

Writing website copy that connects and converts

A webinar with Heather Lutze and Patrice Rhoades-Baum

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Heather: I'm Heather Lutze, and today we have a bonus teleseminar with Patrice Rhoades-Baum. She is a brilliant writer and branding expert, and I'm going to let her tell us a little bit something more about herself. Thanks for joining us, Patrice.

Patrice: Wow, Heather, thank you so much. Yes, I am a marketing consultant and branding expert, and I specialize in teaming with small businesses and solopreneurs, specifically to first clarify your brand. Then from that point on, I usher people through the process to create your marketing toolkit. I consider the primary components of the marketing toolkit to be your website, your company brochure or speaker one-sheet, and your stationery package (your business cards, letterhead, notecard and so forth).

Heather: Sure.

Patrice: With this powerful, compelling, polished, professional marketing toolkit, I really view that as your foundation – or your launchpad – to promote and grow your business. Part and parcel to that is I write website copy for folks. I've been writing website copy, Heather, since Al Gore invented the Internet. Remember that?

Heather: The information superhighway?

Patrice: Yep. I've been writing website copy for, lo, these many years. That's what we're here to talk about today.

Heather: Great. I was having a conversation this morning with a frustrated client, because they've done all the beautiful design work and now they are firmly at the door of a bunch of pages they have to write for their website. Since you've been so instrumental in helping my clients through the years, I wanted to get you on the phone and really talk about your approach to writing website copy. How can someone who's not a professional copywriter take on this task?

Patrice: Yeah, that's a really good point, because the thing is, a lot of marketing teams or small business owners are not professional copywriters. When you're looking at the website, there are a couple of different things going on. First of all, it's marketing copy, and most people are not expert marketing copywriters. Second, it is a website, so there's all these usability issues with embedded links and H1 tags and things that can get a bit frightening or overwhelming.

Then third, people grapple with perspective and objectivity. That's why it's a challenging project. Anyone who's grappling with writing their own website copy, don't feel like you're the only one. It really is a big project. It's outside of most people's comfort level. But it's very doable.

The biggest piece of advice I have for folks, Heather, is to approach it in two steps. If you already have a website and you're updating it or if you're writing new copy the two steps still apply. My two steps are first, you write your copy or you edit and update it with your marketing hat on. You write really powerful, targeted, benefit-driven copy that speaks directly to your target market. Heather, you know all about WIIFM, right?

Heather: Mm-hmm.

Patrice: WIIFM is “What's In It For Me?” People come to your website. They're listening to radio station WIIFM (what's in it for me?), and they want to know the answer, right off the bat. They're not interested in the fact that your company was created in 1989 and we've offered the very best, blah, blah, blah.

They want to get right to it. They want to know what's in it for me. Your body copy, your headline, your call to action really needs to be very benefit driven. Again, whether you're editing existing website copy or writing new copy from scratch the first step I do is focus on strong, clear, benefit messages.

Heather: Maybe even sit down and say, “I'm a writer today.” But they don't have to go lock themselves away somewhere in the mountains, and become Ernest Hemingway. People can have a lot of weird ideas.

Patrice: It can be daunting, but you know your business. Think about your clients. Here's what I always advise people to do: Put on the client hat. In the copy, you're talking directly to a client. What is it that they need? What are their needs and challenges? What are they looking for?

Be empathetic about what they're looking for, what they need. Put on the client hat instead of getting caught up in, “Oh, it's hard. It's overwhelming.” Really think about the people who come to your website because they need something. They have a struggle or challenge or problem. There's a need there – and you are uniquely positioned to meet that need, to take care of their challenge. Anyway, there's that two-step process I do. One is I'm wearing the customer hat. I'm writing the copy really directly to that customer.

Next step, put on your SEO hat. Now you're going back and you're optimizing copy. Heather, I love that SEO is search engine *optimization*. It's not search engine *content*. It's search engine *optimization*. Your goal is to optimize the copy to get those search engine robots to know who you are, to find you, and to bring people to you.

There are two different things going on. One is writing the benefit-oriented copy so that when people do get there they're empowered and ready and willing to buy your product and service. And then there's the search engine robots who are bringing those perfect prospects to your website.

Heather: You have to speak to a robot to get to a customer to visit your website, but once the customer gets there you have to then have something meaningful to say and something that's going to keep them on that page.

Patrice: Absolutely.

Heather: A lot of my clients, they want to speak to the robots. For example, if you put 800 keywords on a web page, that's not going to help. It's a horrible user experience. We've all been on those pages that look like someone went to town with a keyword tool.

Patrice: The copy's almost unreadable.

Heather: Exactly.

Patrice: Keyword phrase, blah, blah, blah, keyword phrase, blah, blah, blah. To the real-live human being – the customer who will purchase your product or service – this doesn't mean anything.

Heather: For a long time when I first started in this business, Patrice, that worked to a certain extent because Google's algorithm wasn't as sophisticated as it is today. Now it's so much more sophisticated. That's why it's so important to take to heart what you're saying: write for benefit messages first, for the customer, the buyer. Then optimize. I really like that.

Patrice: I love that when I'm reading about Google's new algorithm, especially the new and significant algorithm update, Hummingbird, I love that the goal is simply to make the search engine robots more like real human beings. For those of us who are writing the website copy, we don't have to rely on tricks. We're not relying on gamesmanship. We write the website copy the way it needs to be written to convey the compelling benefit messages – for the real-live human beings, which the search engine robots are also going to appreciate.

Heather: Let's move on to another topic that's near and dear to my heart. I train my Findability University students to use the HTBLI method to incorporate organic keywords: Insert the keyword phrase in the HEADLINE, the TITLE in the browser window, through the BODY copy, in the LINKS, and in the IMAGES (the name of the image as well as your alt text).

Patrice, when you go to do this on your web pages, can you give me some insight into how to balance that with your philosophy around writing?

Patrice: Again, because you start with step one. You really make sure your copy is benefit-driven and on-target. Period. Make sure the copy works. Now, and I love your approach here, Heather, you optimize the web content with the HTBLI approach.

You go back into the copy and optimize by placing keyword phrases in the title, that title in the browser window, the headline, the body copy, a little bit of link. The anchor text linked within the body copy, and then, to your point, also the images: the filename on the images and alt tag. That's really smart. And then, in addition, I know that there are weak points in websites that a lot of people tend to overlook. When I write website copy, in addition to that I'm also going after some places that I think are overlooked opportunities.

The two favorite ones are the contact page and the success pages. A lot of times on the contact page you go to a website and it's well written, it's compelling, and there are pictures and imagery, and there's all this really great, robust stuff going on throughout the website.

Then you get to the contact page and it says, "Contact page," and there's a form. There's no text. There's no key messaging. There's no benefit messaging. There's nothing warm that says,

"As we've been saying, here's our key resonating benefit message. This is your opportunity to resolve your challenge or issue. Contact us today."

I'm a big fan of saying, "What is that key resonating benefit message that needs to show up throughout your website?" Not just on your home page, but it needs to resonate on every page throughout. It's like, "Here's why you're here. Don't forget..."

It's like if you're reading a really good book. A lot of times the beginning of a chapter and the end of a chapter reasserts the main message. "This is why you're reading this book." That's why I believe, with the website, you've got that key resonating message. Put it on the contact page. It could be two sentences. "Remember that this is your challenge or frustration, and we can take care of that for you. Contact us."

Heather: And, "Here's why you should fill out the form." Right? "Here's why you should bother."

Patrice: Or, "Call our sales team now." In marketing, the word "now"... there's all these studies around the word "now." You tell people to do things now, and, shockingly, it works!

Patrice: "Do it now." "Oh, OK." It's the call-to-action. Tell people what to do.

Heather: What is your definition of a success page? Is this like a testimonial page? A case study?

Patrice: The success page is what some developers call when you fill out a form...Let's say, you fill out an opt-in box or the contact form. Then, an automatic page comes up. "Thank you for your request. Thank you for contacting us. We'll get right back to you."

Most of the time these web pages are barren wastelands. Someone has taken the time to complete an opt-in box or taken the time to complete a contact form. You now have a lead. What's the most important thing a website can do for you? Supply a well-qualified lead. You now have this well-qualified lead, and that person is served up this barren page that says, "Thank you. We'll be in contact soon."

Heather: I've seen them too, Patrice.

Patrice: That is so pathetic. It's not warm. It's not nice. It's not full of keyword phrases. I'm like, there's such an opportunity here to connect with that person personally. And, why not insert some keyword phrases?

What I'll do a lot of times on the success page is I'll reassert my key resonating benefit message. "Hey, we're so glad you contacted us. We'll be in touch with you. We'll have a personal response to your comment or request as soon as possible. And, as you know, we're the leaders of blah blah blah, and we really pride ourselves in teaming with people like you to ensure you have the best blah blah blah possible. Thank you again. We'll be in touch soon." It can be warm. It can be nice. It can be full of keyword phrases. Why not?

Heather: Sure. Also, I always recommend to my clients on their contact forms to say, "If you can't wait, this old-fashioned thing called a phone number works really well."

Heather: You don't have to fill out a form. You can pick up the phone.

Patrice: Yeah. And you can make this important page look more appealing. Maps on the contact page help for a place that's a destination. A photo. A team photo. Some nice stock photo that's very appealing. Another photo of your product. And why not put a photo or image or testimonial on the success pages? "Thanks for contacting us." Then, at the bottom of that page is, "Here's the testimonial from a client who really loves us."

These "success pages" or "thank you pages" can be shockingly hardworking pages. What I like about that is you're taking a page that's usually overlooked and barren and turning it into a really hardworking page for you.

Heather: I love it. You have a couple of other great ideas too for your opportunities to use keywords. One of them was photo captions?

Patrice: Photo captions. Yeah. Again, it's another way to reassert a warm message or explain what's going on in a photo or image. For example, awards photos really should have a photo caption. I'm going to date myself here, but I've been in marketing for 35 years. Clearly, I started out in the world of employee newsletters and brochures and other marketing tools. Photos had to have a caption. That was standard operating procedure.

Now, a lot of times, you'll go to an "About the Company" page, and they'll have an awards photo, but there will be no caption. That's a prime opportunity to say, "Our company founder whose name is X receives this prestigious award from XYZ Association for 'whatever' service or product."

There are lots of opportunities there. First of all, you're talking to a real-live human being, so you're explaining the photo, but it also does offer key opportunities for keyword phrases. Look at that as an opportunity. That goes hand-in-hand, Heather, with your THBLI approach, where you post the image file name as well as the alt tag, which also has keyword phrases in it.

Heather: And they match. The keyword phrases match.

Patrice: And they match. Yeah. How about that.

Heather: You had a couple other ideas to share with other keyword usage?

Patrice: Yeah. Interestingly, this is something that gets overlooked too. I tripped over it not so long ago: The blog category name. One of the ways I differentiate my branding process is that I am stepping up as a thought leader in branding for solopreneurs ("small business branding"), because I have a system specifically designed for branding solopreneurs and small businesses. One of my keyword phrases is "branding for solopreneurs." Interestingly, I was doing a search on myself to see how some of my SEO was working.

One of the top things that came up for me was one of the blog categories. I have a blog, and I have multiple categories within that blog. One of my categories is "branding for small business" and that came up way at the top of my search results.

I'm like, "Hey, if it works for me, it could work for others too." [laughs] So, look at your blog category titles and make sure they're not milk-toast. Make sure that they're hardworking titles,

again, for both your human readers who have the power to buy your product and service as well as appealing to the search engine robots.

There's another tip I'd like to talk about, because it dispels a myth, and I always like dispelling myths. Heather, don't you think there's a million myths out there where half of our job is dispelling myths?

Heather: Yeah. There's so much standardized practice that web developers have been doing for so many years that now it's become a foregone conclusion or an expectation that we must have that thing.

Patrice: And, we have to fight the good fight.

Heather: No one ever questions it, right? It's like, "If my friend did it that way, I'll do it that way."

Patrice: Yeah. So, we're out there fighting the good fight. One for me is dispelling a myth around testimonials. The testimonial myth is that you never edit your customer's testimonials – even if there's a typo! There's no way I'm going to consciously include a typo in my website copy or in my clients' website content. At minimum, proof them. You can edit testimonials without changing content. You have to be very respectful of the content and the message, but you can edit them to make them shorter.

You can highlight a really important phrase in bold, and you can slide in your company name and your product or service name. Why not? If the testimonial says, "I worked with this team starting two years ago, and I come back every year, because their service is so incredible." Why not say, "I worked with the XYZ company starting two years ago for change leadership consulting. I come back every year, because the consulting service they provide is so incredible." Why not be a little bit more specific and throw in organic keyword phrases? it will help you.

Heather: One thing I did is when I launched my first book, I pre-wrote a bunch of testimonials, taking key attributes from the book and then I sent them out to clients and I said, "If any of these testimonials resonate, take it, edit it, amend it."

That was a significant benefit to my clients, because they felt like it got them started. (Some people don't even know where to start.) Then they added own thoughts or an important point, based on the experience they had had with me.

Patrice: I like that you're talking about handing the testimonials to them as a helpful starting point and inviting them to elaborate on that. The key messages are in there that you're looking to underscore as well as keywords phrases. A lot of people hit the wall when you say, "Hey, can you give me a testimonial?" They say yes but then they don't get around to it, and it's difficult to get the testimonial after all.

Heather: Yeah, you're chasing them and you're like, "How come they don't show up with a testimonial, like they promised?"

Patrice: I wrote a long blog posting on how to get testimonials. You can go to my blog, www.BrandingAndWebsites.com and find my blog posting for testimonials. It contains there's a lot of hints and tips to ask for – and get – testimonials.

Getting testimonials for your website is important, there's a credibility factor. Everything we've talked about testimonials also applies to *case studies*. I'm a huge believer – whether your business is small or large – to put case studies on your website.

A lot of times they need to be anonymous, because you're talking about working with the company, especially with service-oriented case studies. For example: "We worked with them when they had a problem or a challenge. They were able to move through this process and then here are these wonderful results they were able to achieve." The company name is typically anonymous. My gosh, what an opportunity to put in your key benefit messaging and your organic keyword phrases.

Heather: Case studies can really be important. I'm wondering why they need to be anonymous. Do they lose any of their validity if they're anonymous? What goes through my mind is that they made it up. They wrote it themselves.

Patrice: You can say, "We're working with a large company in the telecom industry," for example. A lot of times, let's say that you're a leadership consulting company and you go in to consult. Usually there's a real issue, a massive, almost embarrassing issue going on. You don't want to embarrass clients so there's sensitivity to that.

Heather: I understand.

Patrice: It depends. It's all content driven.

Heather: I love that. We can optimize testimonials. We can optimize the case studies. Google is becoming more and more sophisticated in interpreting data and content that's attached to a website: PDFs, things of that nature. Maybe you can consider attaching testimonials to a web page, giving them the PDF name with the keyword. Google is becoming sophisticated and starting to be able to interpret and index the data on documents that are attached on a given web page.

Patrice: An idea for folks for case studies, then I'm getting what you're saying, is do a very brief before-and-after case study on the website, then attach a longer one-, two- or three-page white paper-like case study as a PDF.

Again, problem/solution, very brief. Get in/get out case studies on the web page. You could show Case Study #1: problem/solution, Case Study #2: problem/solution. Then have a link to PDFs, where each case study is several pages long, more robust, like a white paper. People like to read case studies that are very much like their issue or struggle or challenge. This gives you the opportunity to have that really robust content again that serves your human reader – your decision makers – as well as the search engines robots.

Heather: It's great. We're running low in time here, but are there any other opportunities for keywords that we haven't mentioned?

Patrice: I would say that your call-to-action is a really, really important piece of information on your website, because looking back to our initial conversation, you do need to tell people what to do next: Fill in the opt-in box or go to the contact page or call our customer service or sales personnel. When I envision a page, Heather, I'm very visual and I look at the page, if you write a mass of gray text, people don't read that.

Think about your page from the top, with your headline, your subheads and bullet copy. For those who are skimmers, remember all they're looking at is the headline, subhead, bullet copy and then boom, they're down at the bottom of the page. Your call-to-action bookends the overarching benefit message you're stating in your headline, which also contains the keyword phrase.

Heather: You talked about skimmers. What reading styles are there? I know there's all kinds of different ways people read. Should we be thinking about that when we're writing our copy?

Patrice: Yes. Let's talk about that, because I always think about the skimmers and the readers. Heather, in one of your webinars you talk about chunkers as well. I really think about skimmers and readers, because you guide people from the top to the bottom. It's almost like telling a story. If you can get your whole story across with headline, subhead number one, subhead number two, call-to-action, if you can tell your whole story like that, boom, you're done. Your skimmers now turn into readers, but I would like you to talk about chunkers.

Heather: Chunkers tend to grab sections. Let's say you have two or three images in the body copy are. They've read the headline, they will then go down, look at the picture and read whatever is associated directly with the pictures. So a chunk of the copy as opposed to reading the whole thing or even skimming the whole thing, they read the headline and then go down to a chunk or piece that's interesting to them. Typically, it has something to do with a video asset or an image on the page.

Patrice: That's good.

Heather: We love pretty pictures.

Patrice: That's a good point: graphics. I will tell folks, create a little graphic icon in your website that says, "Hey, read more about this on my blog," or make sure you have that video in there.

There are lots of ways to engage people on the website. It's not just about writing text. That's when we go back to the top-level discussion we had about the one-two approach. First, you're write impactful benefit copy and then you switch your hat, now you're writing for SEO robot. Both of them, both of these target markets that you're writing for.

They both like the visual assets: any opt-in boxes, any videos, maybe a little graphic link that says, "Hey, read more in my blog." Break it up and make it really inviting. Make it really robust. More is better.

Heather: Also, you can disperse the workload. I was doing a live training last weekend for a company. Everyone from the marketing team, their salespeople were there, their interns were there. The director of marketing was there, and we sat down and looked at the content load and what they had, gosh, probably 40 web pages they are going to have to write.

We're like, "Let's talk about this. How many people are willing to take five pages to write, based on the topics they personally feel comfortable writing?" Don't pick something that you don't feel comfortable with. Take something you're either passionate about or you have a lot of customer experience with. They were able to get all 40 pages written quickly, because each person only had to do about four to five pages.

Patrice: That's a really good idea.

Heather: Everyone tackled it together. It wasn't everyone looking at the marketing manager and saying, "Good luck with that."

Patrice: But Heather, that approach means you must be really clear about your top benefit message. As a branding professional, I've come up with this definition for a brand: Your clear brand quickly communicates (1) who you are, (2) what you do, and (3) what they get – the benefits and results your customers receive. Who you are, what you do, and what they get – everyone must be clear on that. This ensures that every page is in sync and related. If you don't have that clear foundation, then what you get back, it can be really disparate and not as closely related as it needs to be.

Heather: You are brilliant in what you do. I want people to know how to work with you. Could you explain, people may want to know "When should I bring in Patrice and how do I know I need to use her services?" When does that moment arrive for solopreneurs, small business owners, or marketing managers?

Patrice: Heather, a lot of times, it's when you're banging your head against the wall. Your website template is designed and the developer is saying, "We need copy. We need copy. We need copy."

That's when people call me and say, "You know what, we don't have the bandwidth. We don't have the capability – or we don't have the clarity." A lot of time the procrastination or feeling of being overwhelmed is directly related to the fact that the branding message is not clear. There is some disconnect in the organization, something is muddy or foggy. They don't have that clarity, and they really need help moving through the steps to brand their small business.

So we go through a really quick branding process together, process I've developed specifically for small businesses and solopreneurs such as professional speakers, business coaches, and corporate consultants. We move through the "Nail Your Brand" process quickly together, then everything falls in place from here.

The website copy can flow, your company brochure or speaker one-sheet (if you're a professional speaker). All the key pieces in your marketing toolkit now can flow directly from (1) clarifying your small business brand, and (2) writing benefit-driven website copy. That's when a lot of people call me, at that point of pain. They'll say, "I can't do this, I need help."

Heather: What is your phone number, Patrice?

Patrice: It's 719-685-1108. My website address is www.BrandingAndWebsites.com. Heather and I both live in beautiful, stunning Colorado.

Heather: We do. We're so lucky. I want to thank you for your time today, Patrice.

For those of you listening, I'm Heather Lutze, I'm the master trainer and founder of Findability University. We specialize in helping business owners of all sizes become the most findable business online to customers who are ready to buy, and that's really the bottom line. We do a non-technical, easy format through Findability University, either through our live webinar series, our live events here in Denver, as well as a home-study program.

Patrice Rhoades-Baum, thank you again for joining us today. Hopefully everyone will go back, and write some content now they feel confident in. I really want to thank you for joining us, and giving us your expertise today.

Patrice: Oh, you're very welcome. Thanks so much Heather.



Patrice Rhoades-Baum Marketing Consultant & Branding Expert

Patrice “cracked the code” for branding for small business and solopreneurs (professional speakers, corporate consultants, business coaches).

Patrice believes you *must* clarify your brand; it's the foundation – the launchpad! – to promote and grow your business. Using her laser-focused “Nail Your Brand” approach, Patrice will team with you to:

- Clarify your brand
- Lead her team of service providers to create your marketing toolkit: new website, speaker one-sheet, and stationery package

Backed by 25 years of high-tech corporate marketing...

Patrice has managed big-budget advertising campaigns, direct-mail programs, and tradeshow

events. She has been the project manager and copywriter for numerous websites, including two Hewlett-Packard websites with budgets exceeding \$250,000. An expert copywriter, Patrice has been published in *Fortune* magazine. Learn more and get a free “Nail Your Elevator Pitch” worksheet at www.BrandingAndWebsites.com.

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From high in the Rocky Mountains to deep in Utah’s canyon country, Patrice delivers sage branding and marketing advice in this ongoing series of 1-minute videos. Bookmark www.BrandingViews.com to see stunning views of the West, Southwest, and Midwest. Enjoy breathtaking views, fresh air, and a fresh perspective!



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