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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. These days, there are a lot of types of content out there. You can spend time making short or long-form videos or making a podcast like this one. So the question you might ask is this Is blogging still relevant as we go into 2026? I know for many of us, it seemed so 1990, right? Well, you're in the right place if you're wondering about this, because today we're talking about the future of blogging with content writer Alison Ver Halen. We're breaking down what's working in 2026, how to stand out in a world full of AI content, spoiler by not letting AI write it for you, and how to turn your blog into a visibility engine that works even when you're off living your life. So grab your coffee and let's make blogging feel doable. And dare I say, kind of fun again. Here's my conversation with Alison. Hey Alison, welcome to My Weekly Marketing.

Alison Ver Halen: 1:22

Thank you so much for having me.

Janice Hostager: 1:25

So let's start with the big question that I have. Is blogging still worth it going into 2026? Or has AI kind of taken over?

Alison Ver Halen: 1:34

Yeah, well, uh AI is scraping information from blog. So yes, it is important for traditional SEO, it is important for the chat bot. It is also important for the real live humans to find their way to your website. Now it's all about getting the chat bot mention your brand before they really start looking. And the only way to do that is to have that informational content for the earlier stages of the buyer journey, that capitalist one-old information. So that when people are searching, what is this industry? Or do I need to worry about XYZ? The A, they'll get that information from the chat bots and the chat bots will hopefully actually mention your brand and say, yes, we got it from this website. Um it's also good for the real life people who find who actually find their way to your website. I think the biggest way that it has impacted my business, not only from the SEO perspective, but also if someone makes a referral for me and that financial client wants to know more about me before we hop on a call, they're gonna go to my website and they're gonna

read some of my blogs and they're gonna make sure I actually know what I'm talking about before we ever even have a conversation. So yeah.

Janice Hostager: 2:51

Yeah, yeah. Certainly must be changed a little bit, right? Because I know I've had experts on here that talk about, is it AEO or-

Alison Ver Halen: 3:00

All of that.

Janice Hostager: 3:01

Yes. And of course there's traditional SEO too, but the implementation of any kind of AI, it's gonna be reading all the same things, right? So how do you stand out amongst all of that?

Alison Ver Halen: 3:16

Mm-hmm. Yeah. So first of all, the reason that drives me nuts, the new terminology, is because SEO just stands for search engine optimization. And just because the search engine is changing does not mean it's not still search engine optimization. It's just that now it's a little bit of a different search engine. First of all, Google does still own more than 80% of online search. So there's this idea that Google is dead or Google is dying. It's just not true. Whether or not Google will still be around in a few years is you I'm not gonna make any predictions either way. But at the end of the day, it is still SEO with and without Google. I do the one new one I like is AEO, which stands for Answer Engine Optimization, which that makes more sense to me because the way that AI is changing how people look for information, it's also changing the fact that people, you know, they're not looking for a website anymore. They're not looking for a link, they're looking for an answer. Um, and now they can not only get that answer without clicking through to a website, but they're interacting with that, that answer. Sometimes they're gonna get an answer from ChatGPT or Claude or whatever, and they're gonna dive a little bit deeper and ask it more questions. Say, well, what about such and such? And what about this? And that is how they are diving deeper into the content. So if anything, I think having that long, in-depth content that really dives deep into a topic is more important than ever because that's how people are interacting. And again, if a chatbot can get all that information from your website, then it's gonna prove to them that you're a really valuable resource that they can use to provide those answers to their clients. So yeah, it is changing. There is also a certain amount of, yeah, what's old is new again. There's still

a lot of you got to create the high quality content, you got to answer questions people are asking. You have to know your ideal audience and the language that they're using. Because AI adapts to that. The more you use a chatbot, the more it's gonna talk like you talk to it. Um, so if you are using that language in your content, the chatbot will figure that out and start using you as a reference.

Janice Hostager: 5:27

Right. Right. And that's pretty exciting, actually, when you're not only seen as somebody who has a website, but you're also now seen as an industry expert when your content starts being used by AI. And of course, measuring that is a whole different conversation. Yes. Um, and people are just starting to get into that a little more. So do you feel like now a lot of times people will blog and then they'll do social media. Do you feel like blogging has changed in priority? I mean, social media is getting harder and harder with changes to the algorithm. Do you feel like blogging has become more important or not, or feel like it's still the ideal visibility channel in 20 or going into 2026?

Alison Ver Halen: 6:11

Yeah, so where I come from at this is because I saw years and years ago the first time Facebook really changed their algorithm and made it a lot harder for people to get in front of the audience they've been building for years, and suddenly they couldn't get in front of them without paying. People literally lost their businesses overnight. So I, that has always very strongly stuck with me. So I am always very much focused on blogging, focus on your website, build that foundation first because that is the only content on the internet that you own that no one else can mess with. No one else can just flip a switch and yank that away. So that is why I always focus on creating content for your website first and foremost. And again, from an SEO perspective, everything should lead back to your website. But not to say you should not build an audience on social media. There is absolutely value in building that audience, increasing your visibility, and also engaging with the people who are already familiar with you and have gotten to know you. Make sure that you continue engaging with them and building that relationship and staying top of mind.

Janice Hostager: 7:17

100%. 100%. So what I see clients starting to do is go to AI and start generating content for their blogs, which I cringe at a little bit, but they're gonna do it. I know they're gonna do it because it's easier. And sometimes people say, I'm just not a good writer. It writes really well. But of course, it's generating it from existing content, right? So how do you

write something that's really gonna stand out and really number one, make you a thought leader, assuming that's what you want to be? And number two, how do you make sure that it doesn't sound like it does set you apart, so speak, from anything that's written by AI?

Alison Ver Halen: 8:02

Yeah. So first of all, yeah, I hate the term AI generated because AI doesn't generate anything. It repurposes content that humans have created and it just regurgitates for you and says, here, is this what you want? And yeah, the problem with that is it sounds really vanilla. It sounds like the everyone else has already said, absolutely do not use ChatGPT or any of the other box as a as like a keyword tool, which I've also heard of people doing. It's like, oh, I'll ask it, you know, what I should write about. No, it's gonna tell you what everyone else is already writing, and then you're just more white noise. So the way to get around that, if you are using it for your own to create content, um, A have a really good idea of your brand voice. So I played around with this with Claude, that's my favorite AI tool, where I recorded myself talking about a topic and used AI to transcribe it, dump the transcription into Claude and said turn this into a blog post for me. And it still didn't sound like me. It still sounded super generic. And I was like, really? So to get around that, first of all, I love that tactic of taking the content that you that comes straight out of your brain, right? Don't rely on it for ideas. It can help a little bit with idea generation, but I love using it as a brain dunk. Just I know I want to talk about this, but I don't quite know how to say it. But make sure you have your unique perspectives and your personal experience included in there because that's how you're gonna stand out. And that's how you're gonna set yourself up as a thought leader. So make sure that's always included. And then make sure you have a really clear idea of what your brand voice is. Um, my problem that I ran into with Claude is probably that I had not trained Claude properly on my voice. Um, and there are ways to do that. You can dump brand voice guidelines in there if you have them. If you don't have them, yeah, dump a bunch of content in there that you wrote and say, This is my voice from now on when I want you to create content created in this voice. Um, you can also just even when dumping that audio file in there, say you write me a blunt post, make sure it's consistent with this voice in this song.

Janice Hostager: 10:13

Right. Yeah, that's what I did. Uploaded a whole bunch of stuff that I had written over several years, actually. And it did it, you're but you're right. It doesn't not quite right. It's still up to it. Yeah. It always requires editing. So right. And then you always want to

include personal stories, right? That really helps people get to know you as an individual as well as just you as a worker bee, right?

Alison Ver Halen: 10:38

Yeah, and that's always good content. I mean, for social media, for video, for blog, you always want that story element in there because people relate to stories, we engage with stories, and we remember stories more than we remember the facts and figures and statistics.

Janice Hostager: 10:54

Yeah, there's a saying in marketing, facts tell, stories sell. And I just I always bring that back to clients. Yeah, because a lot of times clients are focused on the facts, which are important too. There are different types of buyers too that will just look at they want to hear the see the facts, or other people that just want to hear the story. You gotta include both for sure. So, how often should we be blogging? Like for a long time it was like try and write a blog every week, or some people wrote a blog every day for a while. Is it adequate to write one just once a month, or is it often as you can make it happen? Or what do you what are your views on that?

Alison Ver Halen: 11:30

Oh, I I would really say twice a month is a minimum. I think you can get away with once a month if you're intentional about it. And again, you are using that you're at social media and your newsletter and everything. Um, but I really recommend twice a month. That is what we see. Twice a month if you're investing in that really long, in-depth content that Google loves, that gets really great results. And then re-purpose it, make it into a video, make it into a podcast, break it up and then disseminate it on social media, share it in your newsletter. A lot of people get really overwhelmed just I have to blog a number of times. How am I gonna do that? And create all this other content. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. You can say this is our topic for the next two weeks, and then break it up and disseminate it. So yeah, every other week, if you're you're really intentional about it and you're creating that long index content, you can still get really good results from it.

Janice Hostager: 12:22

Now, what if they are producing other content? Let's say they're doing a video every week or podcast every week, like I am. Is it still necessary to create a blog on top of that?

Alison Ver Halen: 12:32

I've been thinking about this with my own because I was thinking to be starting a podcast, and I'm like, I don't know how much of this is realistic. Um I do think certain value in switching off between a podcast and the blog, because you can turn that podcast episode into a blog. I have the people transcribe it, and like I said, you can dump it in the AI. Or you can just publish the transcription, especially if it's like this, where you're interviewing someone. We um maybe clean up the transcription a little bit, but people will read it and again the bot loves it. It gives some content, it's great.

Janice Hostager: 13:05

Even a PDF?

Alison Ver Halen: 13:07

Yeah.

Janice Hostager: 13:08

Yeah, yeah. That's and that's what I have on mine as well. I and I find myself if I see an interesting blog topic or I start listening to one, I don't I'm sorry, podcast topic. I start listening to one and don't have time to finish it, I will run for the transcript to see, just kind of skim it and get the parts I really want to hear out of it. So Exactly.

Alison Ver Halen: 13:27

Yeah, I and I know I'm a reader, so I'm biased. But yeah, I know I can read much more quickly, and that like you said, you can skim it and get to the juicy parts and get on with your day.

Janice Hostager: 13:37

Yeah. So what metrics are you really looking at? You're looking at, I would imagine, page views, right? Or blogs. Yep. And do you include I used to put in a lot of content upgrades, like little extras that if they are interested in the article and interest in the topic, then they'd get a free lead magnet or something like that. That although I will say that I would

say things like that are less in demand now that people have access to AI because you don't need a checklist when you don't want it to fingertip kind of thing.

Alison Ver Halen: 14:09

Yeah, well, we just have to rethink what our lead magnet is. How can we how can we continue to provide value in a way that's unique? And yeah, I've been going through that myself because my lead magnet is also a checklist and that needs to be rethought. Yeah, so absolutely a page view for sure, traffic. Where the traffic is coming from, because we are seeing more people getting traffic from ChatGPT, which is interesting. Um and also how long are they staying on the page? If your bounce rate is really high, that's a problem. So if they're staying sticking around and really engaging with the content, that we love. And then yeah, have a way to capture it, have a way to get their email, or to follow you on social media or sign up for your webinar or whatever makes sense as that next step in the buyer journey. That's all of the stuff that I look at. It's also, I mean, the thing about content marketing is it can be such a long game. I know for myself, I've had clients where they run into me at an event or they hear me speak or they attend one of my webinars, and then they just hang out on my newsletter for six months and then call me out of the blue and they're ready to hire me because they've gotten all that content for me from me week after week for month. And that not only helped me stay top of mind, but it nurtured them as the lead and it educated them. So by the time we got on that call, we didn't we didn't have I didn't have to go through all of the here's why I'm worth what I'm worth. I didn't have to try and convince them. My content had already done all of that. So that is a success story. And that's kind of hard to measure because that's the kind of thing you find on a failed call. That is the I think the best indication of the value of what I do.

Janice Hostager: 15:51

Yeah. Yeah. And that's powerful, right? When people already know and trust you, right? Yeah. Um so how did you get into blogging? Just I didn't really hear your story. I guess I didn't ask you at the beginning of the interview. So, like, how did you get into all this?

Alison Ver Halen: 16:05

Yeah, I completely fell into it. So I did in college major in English and psychology, which turned out to be the perfect degree for what I'm doing. Little did I know. Uh, had no idea what content marketing was. I thought I wanted to work in publishing. And the misfortune or the fortune, depending on how you look at it, to graduate in 09, right after the job market crash. So there were no jobs to be had in publishing or really anywhere

else. So I answered phone for a few years, found myself between jobs at one point and my roommate at the time, her dad, who was an attorney, was awesome and offered to get me stuff to do around his office until I got back on my feet. And one of the things he needed was someone to write blog for his law firm. And he knew I had a strong writing background. So he offered me the gig and I was like, What? I can get paid to write? Seriously? Yeah, let's do that. So I jumped at that chance and started writing for him, and then for an associate of his and then for some friends of mine, and they just kept growing from there. I did eventually get an overday job, but again, it was just it turns on. So I for as much success. That was my first success story. Client came back to me after six months and told me I had brought in \$75,000 worth of business to his law firm. Just through the blog post I was writing, and that was my first life moment of oh, this is not just busy work he's giving me. This as a favor to like, give me something to do. This is that real developer's business. So that was really cool. Absolutely.

Janice Hostager: 17:24

Absolutely. Yeah, and I talk about that. So I don't necessarily use a marketing funnel in uh with my clients or with my students. I talk about a trail because people will often like it it goes from awareness to consider, to compare, to evaluate, and so on. But part of what we put on our website, such as blog posts, really ties into that consider and compare stage where we're being compared to others in our industry. If before somebody does business, oftentimes they'll look at look around and see what other people are doing. But also in that consideration stage, and they may sit there for a very long time and they may leave. I'm talking about earlier. And that's a thing about a funnel. A funnel is the idea of like, you just kind of put people in the top, they shoot out the bottom as customers. And it doesn't at all work that way. And I know personally I have followed people and had to like unfollow them because it's like, okay, I can't deal with this right now in my business. It's just not time yet, you know. But kept them in the back of my mind thinking when I get ready, I'm gonna go back and buy from them. And I have. So I agree a hundred percent what you're saying is that we putting that information out there makes it so much easier for people and it puts our expertise up to be shown.

Alison Ver Halen: 18:37

Yeah, it positions you as a thought leader rather than a commodity. And people are willing to pay higher prices for that.

Janice Hostager: 18:44

Yeah. Do you recommend that people go out a little further on blogs and not like how do you get fresh information that's not something that everybody knows? You know, how uh what I'm trying to say is that there's a lot, especially in marketing, it's like there there are there are best practices that I can regurgitate in blogs. But that's not what people are really looking for, I don't think anymore. Would you agree? They're looking for something with an edge.

Alison Ver Halen: 19:08

Yeah, I think people are always looking for best practices. I mean, like always many people who don't know what you and I have, like you said, embedded in our brains and can recite in our sleep. Um so yeah, in that, in that respect, it always it always works. But on the other hand, especially these days, marketing is constantly changing. So write about the updates, write about how it's changing, write. I think all of the questions that you are asking me here are are good blog post topics. Um For me, I always go back to whenever people are asking me something I'll write about. If someone has a question at a networking event or on a sales call, it's like, oh yeah, that is a good question. I bet that could be a blog post. Let's go ahead and race that. Um, because if people are asking me about it in real life, they're probably asking Google or one of the chatbots or whatever. Um and for me, it's always um going back to keyword research and answer the public is one of my favorite tools. So anyone listening not familiar with it, that's answerthepublic.com. Really great.

Janice Hostager: 20:09

Just gonna recommend that.

Alison Ver Halen: 20:10

Yeah.

Janice Hostager: 20:11

Just gonna recommend that one. Yeah.

Alison Ver Halen: 20:12

You pump in a word or a phrase, I tend to put in one of my services or a category of services, and it will give you all of the questions across the internet that people are asking using that word or phrase. Um so I will pull out some good ideas from there, but then I always go back to my keyword research tool and make sure that it's actually a

good tool. And if anyone is curious, that is Serpstat, S-E-R-P-S-T-A-T.com is my favorite keyword research tool.

Janice Hostager: 20:39

Um, it's uh sorry, say it again, Serp SERPstat.com. Oh, okay. I'm not familiar with that one. So that sounds awesome. Maybe put the link to that in the show notes too. But if you were gonna place a bet, would you say that people would continue to blog beyond 2026? Okay. That the written word is not gonna go away.

Alison Ver Halen: 21:00

No.

Janice Hostager: 21:01

And replaced by video and replaced by audio and all the things.

Alison Ver Halen: 21:04

No, I think it makes a great companion to video and audio. Um and like you and I said, there are always gonna be people who are like, just let me scan it, just let me get to the kids to meet.

Janice Hostager: 21:16

So where can my listeners find out more about you?

Alison Ver Halen: 21:19

Yeah, my website is A Z, as in my initials, Alison Ver Halen. That is avwritingservices.com. You can find me on LinkedIn. I think I'm the only Alison Ver Halen on there. And YouTube, Alison Ver Halen Content Marketer.

Janice Hostager: 21:33

Well, thanks so much for joining me today. I appreciate it.

Alison Ver Halen: 21:37

Thanks so much for having me. This is always fun.

Janice Hostager: 21:40

So how do you think you will include blog posts as part of your content plan in 2026? Or maybe you won't at all. I'd love to know one way or another. So shoot me a DM on Instagram at Janice Hostager Marketing. For information about Allison or anything we talked about today, visit myweeklymarketing.com forward slash one thirty six. Thanks so much for joining me today. I'll see you next time. Bye for now.