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BOOK MARKETING: How to Use Content Curation to Build Your Expert Authority Interview with Mel Wicks

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 copywriting and content curation expert. Mel Wicks has had a long career in marketing, advertising, and the media in both Australia and the UK. She's worked in advertising as a marketing manager for multi-million dollar development companies. She co-owned a marketing and business consultancy for over 10 years and is now a seasons freelance copywriter and certified content marketer, doing what she really loves best, and that's writing blogs and websites for her clients around the world.

She lives on the beach. And listen to this, folks. In Cannes in beautiful tropical North Queensland with her husband and two dogs. Mel, it's really so exciting to have you on the show all the way from Queensland, Australia where it's really already tomorrow morning.

Mel Wicks: It is. Thank you, thank you, Susan. Yes, it is. Good morning, America.

Susan Friedmann: Thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor. This is so strange. And as I said to you earlier, finding the time to make sure that we were on the same ... That I knew that it was the right time, that I'm speaking to you and you're the next day, you're already ... what is it? I don't know. Whatever. Whatever it is.

Mel Wicks: It's very universal, because it's the fourth of the fourth of 2019 as I sit here today.

Susan Friedmann: Wow. Mel, the first question I have to ask is exactly what is content curation? Because I'd never heard of it before and that's actually what piqued my interest when I first discovered you on the smart blogger website. So, talk to us about what this is exactly.

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Mel Wicks: Sure. It's not really a mystery when you break it down. Content curation is really about finding and filtering existing content around the web that you then share with your audience. And that's really, in its simplest form, that's what it's about. We've all shared stuff on social media. We've all seen the funny dog videos and shared it on our own Facebook page 'cause we thought our friends would enjoy it, too. That's content curation in its really simplest form. But I guess the trick to becoming a really good and effective content curator is to add value to that content, to add value to your audience's lives.

You're not just taking content and dumping it in their lap. You're making their life better as a result of sharing that content.

Susan Friedmann: Let's talk more about that, that whole idea of bringing value to your audience with this content curation. Talk to us more about that.

Mel Wicks: I think there's something like three million blog posts written every day. And if you just stop and think about that figure, that in itself is quite scary. No one can possibly have time to read everything. If you're doing research on Google and you put in whatever it is you're looking for, it comes up with a myriad of different things and you've got to start plowing through stuff that's really not helpful to you. Then you go and look at another article or another website. Here's an analogy. If you consider there's only one radio station in the world that played every sort of music you can imagine and it had all the talk back shows ever made, let's call it Radio Google, and your passion is country music. But finding that country music on Radio Google is a nightmare, because it's so hard to find amongst the noise of everything else.

So, along comes a smaller independent radio station that's dedicated to nothing but country music. It has interviews with country stars. It has news about coming gigs that you might want to go to. Everything that you want to know about country music, it's all curated in one place for people like yourself to enjoy. Now, which radio station are you gonna listen to? You're gonna go straight to the country music radio station and bypass the big noise out there. If you can do that, if you can build an audience around your content curation and say, "I'm bringing this to you. This is adding value to your life," you're gonna build credibility. You're gonna build authority. You're gonna become the go to person in your niche. That's the real value of it.

Susan Friedmann: And that's fantastic, 'cause that fits in really well with a message that I love to share with our listeners, and that is all of niche marketing and

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the importance of that. So, this sort of again helps you be seen as that expert. Having a book, which is what many of our listeners have as you know, they look to become an expert in their particular area. So, this is adding to that as well. Would you agree with that?

Mel Wicks: Absolutely. Absolutely. And a lot of people say, "Well, why would I share other people's content? Isn't that just giving them the exposure and it's not saying anything about me?" But you're wrong. What you're saying by sharing other people's content, and I'd like to preface this by saying I would never suggest you do nothing but content curation and not create your own original content. I think it's about getting that balance right. But when you share other people's content, what you're saying to your audience is, "I want to bring you the very best content that's gonna add value to your life, and if someone else has written something that I think will add value, then I'm gonna bring it to you."

So, it gives you that credibility that you're not just forcing your own opinions and voice down their throat. You're bringing the best of the best from around the web to them.

Susan Friedmann: I like to think I do that with the people that I interview.

Mel Wicks: Exactly. And there you go. You are a content curator through your podcast. That's exactly what you're doing.

Susan Friedmann: Wow. I've never thought about that. And something that we talked about earlier, as I said to you, I found you through an article in Smart Blogger that you wrote all about content curation, and I was like, "I've never heard of this. This is so wonderful." I asked you whether I can use that on the post for this particular episode and you said yes. And that's content curation. Wow. It's as easy as that.

Mel Wicks: It is, it is. Because what you're doing is you're bringing something of value to your audience that you didn't create. If you're providing a link back to my article, you're saying to your audience, "Hey, go read this. I think you'll get something out of it." That then makes you a really good trusted source of information for them. They go, "Hey, Susan suggested I read this. I think I'll go and have a look. She usually makes good recommendations." That's exactly what it's about.

Susan Friedmann: I like that.

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- Mel Wicks: It makes you a trend spotter. When you do this over time and you're focusing very much on content in your niche, content that's going to appeal to your audience, you really start to identify trends and identify who the great content creators are, what's happening in your niche. It actually puts you ahead of the game, which I think is another huge benefit of content curation. You've always got your finger on the pulse of it if you do it properly.
- Susan Friedmann: Do you actually go out and look for this information? How would you go about finding it?
- Mel Wicks: That's actually the easy part. It sounds really overwhelming, where on earth do you start to find content that your audience is going to love when, as I said, there's three million blog posts a day being written. But there are so many tools out there now that are set up to help you do exactly that. And in fact, if your listeners do go to the post that I wrote, there's a list I think of about 20 tools there that can help. But I'm talking about tools like the one I use, which isn't necessarily the best, it's just the best for me. I think everyone has to make their own mind up about that. But the one I use is Feedly. It's an app that I go into, I can set up, I can put in blogs that I follow and it will immediately bring in the latest blog posts from those blogs.
- I can put in subjects. So, I might say I want to, anything that's been written on copywriting, for example. It'll bring in all the latest blog posts and articles on copywriting. It's just a collation point. So, I go into it every morning. And I actually lie in bed with a cup of tea, it's the first thing I do every morning. And I have, takes me about 30 minutes. I go through my Feedly feed and I click on headlines and articles that I think look interesting, and I can in fact then go direct from that article and then share it on Twitter or Facebook or wherever I want to share it. It's actually that simple. But there's more layers to it than that. But in terms of finding content, that's the easy part and there are loads and loads of tools to help you do that. So, it's not scary.
- Susan Friedmann: Which is nice. We don't want to do anything scary. Don't like to scare our listeners.
- Mel Wicks: Absolutely not.
- Susan Friedmann: You talked about original content versus this content curation. Is there a percentage of time that you should do original work versus sharing

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other people's work? How does that work? What have you found works best?

Mel Wicks: I think everyone again has to find their own level and that will only come over time of doing it for yourself. But there is a little rule of thumb for people just starting out, and it's not a bad rule of thumb, that it should be about 60/40. And that's 60% content curation to 40% content creation. If you want a guideline, that would be my best guideline. That came from a fairly sort of scientific article, which I think is linked from that blog post I wrote on Smart Blogger, I think you'll find there's a reference to that article in there that explains that rule.

Susan Friedmann: Again, so within your article, you've done some content curation for somebody else's advice.

Mel Wicks: The entire article is probably a really good example of content curation, because what I've done is I have given examples of everything I've talked about. If I'm talking about, "This is how you should do this part of content curation," I give an example and I link to it. So, the entire post is a curation of examples of how to content curate, if that makes sense.

Susan Friedmann: It does. And it's original because you're the only one who's taken all this information and put it together, so that makes it an original piece. Is that correct?

Mel Wicks: That's right. Again, if you Google content curation, you'll find however many thousands of different articles on the subject. What I tried to do was just add greater value to any other article by covering off, I think we called it the ultimate guide. I think it's about 7500 words, which is very long for a blog post. But when you're writing something as comprehensive as that, the word count shouldn't matter. This should be a really evergreen piece of writing that gets bookmarked and hangs around for a while, because it's a really good reference source for anyone who wants to startup or learn a bit more about the practice of content curation.

Susan Friedmann: That's fantastic. So, the difference between content curation and content marketing, because that's a term that I think people are more familiar with. What would you say in terms of differentiating the two?

Mel Wicks: I think content curation is part of content marketing. If you like content marketing, sits like an umbrella over the top, and underneath content marketing, you've got things like curation, you've got blog writing,

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you've got social media marketing, you've got websites, email marketing, podcasts, you name it. There's a myriad of different ways that you could market yourself, and I think content marketing is really just, let's be honest, it's about marketing yourself online. It differs to traditional pre Internet marketing in that I think it's more about building relationships and understanding your audience, 'cause it's much more of a two way street than it used to be before the Internet came along.

But really that's, content marketing is about marketing yourself online and underneath that umbrella are all the different ways you can do that and the different disciplines that fall under content marketing. I hope that makes sense.

Susan Friedmann: Oh, it certainly does, and that's fascinating. You talked about tools before, you mentioned Feedly. What are some other popular tools that will help automate this process?

Mel Wicks: There are hundreds. One of the things about writing this post was the research. I think the whole post took me about three or four months to write, mainly because of the research that I had to do. I filtered it down to, and again, filtering. It's a great discipline within content curation. I can talk about that a bit later, but I filtered down the tools to the ones that I thought would be most useful to Jon Morrow's audience on Smart Blogger, because they're all, they tend to be bloggers who are just starting up. So, they don't have a lot of money to spend on expensive tools. So, I tried to find ones that were free or that had a free trial period, and I divided them up into, I think ... Let me remember. I said they were tools for really sourcing and collating content, which are the tools like Feedly, which is where you just literally go and it's just, it is the dumping ground if you like of, "Here's all the content that relates to your niche, and here's the tool."

So, sort of Feedly is one. Inner Reader is another. Again, I think your listeners need to go and have a look at the list of tools that I put on there. But the next category I think was, there was a category on tools that can actually help you source content and then directly put it into an email newsletter. Now, a lot of content curators use e-newsletters as their distribution method for their content curation. So, they go around the web, they find content they believe will be of value. They put it into an email newsletter, and then they send that off to their database. Well, there are tools that will let you do that within the app. You can just create the newsletter in the app, source the content from within the

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app, put the whole thing together, and send it out. There are those sorts of tools as well.

There are tools for sharing curated content on social media, so again, you can source the content and then direct from that app, you can spread it out across all your social media platforms. There's the tools that do just about everything, including the washing up. But they are the ones for the really almost professional content curators, 'cause they're quite expensive. I did list a couple and I said quite expensive, I think they were about sort of \$60 a month or something as a subscription fee. But they do everything. They collate the information, they send it, they distribute it, they do reports, they do everything.

But those ones I would suggest you leave to one side until you're quite proficient in curation, yes.

Susan Friedmann: Let's talk about filtering. You mentioned that, so don't want to leave our listeners hanging. How do you exactly go about filtering?

Mel Wicks: Well, as I said, sourcing the content is the easy part. But anyone can go out and find a bucket load of content with the tools. They really can. It's very easy. But unless you add that sort of filter of human analysis to the content you're sharing, or to the content that you then sort of sort through, you're not adding value to your audience. What you don't want to do is just dump content in their lap. You need to filter what you find. When I, for example, go to Feedly in the morning with my cup of tea and I go through, it's really [inaudible 00:17:15] of headlines that grab me and I think, "Oh, that sounds interesting. I'll go and have a look at that."

And I'll start, you skim through and then you start to read a bit more and you think, "This is good." I think in terms of how you filter is you really have to ask yourself some key questions. Like for example, "Is it well written? Or is it well produced?" If it's a podcast interview, is it professional, does it read well? Is it relevant to my audience? Again, if you've written a book on parenting, you're not gonna share a blog post about early retirement. It doesn't make sense. It's always got to be relevant. You've always got to satisfy that need or curiosity of your audience. I think is it timely, was it written 10 years ago? And sometimes something that was written 10 years ago is still very relevant. So, it's timely doesn't mean was it written yesterday, it means is it still relevant to my audience.

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A lot of people these days are updating old content as well, so some times you can have a blog post that was written several years ago that's recently been updated, and that makes it very fresh and relevant again. You need to look at that sort of thing. I think you also need to ask yourself, "Is it in the context of everything else I'm curating," and again, you wouldn't suddenly put out a funny dog video if what you've been curating in the past is all about recipes for single moms. It's all got to make sense to your audience and to your niche and the context of what you're doing.

And I guess the final one is, "Does it reflect well on me and my brand that I'm trying to create online? Is this saying something about me?" If you kind of apply those questions as your filter, if something falls out the other end and you've got a tick against all of them, then go ahead and share it, as long as you then add value and that's gonna stick.

Susan Friedmann: Yes. It's all about value, as you rightly say. And something, when you talked about timely, it reminded me that every time that I go about writing some original content, I want to be in that area of what I call evergreen material that, as you say, you can read it five years from now, or ten years from now, and it'll still be relevant.

Mel Wicks: That's right.

Susan Friedmann: That's one of my filters when it comes to writing. Let's talk about some common mistakes that people make in this arena.

Mel Wicks: I think one of the first ones is that they jump in boots and all and get very excited about it, and they start to curate, and then it sort of drops off and life gets in the way. So, there's not consistency to it. I think if you look at the really great content curators, and again there's examples in that post I wrote, they're all very consistent. Some of them literally put out daily emails of curated content. Now, I wouldn't for a moment suggest that anyone starts by, that could create a monster. But I would certainly suggest possibly weekly to start with that you aim to put something out, and that can be as simple as sharing something on your Facebook post or Twitter or whatever social media platform you prefer. Once a week at least. Throw something up and say to people, "Hey, look. I found this. I thought you'd enjoy it for these reasons," and go from there, and build up.

But if you're doing it on social media, you can be a bit ad hoc about it, because obviously it's like when things come up, you can't always

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anticipate when great things are gonna come up that you want to share. But if you're doing it in an email newsletter, which a lot of people do do this way, then you really need to be consistent in terms of the day you send your email newsletter and the time. You want to train your audience to anticipate its arrival, is what I'm getting at. A lot of people, for example, put out a weekly or even a monthly email newsletter that says, "Hey, this is the best of what I've found around the web this month or this week that I thought would add some value to your life or tell you a bit more about parenting," or whatever the niche is.

I think if you're doing an email newsletter, make sure it's very regular. Social media can be a bit more ad hoc. I think one of the other mistakes that people make is that they think it's going to save them time. If you Google content curation, have a look at a lot of the articles, you'll find that they all say, "Content curation is great 'cause it saves you time, 'cause all you've got to do is whack out other people's content and Bob's you're uncle, you've got an email newsletter or social media post." Yes, it can. If you use the right tools, it can certainly save you time in terms of finding the material. What takes you time is filtering it, and then adding value and making sure that you explain to your audience why you believe they should read it. Don't just throw it at them and say, "Here it is. I enjoyed it. You read it." Tell them why. Tell them why it fits into their life.

And it can be as simple as taking a quote from the piece and putting that in as your introduction and saying, "This is what this piece is all about." The really good content curators go a bit deeper than that and they'll actually give you a brief overview. You don't want to put too much in, 'cause otherwise people don't have the need to actually go and read the original piece. You want to put enough in to make people say, "I really have to read this." That takes time. So, don't get into content curation if you think you can spend more time sitting back drinking a beer and watching the football. That's not what it's about.

Susan Friedmann: That's not what it's about.

Mel Wicks: No.

Susan Friedmann: So, Mel, I know that our listeners would love to hear more about your services and how they can possibly get hold of you.

Mel Wicks: Well, I have a website called TheCraftofCopywriting.com, which is probably the best point of contact. You can get to me on my email

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address, which I'm happy to give out, is Mel@TheCraftofCopywriting.com. My core services are probably I write a lot of blog posts. I do a lot of writing for Jon Morrow at Smart Blogger. So, I write about writing and I write about content marketing. And I'm hesitating as I say it because my own blog, I do have a blog on my website, I actually haven't had time to put a post up for about six months. So, I don't practice what I preach, folks. I've just been so busy with client work, I haven't had time to write my own content.

Susan Friedmann: That's a great position to be in. A great position to be in.

Mel Wicks: It is, but I always feel slightly embarrassed when I tell people they really should write regularly and keep that blog up to date. But I do write, I write a lot for Smart Blogger, and I write for a couple of other ... I do a lot of ghost writing, if that makes sense. It's where I write blog posts for websites and they get published Under the website owner's name or the company name. Which I'm very comfortable in doing. I tend to charge more for that, because obviously I don't get the exposure that someone like Jon gives me. And I just love writing, so I don't care. If someone wants to pay me to write a post, that's fine. So, I write a lot of blog posts. I write a lot of website content. I work with people to help them create their sort of story and brand and make sure their website looks great, and tells the right story, and encourages people to dig deeper into the site. That's kind of me. I do a little bit of social media management, but more the writing side of things.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent. And we'll put links to all of that in the episode when we post it as well. Before I let you go, Mel, if you were going to leave our listeners with a golden nugget, what would that be?

Mel Wicks: Dear. I feel like the guru now.

Susan Friedmann: You are. You are, my dear.

Mel Wicks: Look, I think a lot of people get very intimidated by the concept of marketing, especially content marketing, 'cause it's still relatively new. A lot of people don't really understand what content marketing is. I think it's full of very sort of secret techniques and buzzwords, and people think you have to study it for years to understand it. But let's take content curation as an example. We've all done it. We all do it. It's just a matter of being formal and putting some structure around it to make it actually really work for you as a marketing technique. That's the

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different. I think in essence, there's no great secret to marketing. I think honestly it's about building relationships and making yourself likable.

And when I say likable, if you think about it, when was the last time you actually handed over your hard earned cash to a business or a person that you didn't instinctively like or trust? And look, we probably say whenever you fill up your car with gas, it doesn't matter whether you like them or not. But I bet you you've had an experience at a gas station where, I don't know, someone might've come out and wiped down your windshield, or they might've given you a big smile as you paid, and you kind of think, "I'll go back to them. I like them." And that's what it's all about. It's about being liked.

Susan Friedmann: Likability.

Mel Wicks: Yeah. If you just have that in mind, whenever you're out there marketing yourself, whether you're writing a social media post or a blog post, or you're doing a podcast, or you're reaching out to an influencer in your niche, just be authentic, and be yourself, and be likable. And people will respond. And I think that's what marketing is.

Susan Friedmann: I love it. I try and do that all the time. Doesn't always succeed, but hey, give it a true. So Mel, all the way from Australia, who is in tomorrow land already, so thank you. Thank you so much. For sharing your wisdom with us here today. And thank you all for taking precious time out of your 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.