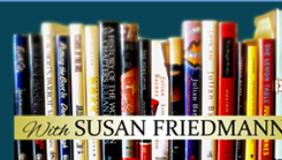


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BOOK MARKETING: How to Attract Clients Like Magic with Conversion Copywriting Interview with Joanna Wiebe

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 conversion copywriting guru. The co-founder of the Air Story writing platform, and the founder of Copy Hackers, Joanna Wiebe is the original conversion copywriter and a published novelist. She teaches copywriting on stages internationally, and she's sold more than 20,000 copies of her self-published Copy Hackers e-books. Joanna, what an honor to welcome you to the show, and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.

Joanna Wiebe: Well, thank you for having me on. I'm like, typical Canadian sounding girl, and as I'm listening to you, you sound so elegant, like I love the sound of your voice.

Susan Friedmann: Thank you, it's that British training, what can I tell you?

Joanna Wiebe: It's beautiful, yeah, I love it. Keep talking, you just talk, and I'm just going to sit here and listen, it'll be great.

Susan Friedmann: I know, people say, "Well, you could read the telephone book and I'd love it." We won't go there though.

Joanna Wiebe: Right? It's amazing. If it gets really bad, if we're hard up for material, then you can switch over to the telephone book, it'll be great.

Susan Friedmann: Joanna, you're known as a guru in conversion copywriting environment, but what exactly is conversion copywriting?

Joanna Wiebe: Oh lord, and I had to laugh when you said "guru" before, I was like, "Oh gosh, that's something to try to live up to." Conversion copywriting is really a throwback to the copywriting that the world started with, which was copy that was intended to get people to say yes in the short term, not just in the long term. Conversion copywriting is best understood

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against creative copywriting, which has kind of become sort of the standard since the 80s. The direct response copywriter moved to the back of the agency, a little dark room off to the side where the money is made, and the creative copywriters kind of stepped up and said, "Let's come up with interesting concepts, and we'll turn a tagline into like a three-year campaign," that kind of stuff is not what I work in.

I started as a creative copywriter, and didn't get the results that businesses need. When you work for an agency, that's one thing, but when you're a business of any kind, including a self-published person or a person who is making a go of selling their information, you need results, and that's where conversion copywriting is all about that. It's focused on getting the conversion, and that doesn't always mean a paid conversion, but it often means a paid conversion, that's what I most prefer to write to is, "Let's see, will this get people to buy?", but it can also mean, will it get them to give you their email address, will it get them to click through on the email to the landing page, where the next round of conversion copy will then get you to buy?

Yeah, conversion copywriting is there to get people to say yes, and that uses a lot of old school direct response copywriting techniques, a lot of persuasion techniques, and of course like putting that into a modern environment where you have to consider the user experience, mobile context and other spaces, where people might be at the point of conversion, but the context that they're in makes it difficult to convert. There's all of that stuff to consider with conversion copywriting, but the core difference is, yeah, it gets you to say yes.

Susan Friedmann: Then why do you think it's important for an author to be able to write copy?

Joanna Wiebe: Because you want to sell books. Actually, when I was, so I've published two fiction books traditionally with a traditional publisher, and I was surprised at how little copy was actually considered. This is nothing against the publisher, it was a small press and so you've only got so many marketers on the team, but how are you going to sell the book? Like the back of the book, the blurb, that's sales copy, it's not going to read like sales copy, but it has to get them to say yes to buying the book, or at least opening it to page 99 and seeing if it's worth a read. Copy sells books.

One of the greatest copywriters in the history of copywriters, his name was Gene Schwartz, he's deceased now, sadly, but Gene or Eugene, he

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wrote copy for other people's books, and then he got so good at it, he started writing his own books, just so he could write the sales page to sell the books, because he was so good at selling books using copy. That's exactly, like you need to sell books, so you need to write copy that sells books, that's the number one reason people should care about this.

Susan Friedmann: Let's talk about some fundamentals because this is such a huge subject, so what's the beginning point?

Joanna Wiebe: Start at the point of conversion, I say, so start there and work back. If you're like, "Okay, I'm selling my books on Amazon, Amazon is my sales page, I've got what could turn into a long form sales page as my sales page," so that's the point of conversion, that's where you click the buy now or add to Kindle or whatever that thing is, like buy with one click, it's a great place to start. Treat that as a space to optimize. What you have there today is not what you'll likely have there six months or a year from now. Unfortunately with Amazon, you can't, as far as I understand at this point, you can't AB test that landing page, you can't put one version together or keep the version you have now, and then write a different version and test those against each other by driving different traffic to it.

That's something that you can do with email and other stuff like that, but you can't do that with that sales page, so I still think you should start at that point of conversion. Again, for authors, that's generally going to be Amazon, if it's something else, okay fine, whatever that place is where they lick to buy or they choose not to click to buy, optimize that. I recommend that you treat that like a long form sales page. The first moment of resistance is always, "Wait, nobody reads online," I hear this constantly. Don't worry, if you say, "Nobody reads online," you are one of six billion people who say nobody reads online, and yet everything that gets sold online is sold after you've read stuff online, outside of buying an iPhone like 10 years ago.

That's like the one exception, you didn't need any sales copy whatsoever to buy an iPhone 10 years ago, today you need solid reasons to buy an iPhone and you'd need to perform better with a long form sales page. That's where you'd start, assess the page, look at it. Is it trying to get people to say yes? Is it, or is it trying to get them to understand the character or see what they might like about it? Of course when we're talking nonfiction, it's probably not a character, but what is it doing to compel people to move forward with buying your

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book? That's where I would start, is it doing anything at all to do that, or is it just a bunch of words on the page that were thrown there because you didn't know what else to put down, which is standard.

Susan Friedmann: You mentioned long form. There's always a conversation that goes on, should it be long, should it be short, what's an optimum length that one should be writing? How do you answer that?

Joanna Wiebe: It's the same question as like, "How long is piece of string?", like it's how long do you need it to be? That's difficult, and nobody likes hearing that. They're like, "Well, what am I going to do with that?", and that's perfectly valid, what are you going to do? Well, you're going to step back and say, "What is the conversation going on in my prospect's head when they arrive on this page, what brought them here?" Then immediately, people who are new to this go like, "Well, I've got a bunch of different people," one of them is like, my mom said that her son is writing these books, and her friends or her book club is coming over here.

Okay, I don't want you to look at every possible person who's coming to your page, I want you to look at the people you wrote the book for. If you wrote a book, if I write a copywriting book for SAAS founders, SAAS like software as a service, SAAS, if I write e-books for those people and books for those people, I am only going to write the sales page for SAAS founders. A copywriter may buy the book, a person who works for a dentist's office may buy the book, but I'm not writing it for them. I'm going to start by saying, "Okay, this is my target audience, what is the conversation going on in their head when they arrive on this page? What is," and this is generally the best place to start, is, "What is the problem or the pain that they're trying to solve?"

If you don't know where else to start, start with their pain or problem, start there, that's a great place to start, because chances are good you're going to be able to convert people who are feeling a pain. As long as you can match that pain they're feeling, help them feel it, and then help them understand that your book is the solution to that pain. What I just said there is a framework, a really simple framework that I follow almost every time I write copy, and it's called problem, agitation, solution, or PAS. You open, you join the conversation around their pain or their problem, so that means your headline, your intro copy, all the stuff at the top of the page is talking about the problem that they face.

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If you have the little book blurb, your blurb, which is like, I mean on the Amazon page, not necessarily on the back of your book, but maybe also on the back of your book, that opening hook is their problem, the first line is the problem they're feeling. The second sentence that follows that is an agitation of that feeling, so whatever that initial problem is, next, use specifics to bring it to life. I mean like, you have found the pain you've found, next, you poke at it. That's your job, is to poke at it. Your job is not to immediately solve it, they have to first feel the pain. You poke at that pain until you know they're feeling it, that might take two or three sentences, whatever it takes, you do not cut that copy.

You can cut the solution copy more than you can cut the problem and agitation copy, so open with the problem, agitate that until they are feeling it, and then tell them there's a solution, and help them understand that your book is the solution. That's where you start when you're putting your new long form sales page together.

Susan Friedmann:

That's a great little formula to remember, thank you. How about the research? You said you've really got to know and understand your prospects' pain, and then obviously agitate it, but what kind of research do you do before you sort of start attempting any kind of conversion copywriting?

Joanna Wiebe:

There's a variety of spaces you can go to do the research to identify those messages you're looking for, because one of the core parts of being a conversion copywriter or caring about conversion is that you're not going to sit there and stare at the page and try to come up with stuff, that's what a creative copywriter does. Again, I don't mean any harm or offense against creative copywriters, I was one, I totally get it, I just moved away from it. I know why you do it, I know the thoughts that are going on, and I know that there's a valid reason to have creative copywriters around, but for us, when we're worried about converting people, getting them to say yes today, right now, get out their credit card, say yes right now, then the research that we want to do is what will lead to those messages.

We don't want to start with our own words, we want to go out and find the words to use. This might sound like kind of a pain in the butt like, "Oh, it's just going to be easier for me to just sit here and type out what I know about my prospects." Okay, good luck with that, or you probably already tried that, and how did that work out for you, did it produce great results, are you beyond happy with what you're getting? If you're not, and there's always room to optimize, optimization is an ongoing

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process that never ends, so what else can you do? You can go out and you can listen to your prospects and swipe what they say, and use that as your copy.

The research that you do could happen in any number of ways. It could be that if I write a book for technical co-founder of a SAAS business, if I sit down for coffee with a technical co-founder of a SAAS business, then that's a form of interview, like if I were to record that and then have it transcribed, I could go through that and identify some of the problems and challenges that that person told me about. Interviews are a great place, casual conversations are a great place to do that research. Doing formal surveys, another great way to do the research, all sorts of things. My favorite way to do research, without question, because it's fast and it's relatively reliable, what you're looking for when you're doing the research is not a consensus for what you should say or what the problem is that your prospects are feeling, so you don't need a lot of quantity.

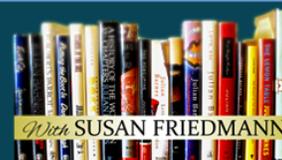
You're looking for messages. It might be that one person in six billion people, one person says one thing that becomes your headline, because you're not looking for the message that's most likely to please everybody, that's usually going to be a deluded, sad message that ends up pleasing nobody. What you want to look for when you're doing the research is, you want to listen for messages that sound raw, that make you pause, that make you go like, "What do you mean by that?" I like to think of it as you're walking along or you're kind of rolling along, and you hit Velcro, you hit the thing that's like sticky suddenly, and you have to kind of peel yourself back from it and then take a look at it. That's what we're looking for when we're listening for our message.

Because we're just looking for these statements, these phrases that are out there that our prospects and customers are saying, we can go to a space like Amazon, look up our product or products that are similar to ours, or products that your prospect hired to do the job your book is supposed to do. This doesn't have to be on Amazon either, this can be on Yelp, it can be on Trip Advisor, if that makes sense for what you're doing, like if you're writing a book about how to be a great travel agent, let's say, you might go over to Trip Advisor, look through some of the reviews and see what some problems are that people have that your book could solve for them.

Point is, you're going into the reviews, the actual reviews that people are writing about different products, sometimes yours, sometimes

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other ones, and you're looking for those sticky messages. The internet is filled with great reviews, not necessarily great comments on blog posts or YouTube videos or anything like that, but a lot of great reviews on a lot of these sites that are out there. My recommendation is to go there to a review site, and do the work, sit down for an hour, and it'll fly by, it'll be painful, but it'll fly by, and listen for those messages, that's where you start.

Susan Friedmann: I love going to reviews and reading them, because you're absolutely right, they say things that you're like, "Oh yes, that seems the most obvious thing to say, but yet it wasn't top of mind for me," but once I read it, I'm like, "Yeah, that's sticky."

Joanna Wiebe: Yeah, exactly. People are saying in their reviews, they'll confess things, like their expectation, their hopes, the problems they were trying to solve, but really some emotional stuff too that when you're tasked with the job of trying to feel, like if I say, "Okay, write something emotional, write something that makes you feel something about your prospect," that's hard. We tend to look for obvious emotions like, "Oh, I want to feel happy, or I'm so disappointed," but they're going to get into some emotional language that will blow open doors for you, where you have a new level of empathy, and that's at the core of any creative or conversion copywriter, you have to have that empathy. Yeah, they're revealing so much in these reviews, it's such a goldmine. Everything I write, I start with an Amazon review, without question.

Susan Friedmann: That's good to know, now I know where you get all your secrets from.

Joanna Wiebe: It all comes from there, no secret whatsoever, yep.

Susan Friedmann: Mistakes, our listeners love hearing mistakes, I'm sure you could write a book on mistakes. What are some of the top ones that we ought to know about?

Joanna Wiebe: Listening to bad advice. You're like, "Well crap, Joanna, what if you're full of bad advice?" Could be, but I test like a crazy person, so a lot of what I say is supported, but there's a lot of information out there about how to write copy. People know this when they write books, there's also information about that, and you can try it someone else's way and go, "That didn't work at all for me," and that's true with copywriting too. Don't take anything you read or hear out there as the gospel, and make sure you're listening to an authority, someone who's actually cared and gone down the path of doing this kind of work for a crap ton of

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industries, audiences, all of it, not just someone who knows that people are searching the term "copywriting" or "how to write a sales page", they put together a blog post so they can get traffic to sell you something else later.

I would just be really careful about the sources where you're getting information that's guiding what you're going to write, that's number one. People make a lot of mistakes by saying like, "Oh, I read copy is always supposed to be short, or a headline should only be six words long, or you should never have an even number in your headline." That's a lot of crap that's out there, be careful before you start treating it like it's the gospel, because your audience and the way that you sell your product could be completely different, and you might be really closing the door on some cool opportunities to write big, bold, crazy copy that gets people to really notice it and then say yes.

That's number one, the number one mistake. Second mistake is looking to yourself for your own message. Never, even if you wrote the book for yourself, do not write your copy, and that includes your emails, your ads, your landing pages, all of it, don't sit down and depend on your own brain to write that copy. You might be the world's greatest writer, copywriting has very little to do with how you put the words together, like how you put phrases together, how you string sentences together into paragraphs, it's not about elegance at all, it's not about you sitting down and being a writer here, it's not about you sitting down and having this creative mind. It is fully about you listening, the best copy will always come after you listen. Listen first, and then be a better copy editor than you are a copywriter. Those are the two biggies.

Susan Friedmann: Wow. I'm exhausted just listening to this.

Joanna Wiebe: I know, I'm tired too. Ugh, someone else do it for me. I'm just kidding.

Susan Friedmann: That's a great segue, by the way. At what point do you, let's say, hire somebody to do the copywriting or the conversion copywriting for you, versus struggling to do it yourself?

Joanna Wiebe: It's a toss up for me on this one. In most cases, I fully believe that you should write your own copy, and that's because the world, and I hate to say this because people who are copywriters hear it and go, "That's not fair," and I get it, but I have, in 15 years of doing this and working online for the last 10 of them, I've met a lot of people who call themselves copywriters, they're not. You have to be able to hire a copywriter who

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actually is a copywriter, that's really hard to do, it's hard to identify. I think because like their price alone, that's not enough to separate them and say, "Oh, well they charge me \$100 an hour, so they must be good." Nope, that doesn't have to be true at all, so I hesitate to tell anybody who doesn't have a big budget and a lot of time to hire a copywriter.

I strongly recommend, this is why I teach so much on Copy Hackers, is because I strongly believe that because you care about your product, because you care, you have the heart, you want to make this work, if that's true for you, you're already in a better position than most copywriters are to write your copy. Next comes the part where you just learn how to do it, and once you learn how to do it, you will never lose that skill, and you'll be able to use it for everything. I mean, if you decide that you no longer want to self-publish, or you feel like you have a book that's ready to go huge, and you don't know that self-publishing will help you do that.

Let's just pretend, let's put that out there and say like okay, you're a great writer, you might find that the marketing side takes up so much of your time that one day, maybe you'll let a traditional publisher publish for you, so you can get inside airports and things like that, whatever that might be. If you ever get to that place where you want to do that, you're going to have to pitch, you're pitching your book, you're pitching to get an agent, and then you're reviewing your agent's pitch before he or she sends it off to the publishers, and that's copy, that will be a sales page for your book. It'll be written like a sales letter, but that's copy too.

You'll see that every single thing you do to sell your book, whether traditionally published or published on your own, every part of that, if you know how to write copy that gets people to say yes, you have dramatically simplified your life, and probably made yourself a hell of a lot richer too. I strongly believe that it's the best way to spend your time, especially if you already care about words and you care about selling your book, you're the best one to write your copy, you just need those copywriting skills now.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent, and this is a great segue into letting our listeners know how they can find out more about you, your services, the products that you have to offer. Take it away.

Joanna Wiebe: We teach people through courses how to write copy that converts, and it's based again on AB testing, you don't have to know what AB testing is to know that AB testing is the way that you identify whether something

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is likely to perform well again or not. We take what we've learned over 15 years for me, and then plus the team and things like that, the other people that we bring in to help us with our courses too, and we know other experts, we teach you through courses. We don't do copywriting, again, I don't believe that anybody should hire me outside of the larger enterprises that do, but for smaller businesses, you should be writing your own copy without question, and that's what we help you do over at Copy Hackers.

Our software, Air Story, is going to have built in training very very soon as well, so we're definitely doing our best to help people who want to sell more using their words actually do that.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent. It gives you a lot of confidence, and I know that you're very generous with your time and you've got a Tuesday tutorial online. I always walk away with something I can use from that. Thank you for your generosity there.

Joanna Wiebe: Sure.

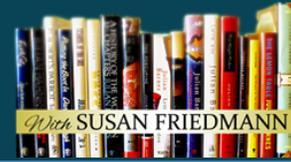
Susan Friedmann: Joanna, if you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what might that be?

Joanna Wiebe: I think understanding everything that's been said, the next golden nugget, the thing that is likely to make your copy shine, even if you kind of suck at it, even if you're like, early on you're like, "Oh my gosh," this is going to sound kind of trite, but be specific. Fill your copy, go heavy on specifics, don't pull back. We tend to be vague, we tend to try to summarize in order to please most people, but if you can be really specific, like if you decided to write an email to a list that you're trying to build, you send out an email about why you wrote that book, or you send out an email to them about the struggle you had getting a chapter out, or impostor syndrome or whatever it is, or you write these as blog posts or whatever it might be, specifics will instantly make everything you write more readable, they hook people.

Specific, I mean getting into the details, like instead of saying, "This morning, I was eating a bowl of cereal while looking out the window," what were you eating? This morning, so you can say, "It was 10 a.m., I woke up late, I was noshing on some Fruit Loops," like whatever that is, but bring people in with those specifics that you already know as a writer, you already know that specifics do very well, apply that to your copy, and it will get far more readable than copy that is not specific.

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- Susan Friedmann: It sounds as if you're painting a picture of everything that's going on in your life, would that be correct?
- Joanna Wiebe: Yeah, and whatever that might be. It might be everything to do with the chapter, like inside a chapter, or for a sales page, if you want to agitate people's pain, you open with that problem that they have, and then you want to make them feel it, they'll only feel things when you get specific with it. When they can visualize it, yes, when you think about visualizing as well as if they can somehow, there are other senses you can bring into play. Whatever you can do to stimulate their mind, we are all predisposed to ignoring. If you know that people are going to ignore you, your goal is to do things that make them not ignore you, and that means lighting up different parts of their brain, which you can do by creating visuals like word pictures and doing something that feels like tactile language, using onomatopoeia every so often, things like that that we already do to try to pull people in and excite them, but know that people have a far easier time walking away from you than they do choosing to sit with you, so you have to do things that make them want to stick with you, and getting specific will do that.
- Susan Friedmann: Excellent. Well, 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. I sincerely hope that it sparked some ideas that you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.