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Episode 160: Marketing That Works When You Don't Have a Decade to Wait

[00:00:00] Hey, and welcome back to My Weekly Marketing. A few weeks ago, I was on a call with a woman, let's call her Susan 'cause I don't wanna use her real name. She spent 31 years in corporate and got laid off in a restructuring and decided that she was done with corporate life. She wasn't ready to retire.

Her kids were grown, and she wants to work, and she always had a dream of starting her own consulting business, so she decided it was now or never. So she had been listening to podcasts, lots of podcasts, and she was doing everything the experts told her to do. She was on LinkedIn. She had started an Instagram account.

She was working on her personal brand. She had a content calendar, blogging. She had a new website, the whole enchilada, and she had zero clients. About 10 minutes into our call, she said something like this: "Janice, I am doing all the things. Why isn't this working?" [00:01:00] Here's what I told her, and here's what I want to tell you today because I don't think Susan's the only one feeling this way.

If you're like Susan, most marketing advice you're getting is built for a business that doesn't look like yours because they have a lot of time to get it growing.

Speaker 4: Because business growth takes time, and if you're starting a business midlife, you need to modify things because you probably wanna get traction sooner rather than later

So today we're talking about what to do when you don't have a decade to figure this all out.

Okay, here's the thing about most marketing advice. It assumes you have infinite time. Marketing takes time and/or money. If you're doing it slow and bootstrapping, it's gonna take time. Time to build a list, time to grow your brand, sometimes even time to really identify who your ideal customer avatar is.

You might have heard advice like, "Build your audience for two years and then monetize it," [00:02:00] or, "Be patient, SEO compounds over years," or, "Show up on social media

every day for the next 18 months, and then you'll start to see results." That advice is not wrong exactly. It's just built for a specific kind of business.

A 28-year-old building a first company with VC funding, that would work. A 32-year-old influencer who can afford to be broke for three years while she builds her following, that would work. A founder who's planning to still be doing this in 2040, perfect for them. But what if that's not you?

It wasn't me either when I started my business after turning 50. What if you have an 18-month runway instead of a 10-year runway? What if you got laid off and your savings or your unemployment is the clock? What if your kids are launched and you want this business to be working now instead of when you're 65 or 70?

What if you've got [00:03:00] incredible expertise, like genuine, deep, hard-won decades of experience, but a tiny audience? That's a different kind of business, and it needs a different And here's the thing, most of the marketing advice out there is built by and for people whose biggest asset is time. Their disadvantage is experience, so they build strategies that trade time for credibility.

But your situation is the opposite. Your biggest asset is your experience. Your disadvantage is your time. So you need strategies that trade expertise for speed. Same destination, completely different route. So today, I wanna walk you through three moves that flip that script.

These aren't hacks or shortcuts. But they go against a lot of what you've probably been told. So buckle up. Here we go!

Okay, move number one, sell to people who already know you before you [00:04:00] chase strangers. The first move is the one nobody talks about because it's not especially sexy. There's no funnel, there's no dashboard or automation.

But it's the highest ROI marketing activity that exists, and almost nobody is doing it. Before you spend one more minute trying to find strangers, sell to people who you already know. Most marketing advice tells you to build an audience, get more followers, grow your list, and eventually, sure, those strangers will convert into customers.

But here's the math. The conversion rate on cold content marketing, strangers finding you on the internet, is somewhere around like one to two percent on a really good day.

The conversion rate on, on a personalized email to someone you already knows, likes, and trusts you, it's usually around ten to thirty percent.

So stop and think about that for a second. You need ten to thirty times more strangers to get the same revenue you could get from your warm network. So why don't [00:05:00] more people do this? I think it's a couple of reasons. One, it can kind of feel icky, like you're using your relationships, like you're gonna be that person at the high school reunion pitching essential oils, right?

And two, most of us don't realize how big our warm network really is. So here's an exercise I want you to do if this is you. I call it the hundred people exercise. Open a spreadsheet and start listing every single person who knows and trusts you. Not strangers you wanna reach, people who would pick up the phone if you called.

Start with the obvious, your family, your friends, your current clients, and then go further to former colleagues from every job that you've had, people you work with on volunteer boards, parents from your kids' school, maybe your dentist or your hairstylist, or the woman who used to be your boss back in two thousand and eight.

Go through your LinkedIn from your corporate days, or the neighbor whose dog you [00:06:00] watched that one time. Most women I do this exercise with stop around thirty and say, "Okay, that's it. That's everyone." But I want you to push past it. Get to a hundred. I promise they're there. You've been collecting them for, like, twenty-five years, right?

Now, and this is the important part, go through that list of a hundred people and tag each person with one of three things.

A, could they hire me? B, could they refer somebody who'd hire me? Or C, could we collaborate? You will be shocked. I have never, and I mean never, done this exercise with a client and not found at least ten viable leads in their existing network that they were completely ignoring or forgetting about

Now, here's how you actually contact them. Not a big launch email, not through your email service provider, none of that. One personal email at a time.

When I moved to Texas and restarted a business I had in Minnesota and in Wisconsin before that, [00:07:00] I did this. Right away, I had two leads that turned into customers

immediately. So I want you to send twenty of those this month. Twenty personal emails to twenty people who already know you. Don't pitch in that first email.

Just reconnect. Tell them what you're up to now. Ask what they're up to. Just let it breathe a little bit. I promise you this will outperform every fancy funnel you've been thinking about. And one more thing on this. If you've ever had a paying client ever in any capacity, you should reach out to them as well.

Past clients are five times more likely to buy from you again than a stranger is to buy from you the first time. Reactivating dormant clients is the single highest ROI marketing move that exists, and it costs you absolutely nothing but a thoughtful email.

Okay, so that's move number one, warm audience before cold audience. And once you build that warm audience, then you can focus on the longer game of content, such as [00:08:00] podcasting or videos.

Okay, move number two, pick one channel that fits you and ignore the rest. This one is a permission slip as much as it is a strategy. Pick one channel, go deep on it, and ignore everybody else.

You've probably heard the be everywhere advice. You need to be on LinkedIn and Instagram and TikTok and YouTube and your podcast and email list and your blog. Oh, and Threads now too. Probably Substack. Don't forget Pinterest. I'm tired just saying it. That advice is built for a 25-year-old with infinite energy who genuinely enjoys spending five hours a day making content.

And it's probably bad advice even for them, because their ideal customer is really highly unlikely to be on all those platforms. They are spreading themselves too thin.

You cannot be everywhere. And the secret nobody tells you is that you don't have to be. Posting on one platform consistently for [00:09:00] two years will absolutely outperform spreading yourself across three or four platforms for the same two years. Depth beats breadth every single time.

So how do you pick the one? It comes down to matching the channel to your unfair advantage, number one, and where your customer is hanging out. So let's go back to your advantage. If you think out loud well, like if you're someone who can talk for 30 minutes about a topic and it sounds good, then a podcast or YouTube is perfect for you.

Long-term video, that's your channel. But if you write better than you talk, if you've always been the one in meetings who sent the follow-up email LinkedIn long-form posts or Substack or a blog with SEO, those are where you should be. If you're high energy on camera, YouTube long-form video is probably your channel. You can talk to the camera, you can teach, you can demonstrate, but you don't need to be a TikTok dancer to make video work.

If you're best one-on-one [00:10:00] and the idea of public content makes you want to crawl under a desk, you can build a service business entirely on referrals and one-on-one conversation with zero public facing content. Yes, really, this is a legitimate strategy. If you really are an introvert and hate putting yourself out there, you can do this. The mistake is just picking the platform because it's new or growing or some marketing guru told you that you should be on it. Pick the one that matches you and it matches your ideal customer.

And consistency on one platform is going to beat a half-hearted presence on four platforms. Now, here's the other piece I wanna mention. Not all channels are created equal when it comes to your time. Some channels compound. That means a piece of content you make today keeps working for you for months, sometimes years even later. SEO is in that category, so blog posts would be in that category, [00:11:00] podcast episodes, YouTube videos, Pinterest, your email list. These are all platforms that compound. They're compounding assets. A blog post you wrote in 2022 can still be driving leads to you in 2026.

Some other channels are more disposable. They disappear the moment you publish them. Instagram, Facebook, TikToks, they get a few hours of attention, and then they're gone. If you have limited time, and you do, spend it on the compounding stuff. Build assets instead of posts.

You're listening to this on a podcast. Podcasts are compounding assets. The episode I published two years ago is still getting downloads. That's the kind of marketing you want.

When I started my podcast, I was absolutely gonna do an audio-only platform. Now, I can't tell you how many people have told me I need to be on YouTube and doing video, but here's the thing. I didn't grow up on camera like so many younger [00:12:00] people, so I hate looking at myself on video, and I get very self-conscious, and I hate doing video.

So it's never gonna be high on my list, and honestly, I don't think it's worth my time. I do post on Instagram, but it's highly competitive, and it's probably not worth my time either. So here's your permission slip if you need one. You don't have to be on TikTok. You don't have to make reels.

You don't have to be on camera if it makes you miserable. You don't have to build a personal brand by sharing your morning routine or your outfit of the day unless you love doing that. Anyone telling you otherwise is either selling you a course or hasn't actually built a service themselves. It's a big pie out there, and unless your aim is to become an influencer or you have a team to help you out, pick your one platform, go deep, the rest can wait.

Okay, move number three, position around expertise, not aspirations. All right. This is the [00:13:00] last one, and this is the one that I think is most important. It's also the one I see women in the season of business getting wrong the most.

Here's what I mean. Most marketing advice for service-based businesses, meaning coaches, consultants, freelancers, whatever, most of it sells aspiration. The hook is build the business of your dreams or live the lifestyle. That's aspirational marketing. That marketing works really well when the founder is 27 years old, photogenic, and is selling a dream because she doesn't have a track record yet. She's got a vision and is trying to sell a lifestyle and dream around entrepreneurship. She has to sell the dream because the dream is all she's got. But you've got something better. You've got 25 or 30 years of actual expertise.

You, have real experience, and with all your experience, you have become a thought leader. you've lived the dream. That's a different brand and a different [00:14:00] customer than a lifestyle or an aspirational brand

So flip it and sell your expertise instead.

So what does that look like in practice? Three things. First, lead with a resume, not the aspiration story. You can say, "I ran marketing for a \$50 million division for 12 years, and now I help small business owners stop wasting money on marketing that doesn't work."

I love stories, but it's a different story. It's a completely different sales conversation-- one sounds like a nice journey, the other sounds like a problem that was solved. Your audience, especially if your clients are other experienced people, want to hire an expert, not follow a journey and a dream.

Your story matters, but lead with the expertise and let the story support it. Second, sell the outcomes instead of the dream. Aspiration marketing sells that vision. It might be step into your power, or unlock your potential. All very lovely, very hard to measure.

[00:15:00] Expertise marketing sells outcomes. Get 10 qualified leads in the next 90 days. Increase your email list by 500 subscribers in six months.

Stop losing customers in your sales process. These are outcomes that are very specific, and they're measurable. They're hard to fake, which means they favor the person who can actually deliver on them and show the results, and that's you. When you're writing your sales page or your bio or your services page, every time you're tempted to use a transformational word, swap it for an outcome-based word.

So instead of 'become', use the word achieve. You might, instead of the word unlock, use the word increase. Yes, it's probably less poetic, maybe less dreamy, but it has proof, and at the end of the day, people are looking for proof.

Which one would you want to buy? Okay, and the third thing, and this is a hard one, charge expert prices from day one. [00:16:00] I see this a lot. A woman with twenty-five years of corporate experience starts her own consulting business and charges seventy-five dollars an hour because she's new to entrepreneurship.

She is not new. She has twenty-five years of experience. The fact that she's freelance now doesn't reset her resume. Here's how the market actually reads price. Price is a signal. When you price low, the market reads junior or beginner. When you price at expert rates, the market reads expert.

And here's the thing, your competition is not the twenty-year-old freelancer on Fiverr. Your competition is the other experienced consultants that are out there. Look what they charge. I know this is really kind of a hard part.

I know that there's a voice in your head that says, "But I haven't proven myself in this new business yet, so why should I lower my price?" And I'm telling you, that voice is wrong. Pricing low does not get you more clients. It gets you [00:17:00] clients who can't afford you and don't value you, and it signals to better clients that you're not in their league.

This is something that I struggled with a lot. Sometimes we don't realize how much we know and the value of what we have in our head. I was charging way too little for so

long. And what happened is that I started resenting the clients who were not paying enough, and I was angry at myself for it.

Price like the expert that you are, the right people will pay it. The wrong people will self-select out. That's the system working the way it should. Now, I know you might be thinking, "But Janice, what if my clients can't afford me?" I want to gently push back on this because there's a hidden assumption inside that question that's costing you money.

The assumption is that it's your job to be affordable to anyone who wants to work with you, or that you might not get clients if you charge too much. Neither one of those are true. You're a business. Your [00:18:00] job is to be valuable to the right people, not affordable to everyone. The job of a business is to make money.

Here's another way to think about it. When somebody says, "I can't afford you," one of three things is true. First, maybe they genuinely can't afford it. In that situation, the system just told you that they're not your client. That's not a failure on anybody's part, that's just the filter doing its job.

And honestly, cheap clients are the most expensive clients you will ever have. They stretch to pay you, then turn into anxious clients with scope creep and midnight emails. Like I said earlier, you'll end up resenting saying yes to them. Take it from somebody who's been down this route, you don't want a cheap client.

Two, they could afford it, but maybe they don't see the value. That's a positioning problem. That's a communication problem. Lowering your price doesn't fix it. They will think you're worth less because you [00:19:00] haven't communicated your value. Think about an item, let's say a glass bowl that you're selling at a garage sale. Marking the price down further doesn't make it move any faster because people still don't want that glass bowl. But if you mark on the bowl that it's maybe Orrefors or Waterford, it's suddenly worth more, and people will clamor to buy it because it becomes a good investment.

That's you too. Communicate what a great investment you are. The third reason they may say they can't afford you is this: they could afford you and they see the value, but they're negotiating. For that client, scope the work down, offer a modified package, but don't drop your rate. In none of these three scenarios is the right answer to lower your prices across the board.

Here's the thing, underpricing isn't generous. It's a math problem dressed up as a values problem. Because if you fill your roster with bargain rate clients, you have less time for clients who would [00:20:00] gladly pay your real rate. So the people who actually need you the most got wait-listed, or they hired somebody else.

If you want to help people who genuinely can't pay, do it deliberately. Offer two scholarship spots a year or an hour each month to a nonprofit. That's how you serve them without torching your business. I could do a whole episode on pricing because as you can tell, I'm pretty passionate about this. Let me know if you would like that.

Just send me a DM to @janicehosteggermarketing on Instagram or find me on LinkedIn. But for right now, that's the framework. The fear of charging too much is almost never about your clients. It's worth asking yourself what it's really all about. Okay, deep breath. Let me pull this together. Okay, three moves.

One, sell to those who already know you before you chase strangers. Make the list, send, of those hundred people, send the emails, and reactivate those dormant connections. [00:21:00] Two, pick the one channel that matches your strength and go deep. You have my permission to ignore the rest.

And three, position yourself around your expertise, not aspirations. Lead with the resume, sell the outcomes, and then charge the expert prices. Here's what ties these three together. The one thing I want you to walk away with.

Most marketing advice is built for businesses with an infinite runway, and if you've got that runway all that time, great. Use that playbook. But if you don't, if you've got say like eighteen months or thirty-six months

Or just a deep desire to stop spinning your wheels and make things happen? Then focus on warm audience before cold, deep content before wide, expertise before aspiration, and pricing it like the professional that you are. You'll still have to do the work, but it's the right work for your business, not for someone with more time.

So if this resonated, if you're nodding along [00:22:00] going, "Yes, this is my situation," I would love to hear from you. Please send me a DM on LinkedIn or Instagram. And if you're in the season of business where you're trying to make this work now, not in 10 years, I see you. More episodes coming on this exact topic over the next few months.

So for more information about anything I talked about today, including the transcript, visit myweeklymarketing.com/160. Thank you so much for joining me today. I'll see you next time. Bye for now.