

myweeklymarketing.

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.

Janice Hostager: 0:32

If you have an online business, you probably are familiar with the importance of a really good sales page. It might be for an online course, a coaching program or any big ticket item that you sell on a website. You likely also know that it takes a great deal of focus and planning to create a sales page that's effective. It needs to be aimed precisely at the transformation your ideal customer is looking for. If you've ever put one together, you know that's not an easy order.

Janice Hostager: 0:56

I have to confess that I'm a bit of a sales page geek. I love creating them because they unite research, psychology, writing and design all together in a way that should optimize the page and sell your product. That's why I wanted to talk to Linda Cathcart. Linda is a sales page copywriter and in this episode she's going to share her process for how she writes fantastic sales pages for clients, and she'll answer a lot of questions about what makes them powerful. So here's my conversation with Linda.

Janice Hostager: 1:30

Well, hey, Linda, welcome to the podcast. So you are a sales page copywriter. Yes, what is specifically? What is a sales page copywriter and how did you get to this point?

Linda Cathcart: 1:43

I have an undergraduate degree from many years ago in English Lit and it was something I could do. I could write, and when I went back to work after my children had grown I ended up in copywriting. I like sales pages the most because it sort of had a. It was very defined. You know you had one point throughout the whole to hit this one point and then it was looking at. It's like what is it? There's a poem like 20 ways of looking at a blackbird or something. It's sort of the same idea, where you have to look at things in all these different views to then come back to explain why a particular product or service is useful to someone.

Janice Hostager: 2:32

That is really true. I mean you have to look at the psychology behind it, you have to look at it visually, you have to look at it from different buyer types, you know, from people

that are maybe looking for value versus looking for something that's done quickly. I mean, you're absolutely right, there's so much complexity. So what makes them? Is that really what makes them so challenging to put together for people?

Linda Cathcart: 3:01

I like that. Like I said, I like that it has constraints because somehow when I work within those constraints, my writing is so much better than if I had all the options available to me. I think I started out doing websites and it was just, you know, too much going on at the same time and getting to very specific constraints that I needed to stay within to get a point across in the most elegant and simple and accessible way. That was kind of exciting. I have to get off on taking words out. I like to edit, so if I can get something down to its essential pieces, I feel very good.

Janice Hostager: 3:50

Oh, I love that. Yeah, when I used to have a design agency, if I would do like any kind of design I know what you mean Like the more constraints that I had on it, like it could only be, you know, three colors or two colors or whatever, and it had to be like this and this and this. It was so much more of a challenge than if you have all the options in the world available to you and then it becomes just overwhelming.

Janice Hostager: 4:15

So but, I love the fact that you edit, because I used to have this phrase. I was such a nerdy teenager on my bulletin board when I was in high school and it was like I think it was "Words are like sunbeams the more they're condensed, the deeper they burn." That's good. Yeah, I didn't come up with it, but it was like, oh, I love that, that was so good. I didn't come up with it, but it was like oh, I love that, that was so good. But yeah, I mean, I think it's really easy to be wordy. And then do you recommend going back? How do you do the writing process? Do you lay everything out and do a messy first draft, or do you work?

Linda Cathcart: 5:01

paragraph by paragraph. I am a believer. They call it the shitty first draft. I think that Anne Lamott has a wonderful book about writing and she goes write it, write the really bad one, and you get that out of your system. You get the stuff down on paper. Then you aren't sort of clinging to things all the time, hoping oh I got to remember this then and this there.

But I do have a process that I follow. That is, it's like scaffolding basically, and I follow the process, so it helps me make sure that I don't leave any parts out. And then, as I go

through the process, I start putting pieces together and figuring out what fits together, what doesn't fit together, not saying the same thing twice. I don't like to read long things and I don't like to write just to be writing. I think that turns people off. I've read sales pages that have gone on forever and they just say the same thing over and over, like they're fulfilling the quota of X number of words. You know, if it's not getting you anywhere, you don't need it. You should take it out.

Janice Hostager: 6:21

Yeah, yeah, and that is true. I mean, I think sales pages, our modern day sales pages, came as an extension of the old sales letter back when advertising sent out letters to people in the mail. And they were very light. I do remember some of those when I was a kid, just looking at these love letters thinking who reads all of these. And I know that there are some people out there who actually do. But you write online. We just don't read online. We skim, for sure.

Linda Cathcart: 6:54

There's so much information. I mean, I still get excited about the fact that if there's a word I don't know, I can click on it and I don't have to look it up the whole thing. I really think that's totally amazing for me. But there is. There's just so much information that you have to pick and choose what you let through your filter. And if someone's kind enough to let my information through their filter, then I want to be respectful of their time, especially if it's somebody who's running a fairly large organization. They don't have time to fool around. You know, get to the point, sort of thing.

Janice Hostager: 7:36

I love that. So can you break down the anatomy of an effective sales page. So what do you have like a process or a system that you use?

Linda Cathcart: 7:46

Yeah, I do, I have. I was so lucky to take a course through a woman. Her name is Danny Page and she writes a sales page prep course and she's just an incredibly bright, very perfectionist kind of person, which probably isn't great for her, but for students taking it it's amazing. She actually broke down things into how you get the information, which really the first part, and sometimes the longest part, of writing a sales page is doing the research beforehand, and that truly, I think is almost the most important thing. I'm a big believer in hearing the words that someone chooses to use to describe either their experience as someone who's already bought it or someone interested in buying something, or even the person who's the owner, how they talk about what they're offering, and the words mean an awful lot because you want to.

Linda Cathcart: 9:01

It's almost like using a different language. You need to come in and speak the language of other people who want to buy the same thing, and those are the people you want to talk to. You don't want to worry, you don't want to push something on someone who doesn't need it. So, using the right language and reaching the right descriptions, it's just so important, and that's really my first part of the whole process. And then it's gathering the information, doing the interviews. I do phone interviews and I do competitor interviews. I probably not much different than what you do. You know. You take a look at what's the lay of the land and then you get an idea of where they fit into the lay of the land and what makes their clients or customers choose them. And that is always best coming from someone who already chose them.

Janice Hostager: 10:10

Right, yes, now you said interviews. Do you actually call up customers and just have a conversation with them?

Linda Cathcart: 10:17

I do, but I never do that without talking to them. It's not done blind. It has to be someone that the person I'm working for, the client I'm working for, sees as someone who would be good for me to talk to. And I've been floored by some of the great stuff that comes out of it. I mean, just over the conversation. I take really good notes, I do a recording of it and then I start charting it and sometimes there's some sticky words here and there where you'll hear over and over and over again and you know that this is sort of a common theme throughout, and then you start being able to build a picture of what is different and special about the service or product you're offering. So, yeah, I do interviews.

Janice Hostager: 11:12

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love that Because you're absolutely right. When you use the same terminology that your ideal customer uses, they're going to know that it's right for them. So they're going to say, wow, this really clicks with me. I think we've all read things where it just isn't sinking in. It's just like, yeah, this sounds like I could be interested in it, but nothing's connecting for me. So you just end up leaving and a confused mind doesn't buy. I think that's such an important point.

Linda Cathcart: 11:46

You want to get that. Yeah, yeah, I feel that way. That's exactly what's happening to me. Or I have a friend who was just saying that the other day, and that comes with bringing

the personality in and the words, and I just think it makes it more interesting, too. If you're reading something and you see someone say exactly something that you've said or thought about before. Or they reference something, a movie that you care about you're going to keep reading.

Janice Hostager: 12:16

Yeah, so what would you have to say to somebody who maybe has a new product or service that they're offering that they don't have existing customers? Are there places that you go that you recommend? Do you read Facebook posts or some comments, or do you always just go right to that in-person interview?

Linda Cathcart: 12:41

Oh no, I think actually exactly what you said. There's great resources out there that require a little legwork to get to, but there's wonder, Facebook has turned into like groups of people who have common interests, and there's so many different groups out there that you could get involved in and listen to what other people are saying. You're not going in and selling anything. You just would like to hear how they feel about something and make yours better, or give them something, a price point that works for them or an offer that works for them. So I do Facebook.

Linda Cathcart: 13:24

Reddit is another place. It's a very strange place, really weird. My son has helped me not be afraid of Reddit, but sometimes I get in there. I'm like whoa. But then there's other times. I've learned how to fix my car's air conditioner on Reddit. So I mean, I have nothing bad to say. And then, even if you go into YouTube like the courses you're talking about putting on YouTube you can find a lot of good information there and even the responses to what other people have said. And then I have my SEO locations that I look at just to get an idea of the questions people are asking related to the subject.

Janice Hostager: 14:19

There's answer answer the public, or something like that. Yeah, okay, the questions. Yeah.

Linda Cathcart: 14:25

I haven't bit the bullet yet for me to carry my own you know SEO program like SEMrush or something like that, but down the road, that's sort of that's on my list of things to do, but I do think that's an interesting way of getting an idea of what people are looking at where they're going, what words mean something to them and making sure that the people that are attracted, that are using those words, are the people that are going to fit

a particular offer. It's sort of re-engineering it, because if you use the wrong word, you're going to send a whole bunch of people to a place they don't want to be and then you ruin that relationship before it's even started, you know.

Janice Hostager: 15:15

Oh yeah, it really really boils down to really knowing that ideal customer before you do anything else, and that's true in any part of marketing knowing that ideal customer and then you know how to communicate with them. And yeah, I love that idea. I love Reddit. I think it's kind of undervalued. I mean, I think initially it was sort of like this fringe kind of place where you know people would just say I don't talk. But the fact that they are so real on there and I think just having usernames instead of their actual names I think helps with that and then they're not afraid to say anything or to voice an opinion about anything makes it where you really are getting a real feel for how people think and what they feel about something. For sure.

Linda Cathcart: 16:04

Yeah, I agree with that absolutely.

Janice Hostager: 16:10

And also Amazon, sometimes looking at reviews, oftentimes going on social media, I think the comments are so much more entertaining than the posts sometimes.

Linda Cathcart: 16:20

You know, I've noticed that too, and that's always been, even when I started my business, one of the things that he mentions, like you know, take a look at the comments. Those are the most, sometimes the most important things, because you've got one person on one side. Then you have the responses of people saying yes, this is good, or no, this isn't, or I don't understand what you're talking about. And that's the meat, that's the good stuff.

Janice Hostager: 16:46

Yeah, yeah, as long as it doesn't get ugly, which these days it often times is.

Linda Cathcart: 16:50

It's a tough year.

Janice Hostager: 16:53

Yes.

Linda Cathcart: 16:54

It's been a lot of ugly years but you know, I think I've been very lucky. I really have had the best experience. I'm older than most of the women that I've taken the courses with and I found these women that are younger than I am to be so bright and so, just re-evaluating how everything is set up, the fact that women have created this online world where we run it it's not you have to wait 10 years before you can even start writing any kind of copy. You can do it. You know, these are rules we didn't make, so let's make our own place, and I love it.

Janice Hostager: 17:45

Yeah, yeah. So talk to me a little bit about storytelling. Does it have a place in sales pages and if so, how can it be incorporated?

Linda Cathcart: 17:59

It does. I think initially I want to understand how the offer, the company, the owner, how this all ended up coming together. And in listening to someone's story you usually hear their passion, and when they dig into that passion, that's the best. I get excited. That's actually the joy for me, Because when I hear someone getting really passionate about the work they do, the difference they're seeing, how they're growing, who they're nurturing, any charities they're working with, I just think it's fantastic. So that's kind of the initial bit, but I find that when I do my interviews that's where the stories come out with their clients, their customers, because I have a very specific list of questions that I kind of use as conversation starters, specific things I need to get answers to. But then I let them go and that's what I like.

Linda Cathcart: 19:12

I really like the story brand idea and I try to work some of that in there as well, Because, you know, I read someplace recently that there really aren't all these tales of our lives and our daily existence, our businesses. These are all things that we create in our brains so that we can remember things or that we don't have to recognize a chair Every time we walk up to a chair. We'll know what it is, but that's the stuff that makes us human. Having the story, it's like provenance. I don't know if you've ever watched Antiques Roadshow.

Janice Hostager: 19:57

Yes.

Linda Cathcart: 19:59

But the value of one of the antiques is that it has what they call provenance and it's got a history, something attached to it. So if there's a letter attached to a book signed by Abraham Lincoln, well that's a big deal. If it's just a book signed by Abraham Lincoln, it's not as much of a big deal. And I think that gives meaning to our lives. It gives meaning to the people who are sharing their personal experiences and you honor that. That. That's something that was important enough that they took it into their lives and they remembered it and they were nice enough to share with me and I try to honor that. Yeah. Yeah, I think there's stories. I think stories are kind of the key way of doing it. And even when you're not talking about stories, you're talking about stories, because if I'm saying, if you're this person and this is what you want to do, then this is what this offer can do for you, and that's a story. I mean, it is a story.

Janice Hostager: 21:13

So, after you've done some interviews and you really identified who your ideal customer is and you maybe gather some stories um what next? What do you suggest people do? Do they start out with a framework or what do they go from there?

Linda Cathcart: 21:32

It is. That's the research portion of it, and then it is filling in the blanks. There's certain bits of information I have to gather. Make sure I have every bit of it before I can actually sit down and write. So my goal is to get information about the particular offer. What's the one-line tagline that they're using now? Looking at what they have now Also.

Janice Hostager: 22:08

Maybe the value proposition.

Linda Cathcart: 22:10

Yeah, the value proposition I was just thinking about, the one I was working on right now. The transformation right now for me is one of the most. Once I get the transformation down. The idea of this is for this particular person who starts here and they want to end up there, and if I understand that thoroughly, then that's where I start being able to put things together. So let's say I've gathered all the information, I've gotten it from the client, I've gotten interviews, I've collected editors' information, I've looked at their current Facebook, their social media footprint, anything they've got, and then I sit down and I start organizing things and I actually start with the second half of the sales page first.

Linda Cathcart: 23:10

I don't know if you were like this at school, but sometimes when there was such a big paper to do that I felt overwhelmed. I didn't even know where to start and just knowing that if I could put my name and the date in the right-hand corner, at least I got that. That's one thing down and that's why I start about halfway through filling in just the real nuts and bolts of the offer, versus the touchy-feely parts that are usually towards the top of a sales page. So I'd start at the second half and get all that stuff down, make sure I understand exactly what the offer is, and then go back up to the beginning and start there again, and that seems to work really well for me.

Janice Hostager: 24:06

I know there's a lot of writers that write the opening paragraph very last. Is that what you do too? or the headlines.

Linda Cathcart: 24:13

yeah, yeah it doesn't mean that I'm done either. It's sort of right, yeah, it it's. It's a process that I hope I get better at every time I do it. Sometimes things come easy and sometimes they don't. You, you have to keep pushing.

Janice Hostager: 24:35

I love that you brought up the transformation. I have a business coach that always says nobody wants your online course and at first you're like, okay, and he said you know, what do they want? Is the transformation your online course is going to bring them? Yes, and that is true about absolutely anything we sell. They have to be able to visualize how their life is going to look and how it's going to be different once they have the thing that you're selling, be it a course, be it coaching, photography, whatever it is, photography whatever it is.

Janice Hostager: 25:11

Do you feel like that needs to be really front and center?

Linda Cathcart: 25:18

Where do you add that on the page? That's the first part, that's part of the last part. It's at the top of the page and the last portion that I do, the top two, and, like I think I'd mentioned, the transformation is very important and that is one of the most important things before I even start writing. I do get that down before I start writing anything else. Um, when I'm still doing the collecting of the information, how I do it is it's section and section and section, and then I fill in the information along the way. And to make my life easier, as I'm filling the information in, I'm trying to write it well. Now, I could just throw

things in there and then go back through later and try to fix it, but I think it's better to do it well the first time through and then you'll end up with a cleaner piece at the end.

Janice Hostager: 26:21

Love that. Do you ever split test pages?

Linda Cathcart: 26:26

No, you know I haven't done that. I haven't had a client request it yet, but I'd like that's on my list.

Janice Hostager: 26:34

Yeah, I've often thought about that, because if there's some subtle differences between a couple of markets I don't think I've ever actually tried it, but not for an entire landing or sales page. Rather, I have done it on landing pages for free downloads. I've done that, but I'm just curious what your experience has been, because it could just be a subtle difference like different images or different headlines.

Linda Cathcart: 27:00

I've seen it done on social media and I've done that for myself on social media where I'll put out a post and there'll be some subtle differences between the two and you know the A and B test. But I haven't taken as far as writing a sales page, which would be interesting. It's just so much work to write a sales page, but to be able to, you know, it's almost like what would I? If I think it's the best it can be, what would I change? I'd really have to think about that, you know.

Janice Hostager: 27:34

Yeah, and it would just be. And of course, anytime you test something, you want to keep it to one element at a time so that you don't get really confused, you know. So it would just be maybe a headline or an image. I guess that's the. What I've done with landing pages is just test the headline or the image.

Linda Cathcart: 27:53

Have you seen a change between the images? Has that made a difference?

Janice Hostager: 27:58

Yes, I have. It's amazing to me because you think I got this. I know exactly what they're looking for. But yeah, and definitely it adds to it, it is quite incredible how a small change can have a big impact. However, if you're a small business owner and you're just starting out, unless there's like a thousand people or so that you're looking at, it's easy to get off

kilter too, because you don't want three people to like one better than the other and you make your judgment based on a very small number of respondents. But I was curious whether or not you've done it and if you had some success with it.

Linda Cathcart: 28:44

That's fallen into a portion of some of the work I've done in the past with quizzes where you get profiles of people, but I haven't ever done it from the point of view of actually then going to write something specifically for each profile, but that would be really interesting.

Janice Hostager: 29:03

Another way I've done it with landing pages is to create something for a specific person, let's say person, but career. Like I'll have one that's maybe for photographers and one that might be for art directors, and it would be the same, really the same download, but since I'm marketing it differently and the SEO would be different for each page, you're pulling in a different audience. So that's not really split testing, that's just multiple versions of a page. But yeah, I'm just curious.

Linda Cathcart: 29:36

I think that's really smart, because you can end up dirtying the water if you try to be everything to everyone at the same time. It's hard for me to get that through my head as someone selling my services. It still is hard. It shouldn't be, but it is to just accept that. Not everybody's going to buy me their cup of tea, nor are they going to be interested in what I'm offering and to try it with folks.

Janice Hostager: 30:10

But you know, yeah, focusing on the one that really is enthusiastic and is going to tell other people about you and all of that, it is hard. It's like when someone unsubscribes to your email list and you're like, wait, but then you have to tell yourself, well, that's okay, that's good, they're not my person, those aren't my people.

Linda Cathcart: 30:31

It's humbling. So, yeah, it's humbling, it is a thing. I went into this thinking that I knew so much goodness, I've read so much all my life, I should be able to do this and it was humbling to realize that what I thought I knew I really didn't know. You really do have to do the testing, you do have to do the universe, you have to do the research, just because you think it's true doesn't mean everyone else does.

Janice Hostager: 31:00

Right, yeah, definitely. So what mistakes do you see? Some common mistakes that you see when you visit other people's sales pages.

Linda Cathcart: 31:09

I think the first one is what I'd mentioned a bit before about feeling like you have to write to reach some sort of quota where you're really not sure what the goal of a particular section is or who you're talking to, so you're just sort of copying what you've seen someone else do without understanding the structure beneath it. I think that's the biggest thing I've seen. And the thing that drives me absolutely bonkers is I like, when I write, for there to be parallels, so if I say running, walking, swimming, I'm not going to say run, walk, swim. You know, like because I'm in my undergrads in English, I believe in the beauty of prose and prose can be copied.

Linda Cathcart: 32:15

Something written well is something written well, and sometimes that's the only place that people get access to writing. You know that they might not read a book, you know I don't know how many people read newspapers anymore, but well-written is well-written and I believe things should sound good and look good and be attractive. And when I see something that's all jumbled or it looks like the person writing it didn't really understand the thing they were writing about. If you can't understand it, then it's your responsibility to understand it. I mean, if that means you have to go and create a map of what's going on. Then you create a map, you have to be able to explain it backwards and forwards to someone else that you haven't met and you need to be at ground zero on it.

Linda Cathcart: 33:26

And that's another thing that makes me sad, because I can see the goal is to sound impressive and use big words, and sometimes that's well. Look at the most popular or the most successful advertising programs and they don't use gigantic words. I mean, it's as simple as you can get it. Even the font, which I still have trouble with too, letting go of something that looks attractive as a font. But you look at Apple's font it's nothing. It's like popping or something. It's nothing. So it's all about communicating.

Janice Hostager: 34:10

Right, that is absolutely true. So talk to me about SEO. Do you start out with, I would imagine you do the SEO research, or do you have somebody that does that for you, and then do you work with that initially, or do you kind of retrofit your copy after the fact to put in the right keywords and all of that?

Linda Cathcart: 34:37

I'd like to know when I'm starting. Usually I pick it out when I look at what the competitors are doing and the words that are showing up there, and I will see it when I do my interviews. That's the sticky words, the charting of all of the phrases, the quotes. I'll pick up things there and I'll, you know, maybe do a little bit of research to see if this is commonly used or if I'm on the right track. And then at the end, it usually takes care of itself. Quite honest. If I write for the people that want the product. If I've done my research well, I've interviewed clients that are satisfied, are clients that aren't satisfied and gotten an idea of you know what they're looking for, what worked, what didn't work, how the words they used then I should be able at the end, to go in and take a look and say, oh, you know, okay, this is working, or I need to maybe move some things around, make sure I have the right keywords or key phrases in the right locations. But that's it. Most of the time it takes care of itself. To be quite honest, if I'm lucky, it takes care of itself.

Janice Hostager: 36:04

Because the words that people are Googling are the words that probably your ideal customer is using anyway, so it's already being integrated. Oh, that's super interesting. Do you have some tools that you recommend for people who are maybe just writing their first sales page and can't afford a copywriter, or just kind of going out there. Do you have some paper books you've read or anything like that, or do you have some tools available on your own website?

Linda Cathcart: 36:32

Well, what I am offering on a regular basis. I have a Facebook group for women who are encore entrepreneurs getting back to having their business or really taking off on their own business after being able to reclaim their lives. I offer a course. It's actually just a three-day challenge on a sales page. Not a sales page, a landing page and I think that's the best place to start Taking on a sales page with no experience short of buying someone's templates. I think understanding what a landing page is can be just as valuable, and probably more valuable, than trying to copy somebody else's work. It takes a lot of effort. So what I do is I have a three-day challenge. I ask the students to come in and bring something that's not working for them or if they don't understand anything about sales pages, we start from there and we start talking about it, and the goal is, by the time we get through three days, they have a landing page that's successful for them, something that is ready to go or near ready to go, and they're feeling pretty good about it. And once you get that under your belt, then you can start maybe shooting for a sales page is what I'd recommend.

Janice Hostager: 38:19

Yeah, I would agree with that, because it is really hard and even when you buy a template, you don't want to speak in other people's language either. It needs to be authentic, a blend between your own brand and your ideal customer. So it really does require a lot of thought and planning and that sort of thing. So I love that you are doing that and I will put a link to that in the show notes.

Linda Cathcart: 38:46

Would be lovely.

Janice Hostager: 38:47

So I have learned a lot today. Thank you so much, Linda, for being here. I look forward to seeing the sales pages that people create once listening to this.

Linda Cathcart: 39:00

Yeah, I'd be happy to get to know some of the people who listen to your wonderful podcast. If they're interested in learning more about creating a landing page. It's no muss, no fuss. Ask all the weird questions you want. There's no bad questions. I'd much rather somebody walk away feeling good about themselves and feeling confident in where they're going, moving forward. But this has been great. I do appreciate this so much.

Janice Hostager: 39:32

Sounds perfect. Well, thank you for being here.

Janice Hostager: 39:40

I must tell you I love to hear how much time Linda spent on her research before writing a single word, and that she went to the customer first to get their own words. That is powerful stuff.

To learn more about anything we talked about today, including Linda's three-day Great Landing Page Challenge, visit myweeklymarketing.com/66. That's episode 66.

Thank you so much for joining me today. As always, if you enjoyed our conversation, please subscribe. I'll see you next time. Bye for now.