are for their business and where they want to go, what kind of things they want to promote, because definitely in their newsletter they're still going to be promoting it's just not that hard to sell. So we need to talk about what they want to promote and how they want to be promoting it. And then I also do quite a deep dive into all the content

that they've ever created, such as social media, what they've been on, podcasts if they have their own podcasts and their blogs, anything. So I can really get a feel for their voice and who they are, so that when we're meeting and when I'm writing for them, I already have them sort of in my mind. There's also a fairly in-depth onboarding questionnaire that I get them to fill out so that I can really get to know who they are and their business and where they want to go, so that we can plan out their content.

Janice Hostager: 22:20

That's really cool. So you have a free download of the Nerdy Girls Guide to Content Planning, right? Is that the name of it? Yeah, I just downloaded it today, so it looked really interesting. And you do walk people through content pillars a little bit in that and just to kind of get your head straight about what it is you're going to talk about and why you should be focusing on just a few things rather than trying to talk about everything. And I know, in marketing I mean, there's a million things that we could talk about, and so I definitely use a content pillars process to plan out my own marketing. So where can people find out more about that and more about you?

Sarah Dickinson: 23:06

So my website is thenerdyquill.ca, because I'm in Canada, so it's .ca. You can also find me at [thenerdyquill](https://www.facebook.com/thenerdyquill) on Facebook and Instagram, but just a little warning that I don't do Instagram very well. I forget it's there because I'm a newsletter specialist. I don't social media very well, but I'm definitely on Facebook at [thenerdyquill](https://www.facebook.com/thenerdyquill), yeah, and so that's where you can find me, and I love to chat newsletters and nerdy things, anything pop culture and nerdiness I am into. So, yeah, that's where people can find me and my downloads are. The download is on there and I really hope that it's helpful for people. It's the same. It's the same document that I use to help me stay, help me put together my content so that I don't end up with writer's block because writer's block hits everybody and yeah, sounds great.

Janice Hostager: 24:17

Well, thank you, Sarah. I really appreciate you being on today and I will put the links to all your social media platforms and your download in the show notes for today. So, yeah, thanks so much. Thank you so much for having me, Janice. So are you ready to start using stories in your emails and newsletters? Honestly, I stopped recording our conversation too soon After the interview was over. I asked her about something I struggle with, which I wish I would have asked her during the interview how to actually create a story bank. I don't naturally think in terms of stories. For some reason, I'm kind of a structured system type of girl, so

when I sit down to write, I struggle to think of anything I can use for a story. This is why the idea of a story bank was so intriguing to me. What she told me is that whenever she does any everyday errands and tasks, for example, being in line at the bank, she's thinking about marketing. So she thinks about how marketing is like standing in line and she jots down the idea. Or when she watches a movie, she'll make a note of a relevant quote. Basically, she always has her story radar on and scans her world for potential relevant stories wherever she goes and that's how she fills her story bank. That's something I'm going to try to do. So does this give you some ideas for your own newsletters and emails? To get Sarah's free Nerdy Girls Guide to Content Planning, visit my show notes page at myweeklymarketing.com. Forward slash 37. Thanks so much for joining me today. As always, I'm cheering you on, friend. See you next time. Bye for now.