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BOOK MARKETING: How to Set Your Words Free With Speech Recognition Interview with Scott Baker

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books. Today, my special guest is a master dictation guru. Scott Baker is a prolific writer who spent most of the last decade working in freelance nonfiction for numerous magazines in the UK. He began dabbling with Dragon voice recognition software in the late 1990s when it was, quite frankly, terrible. And I know Scott's going to talk more about that part of it.

Things have improved dramatically since then and Scott now uses dictation on a daily basis, taking advantage of the tricks and techniques used by professionals within the speech recognition industry to write thousands of words per hour. His book, *The Writer's Guide to Training Your Dragon*, has been described as the definitive book on Dragon for writers, and has been an Amazon number one best seller for the last year.

He recently launched the School of Training Your Dragon, providing online courses to quickly help writers explode their word counts and dictation up to 99% accuracy. He believes through a combination of the right equipment and training, there's never been a better way for writers to improve their workflow and achieve sky high daily word counts with this incredible technology.

Scott, what a pleasure it is to welcome another Brit to the show and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor, all the way from, is it Manchester, England, did you say?

Scott Baker: No, I'm up in the north of England. Thank you for having me, Susan. I'm up in the northeast of England, near Newcastle.

Susan Friedmann: Near Newcastle, that's even further, wow.

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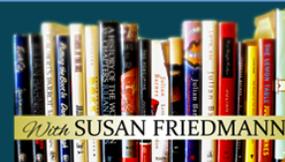
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- Scott Baker: Yeah. And can I just say, you described me as both a master and a guru in that intro, so I'm in real trouble now.
- Susan Friedmann: You are. So the expectation is really high. We've set the bar so high.
- Scott Baker: Let's temper it. Let's temper it a bit.
- Susan Friedmann: So, Scott, let's start with, there has got to be a story behind how you got into this dictation game. Am I right in saying that?
- Scott Baker: Yeah. Absolutely. You alluded to the fact that I first used it about 20 odd years ago, well in the '90s. And i' showing my age now, oh my god. But it was atrocious back then. I used to work in the field of IT and business support, and we were helping businesses use technologies that didn't exist up until that point. One of those, believe it or not, was the early days of the Internet and email. We used to get people saying, "What do I need email for?" It's unbelievable to think of that now, but this was how things were in the '90s.
- And Dragon was about then, the dictation software. And it was pretty, as you mentioned, terrible. It was so inaccurate. You would talk to it expecting wonderful things, and you would just openly point and laugh at what used to come up on the screen, bore no resemblance to what you just said. It was there and it was interesting, but it was so ahead of its time back then, but I was intrigued by it and it stuck with me because I knew there was something there, but the technology to run it, it wasn't up to scratch. PCs were nowhere near powerful enough back then.
- And then we fast forward 20 odd years and, as you mentioned, I was a freelance writer. I used to have incredible deadlines to meet and yet I've never been a fast typist, never. Someone said to me, "You should try Dragon again. It's much better now." And I thought, "Okay, I'll have a look at it," and boy, had it changed. It was so much better. It was pretty accurate, pretty good out of the box. I always thought, "How do we improve this? How do we make it even better?" And I started to delve into how it could be used at its optimum. I started to look at equipment and some of the techniques you could use to train it to your own writing style. And then, just like that, bang, I had a massive problem with herniated discs, slipped discs, where I was literally flat on my back for months and months at a time and suddenly I couldn't write. So, that's affected my income. Overnight, it was a case of, "How am I gonna earn an income now?"

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Luckily, because I'd started getting into dictation and getting into Dragon software, I was well prepared and it made me realize this isn't just about word count, this is about an insurance policy when something goes wrong, because as a writer of any kind, if you rely on writing for your income, you're in big trouble if you suddenly get an injury. And that could be RSI. In my case, it was back problems. So, that's how I got into it and after that, I became completely obsessive about it to the point where, like you say, I now write thousands of words every hour with it and love being able to show other people how to do that as well, because it's an incredible technology that is finally, time has finally caught up with it. Anyone now can buy a computer, buy the right equipment, and have this incredible accuracy and boost their word count overnight.

Susan Friedmann: I know that you're so passionate about it, because that's what attracted me to you when I heard you on a webinar quite recently. And it's that mental shift, though, making that mental shift from the keyboard to the voice. Talk to us about that, because that's what I struggled with for many years.

Scott Baker: Maybe it's different for me, because as I mentioned, I've never been a fast typist. I never learned to touch type as we call it in the UK, I'm not sure what we call it in America. Keyboarding skills, I think they call it in the US. But I never learned to be able to stare at the screen and not look at the keyboard. So, the best typing speed I can achieve is probably in the 45 to 55 words a minute range, which is okay. You're never gonna increase your word count substantially with that speed. There's only so much you can do in an hour.

So, for me, the transition was easy because I had deadlines to meet, because I had a lot of freelance work to do. Suddenly, I could put myself on the level playing field with the people who could type at 120 words a minute or whatever. It was fantastic for me. So, I wholeheartedly embraced it because, like I said, it suddenly made me a much faster writer overnight. I didn't have a problem with the act of writing, it was the speed of doing it was always my issue. But Dragon helped me to completely take that problem away.

I think for a lot of people, the mental shift is tough because, but as I've just said there, it really is a mental shift. In my case, I had a reason to do it, and I think the injury just compounded that that I had, but for a lot of people, I think the creative hurdle is the biggest one, "How do I go from writing through my fingers, typing, to writing through my mouth,

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through dictating?" A lot of people struggle with that. But it's just a tool, like any other tool. We've had so many different methods of writing over the years from quills, to fountain pens, to keyboards, and now dictation. And it's hard to believe that only a few years back, nobody would've imagined using touch on the daily basis as an input method.

But through tablets and smartphones, we've all embraced that completely. And now we've got Amazon and Google and whatever all wanting us to use their voice assistants. So, we can see where things are going. Voice is, we're starting to become more comfortable with voice. In terms of using it for writing, it's just a case of committing to it and saying, "Look, I'm gonna do this and just go on with it." And there are exercises you can do. You mentioned I've got a course. There's things in that that get you over that hump. But at the end of the day, I think a lot of it is just down to you and committing to doing it. Once you start to see the word counts, incredible word counts that you can achieve with it, then I don't think there's any going back.

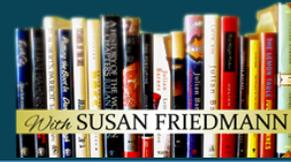
Susan Friedmann: What I found is really challenging is unlocking that creative part of my author voice. Are there any sort of tricks or techniques that you recommend to overcome that?

Scott Baker: The first thing everybody should do who's thinking of doing this is to just get used to talking to a machine ever single day. Okay? Now, by that, I mean use your smartphone, use your tablet, whatever it is. When someone sends you an email, dictate an email back to them using, you have a little microphone button on your keyboard, on your smartphone. So, use Siri or use Google now, or whatever it is, and dictate and email back to them. If someone sends you a text message or a WhatsApp message, dictate one back to them. You very quickly get used to that act of dictation, just through those simple everyday actions, and when it then comes to sitting down and writing 1000 words or more, it becomes that little bit easier, and it's like anything. It's practice. It's time.

It's very doable, and it happens quite quickly. I think when people start to see the huge gains in terms of productivity, they start to rethink, "Actually, okay, this is a good thing." So, it's just a case of practice. One thing I do is, or one thing I recommend people do, is get like a piece of cloth or something and just put it over their keyboard, just pretend that they're typing as they dictate. So, you're still touching the keys, but you're not actually using the keyboard. Another solution is to just not connect the keyboard up to your computer. Or if it's a wireless one, just

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switch it off, and type away as you're dictating, but not actually using the keyboard to type. Just wean yourself off it.

These are all little tips and tricks you can use to move across mentally to dictation.

Susan Friedmann: That's a really cool idea. I'm going to try that, because-

Scott Baker: You can have that one.

Susan Friedmann: Yes. I just find that I'm so much more creative when I'm actually typing the words and that stream of consciousness, and the ideas that come out. And then when I got to dictating, it's like it's very sort of, I don't know, static, and it's very simple. And it's even too simple. I'm like, "This isn't my kind of writing." I like to get deeper with ideas and thoughts, and somehow it doesn't quite come when I'm just using my voice.

Scott Baker: Well, here's another one. Maybe type as normal, do some writing as you normally would, but as you're typing, speak the words out loud as well. Don't actually use dictation, just talk out loud as you type, and you'll find that, I think, we need to make that mental click back to being storytellers, not typists. Because we're not typists. It's as simple as that. We're writers. And the keyboard is actually a human made instrument designed to slow you down, believe it or not, because the QWERTY layout was designed to stop the little hammers on a typewriter banging into each other back in the day. So, the layout is completely unergonomic. It's designed to actually slow down people who were too fast at typing. And it's just the fact that it's an input method that we're so, so used to.

But we were all used to mice as well a few years back and now people whiz around on a touch screen without thinking about it. So, it's possible to make that mental click. You just have to maybe do a little bit of, a few exercises to get yourself over that hump.

Susan Friedmann: That's interesting, because I could never figure out how they came up with this QWERTY keyboard, because it's like it just didn't make sense, but then when you learn to type, your fingers suddenly learnt where the different keys were and that's how you did it.

Scott Baker: Yeah. Yeah.

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- Susan Friedmann: Let's talk about some of the basic tools an author would need to make this transition.
- Scott Baker: First things first, you need a computer. Obviously that can be a PC or a Mac. You have to view this as an investment. You can't just go out and buy a \$200 laptop and expect it to have fantastic results. It's not gonna happen, okay? This is a very powerful piece of software. We're talking about Dragon here. There's no alternative, really. I know there are other solutions out there which are free or low cost, but Dragon is the one you need, because it's the only software that can actually learn not just your voice, but your writing style, so it can actually learn how you write as well as what you're saying, and there's some training involved in doing that, but nevertheless, it's invaluable. That's the part of the software that really is the killer feature.
- But in order for it to do that, you need a powerful computer that can handle that kind of processing. So, you're gonna need something, not crazy specs, but you're gonna need something relatively modern. A Core I5 processor is ideal, a Core I7 is even better, or some of the new AMD ones, [inaudible 00:13:25] processors. Anything like that are fine powerful computers, and I would recommend about eight gigabytes of ram or more. If you're just running Dragon and dictating into whatever, then eight gigs is fine. You could even at a push get away with four gigabytes, but I wouldn't recommend it.
- If you're one of these people who has 50 different programs running at once, then you're gonna need more ram as well. And an SSD as well, instead of a hard drive, 'cause an SSD is much, much faster. If you have those three things combined, Core I5 or better, eight gigs of ram, and an SSD, you're on you way. All you need then is the software, and that's gonna be Dragon for the Mac or for the PC, either one will do.
- Susan Friedmann: And how about a microphone? Do you specify the particular microphone that we should use? What kind of investment are we looking at here?
- Scott Baker: Well, that's probably the most important bit of equipment of all, because garbage in equals garbage out. So, you have to have a half decent microphone and it doesn't matter whether you want to use a headset or whether you want to use a desktop microphone, it's entirely up to you, but it has to be a quality microphone. Now, there's loads of different ones, loads of different price points. I think the important thing is if it's a \$10 headset, it's not gonna cut it, okay? It's just not. I'm

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talking to you now on, this is a microphone made by Road, a company called Road. Something like that is ideal. Blue make a microphone, a company called Blue, called the Yeti, which is a fantastic microphone for the price. It's around \$100.

But you don't have to spend that much. You can get really good headsets from the likes of [00:15:06] Andrea Electronics, Plantronics, Zenheiser, these are all around the \$40 to \$50 mark. So, you're looking at maybe around up to \$50 for a headset, around \$100 or that mark for a good desktop microphone, and as long as you go with a quality make, it's gotta be a brand that makes quality audio equipment, then you're good to go. I would avoid anything else. It's just, I've tried everything over the years. And make sure it's USB. Don't use the little, the three and a half millimeter jacks that you see like headphone jacks. Don't use those with your computer. They're ideal for voice recorders, which I'll mention about later.

But make sure it's USB and avoid wireless as well. Wireless causes signal degradation, and that's not ideal for voice recognition. So, you want USB, wired, and then as I say, either a decent headset or decent desktop mic from a good company and then you're good to go.

Susan Friedmann: And what kind of investment in the software are we looking at here?

Scott Baker: Well, the softwares can be quite expensive. There's different versions of it, which can be confusing. If you're using the PC, then you are looking at Dragon Version 13, and NaturallySpeaking Version 13, and you want the premium version of the software. There's two versions, home and premium. Ignore the home version, because it's crippled a little bit in terms of functionality. The premium version is the one to go for. That includes something called transcription, so that allows you to dictate anywhere at any time, and have the software just transcribe the file later, which is absolutely invaluable. Gets you out of your desk, gets you moving, as well.

So, go for Dragon NaturallySpeaking 13 Premium. That's usually around the \$100 to \$150 mark, but price varies wildly. It's been hovering around the \$80 mark. So, it's just luck of the draw when you come to buy it. But the latest, the absolute latest and greatest version, is called Dragon Professional Individual Version 15 for the PC or Version 6 for the Mac. That software is, again, quite expensive. It's around the \$200, anywhere between \$200 and \$300, depending on when you buy it.

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Black Friday's coming, so they frequently discount this software and I have a feeling it's gonna be discounted soon for Black Friday. But it's just luck of the draw. And there's no new version on the horizon for about another year or so. It's not gonna be discounted heavily for any reason like that any time soon. So, it's just a case of accepting it's quote a bit investment and then going with it.

Susan Friedmann: My listeners love hearing about mistakes, so talk to us about mistakes that we make in this whole dictation game.

Scott Baker: The biggest mistake I've made in the past is to just jump into the software feet first with any old microphone thinking it's gonna do what it says on the tin. And it does at first. When you first use it, it's so accurate and you think, "Wow, this is incredible." But you tend to be, when you're first using it, dictating very simple things, 'cause it's all new and it's all interesting and whatever, but you tend to dictate stuff like, "I am dictating into my computer and the words are appearing on the screen." The second you start to move beyond that into your own writing, the wheels come off.

So, you have to accept that you have to view this as an investment from day one, okay? So, half decent computer, good equipment, good microphone. And it's gonna take a little bit of training. That's the biggest mistake people make. Again, they get frustrated with it, because they try it for a couple of days, "Oh, I'm fast at typing," and they just go back to typing. You've got to commit to it and accept you need to train it to your voice and to your writing style. And once you've done that, it's really, really powerful and really invaluable.

But that's the biggest mistake, is too just give up on it too quick, I think.

Susan Friedmann: I think it's so funny the way you said the basics that you start with, that "I am typing on the computer, I'm dictating rather than typing." That's exactly what I did. I mean, I really did, and I felt so stupid, but the fact is that I had to start somewhere.

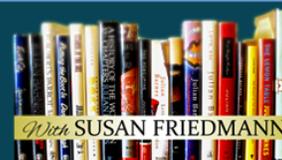
Scott Baker: Absolutely.

Susan Friedmann: So, that was where I had to start, so yes. What else? What other mistakes should we be aware of?

Scott Baker: I think one other big mistake is to simply think you can't do it, because you can. It will click. Again, it comes back a little bit to the giving up on it

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aspect. I know so many writers who say, "Oh, I tried it and I just couldn't get along with it," and all that sort of thing. And then, bang. One day they end up with an RSI related injury or something. I know so many people who have had RSI injuries and stuff, but I know someone very recently, last few weeks, just out of the blue, completely out of the blue, used to write 100 words per minute, suddenly got terrible RSI in her elbow, and now she can't lift her arm. And the doctor said it's going to be six to eight months before that realistically improves.

And it's not just the fact that she can't write now. She's starting to realistically think, "Am I going to be able to write in the future? Is this gonna happen again? Is this gonna be a recurrence?" So, suddenly she's taking it seriously and suddenly she's realizing Dragon is not just about word count, it's about having an insurance policy for your writing business, basically, because when something like that happens and if you rely on it for your income in any way, boy, are you in trouble. We can't write, we're out for tools to write, and if we're completely dependent just on our hands or our body ... You know, when I got my back injury, I literally couldn't sit up. I could not sit in a seat. There's no way I could sit and write. Couldn't do it.

For me, that's a big mistake people make is to think it's all about word count. It's not. It's about much, much more than that. The productivity is great, but it's also an investment against your income in the future being affected by something that you couldn't have predicted. And one final mistake that people make is to think that it's gonna change their writing style or their voice in a bad way. I don't think that's true. I think it can very, very much improve your writing, as well. I think it can unlock a side of your writing that's very natural, because when we talk, it's all very natural and conversational, and it can unlock certain areas of your writing that you maybe didn't realize were there.

So, there's loads of positives. I'm very positive about the whole thing, as you can probably tell, because it's completely changed my life in so many different ways, and I really believe that if people can get on board with it, they're gonna reap the benefits day in and day out.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent. And just in case our listeners don't know what RSI is, could you just tell us?

Scott Baker: It is a repetitive strain injury. So, it's anything that is caused by repetitive movement of some kind. Hitting a keyboard all day with your wrists as a certain position. If you take a look at how a keyboard is

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positioned in front of you, put your hands just over it, and then look at how you type, it's completely unnatural. You tend to bend your wrists inward. Most people don't hover their hands over it, they tend to let their palms rest down on the desk, so it's so unergonomic, and that adds up over time. Interestingly, my little boy, he's only 12, and the other day he started getting pains in the finger on his right hand. And we were wracking our brains trying to think what it is, and then I suddenly realized it was his mouse.

It was because he was using the mouse every day and from an early age, he's starting to develop some pain with it. So, I got some wrist rests and things like that and showed him how to do it ergonomically and those have now gone away. He's now got a vertical mouse, which turns his hand to the side and puts his wrist in a neutral position. And it's hopefully fixed that problem, but it's amazing how these little injuries mount up and we don't realize they're happening, and all of a sudden, you wake up and you can't move your arm. So, it can be pretty debilitating.

Susan Friedmann: Yes. Very much so. I know that many people suffer from carpal tunnel-

Scott Baker: Yeah, god yeah.

Susan Friedmann: From the way that their hand rests, as you said, on the keyboard so unnaturally. So yes, these repetitive injuries ... Scott, would you let us know how our listeners can get ahold of you, find out more about the Training Your Dragon course? What can you share with them?

Scott Baker: The best bet is to go to www.TrainingYourDragon.com. You'll find everything I do there. So, I've got, as you said, a couple of books. There's actually a free one as well called Quick Cheats for Writing with Dragon, that's free on Amazon and everywhere else. And you can also sign up for some free video training on there. There's about an hour's worth of free videos that people might find helpful. And you can also access the courses from that page as well, which are really designed to fast track you into this and get you using the software so that it's perfectly trained to your voice and writing style really quickly.

Susan Friedmann: And if you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget, what would that be, Scott?

Scott Baker: Positivity. Be positive. You can use this, you can do this, and you can improve your writing immeasurably. I know of people who again, they

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keep saying, "Oh, it's gonna change my writing style. I'm not gonna be able to do it. My voice, my writing voice is gonna sound so different." But that does not necessarily have to be a negative thing, and I know a lot of people who told me my writing improved dramatically after I started using Dragon, and I know a lot of your listeners write nonfiction. I used to write a lot of freelance stuff for nonfiction magazines, and I never had an editor come back to me and say, "This is no good because you've dictated it." No, they never knew.

So, something along the way clicked and my writing was exactly the same as when I typed it, it turned out. It's just about getting over that hump. So, be positive. You can do this, and when you do, I think it'll absolutely transform your writing business.

Susan Friedmann: I know that I just have to persevere with it. I've started and I just have to continue.

Scott Baker: You can do it. You can do it.

Susan Friedmann: I can do it.

Scott Baker: Absolute faith.

Susan Friedmann: Thank you. So, thank you so much for sharing your wisdom. And thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview, and I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.