



Talk To Me: A Guide To Helping Professional Service Firms Develop Killer Conversational Content For Their Website.

Talk To Me is about developing web content that help you “talk with” your customer rather than talk at them. In doing so, your website and business will appear as more genuine, relevant, and ultimately position you as the provider of choice for your client needs. Ka-ching.

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Web Design & Marketing Strategies

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About The Author



H. Dean Hua is founder and Chief Web Evangelist for Sachi Studio- a web design and online marketing consultancy based out of the Washington DC metropolitan area.

Aside from wanting to help companies communicate better through his services, Dean founded Sachi because he really hated working for The Man. Despite being Asian, he just loves country music. His CD collection includes country music artists such as Carrie Underwood, Sugarland, and Rascal Flatts. He has overcome the biggest fear that most people will ever have- skydiving out of an airplane at 10,000 feet in the air. He hopes to do that again and again in the coming years.

He calls himself Chief Web Evangelist because, well, CEO and web designer, sounded oh so boring. Not to mention that he just loves evangelizing and spreading the gospel of how fantastic the World Wide Wow can be for his clients. Hallelujah!

Sachi Studio offers the following core services;

1. Web and blog design
2. Content Management Systems
3. Local search engine optimization strategies
4. Social media marketing strategies

I. Introduction

Consumers are tired of being talked at. They hate the salesy pitches. They can't stand the disingenuous advertising campaigns. They want realness and they want it now.

A website is like any other marketing tool-- it can be your best friend or your worst enemy. It's a marketing tool that can bring in more business or it can be a lame duck. On a day-to-day basis, I see too many website owners focus on great site aesthetics and not give enough emphasis to one element of a site that can improve your bottom line- content.

I created this guide as a do-it-yourself tool for the professional service firm whose website's content typically adhered to having only a monologue as opposed to a dialogue with its customers. In so doing, they were not maximizing the full value of their online presence.

A monologue is where one person simply talks and talks and the other listens. Very boring, indeed. In a dialogue, both sides talk and thus a conversation ensues. Appropriately enough, I refer to this type of website content as conversational content. It is paradigm where your web content comes off as genuine and your customer feels like they are part of the conversation that is occurring as they read your site.

Creating conversational content is a way of thinking. It's a mindset of how to win over potential customers through killer content. This will get readers engaged in the process rather than have them feel like they are another IP address landing on your site.

The websites of professional service providers face an interesting paradox. Traditional thinking causes us to believe that in order for our online presence to appear as "professional," then we should adhere to the typical status quo of an online presence. This includes writing in corporate speak and hiding behind big words. While it is everyone's goal to appear professional, we often believe that there is only one way to do this. This simply is not true. Your online presence can still convey professionalism while still maintaining the utmost of authenticity.

Unlike selling a product, selling and pitching your service over the web is a bit tougher. Services are intangible and people will not know what the experience is like until they try you out. So before they can reach that point, your customer faces a lot of friction and resistance during the decision making process. Unbeknownst to many, every time a prospective client visits a section of your website and reads your content, she is subconsciously making one of two decisions. She is deciding whether she trust you enough to call you for more information or not trust you at all and go to another firm's website that will help fulfill her need.

At the end of the day, it is all about your words and the content. If your content can't help accelerate the decision making process of the customer from "thinking about it" to "let's sit down and talk", then your website is a lame duck and of no use to anyone.

This content development guide should aid you, the professional service provider, in understanding the critical type of content to develop on your website. You will gain a deeper understanding of the psychology of a typical website visitor and what goes through her head when visiting your website. Once you understand the psychological dynamics of your visitors and her decision making process, you will be able to craft an appropriate content development strategy to help win over customers.

Too many website visitors leave a website because they didn't have the appropriate information needed to make a decision. The website owner did not develop content that would help spark a conversation with the customer. This guide is to help you develop killer conversational content that will result in an establishing a dialogue with your customer base.

The primary benefits to a well-executed content development strategy are

- Visitors staying longer on your site,
- Visitors taking more action oriented steps such as buying, scheduling an appointment, and requesting more information from you.

Nobody wants to feel like they are being talked at. But everyone wants to feel like they are part of a conversation.

Below, I've outlined 7 areas that each website should have in order to achieve a more effective conversational content development strategy. The 3rd section outlines techniques to help you fine tune your webcopy writing and deliver a more succinct and compelling message.

Who Should Be Reading This?

Anyone that runs a professional service firm or offers a professional service and wants to increase their call to action from their website. This includes but is not limited to the following vertical markets and professions;

- Lawyers and law firms,
- Real estate professionals,
- Business consultants,
- Coaches,
- Agencies,
- Marketing professionals,
- Virtual assistants,
- Human resource firms,
- Accounting and accounting firms,
- Financial services firms,
- Information technology,
- Management consulting,
- Information technology,
- Independent professionals

II. Conversational Content Strategies

1) Testify

Nothing is more persuasive to someone than the endorsement that a client makes of you. Visitors are wondering if you have the approval from past clients. If so, do they have anything nice to say of you?

Go back and ask your clients for an endorsement of you. What specifically did they like about you and your services? Have them put it in writing. Be sure that when you get someone to endorse you that it is not a vague statement. The testimonial should be specific as to the problem that you solved for the client. Remember, prospective clients have a problem that needs to be solved and you need to show that you've solved the same problem with a past client.

Here is an example of an effective testimonial,

"Working with Dean was a pleasure. I was having major issues of bringing in new clients with my website, but his solutions were practical and I saw a 75 percent increase in sales that can be attributed to his strategies and recommendations."

This endorsement is effective because

- The client acknowledges that there was a problem prior to buying the service,
- She acknowledges that the seller provided a solution,
- She gets very specific and attributes exactly how much of the solution solved her problem.

All sorts of professionals are relying on endorsements as a form of credibility. Book authors use testimonials of their readers and put it in the front of the book. Restaurants use good reviews found in magazines and display them on their walls. You should be doing this too!

Most website owners tend to have a section called testimonials and list client testimonials there. That is certainly a lot better than not having any testimonials present at all. However, a better way of reinforcing your credibility through testimonials is by merging your testimonials into the "Services" section of your website.

For example, you may have several services that you provide. After describing each service, you should list a client testimonial that is relevant to that service.

Here is an example;

Description of Service A

Testimonial from client that describes service A

Description of Service B

Testimonial from client that describes service B

This method of structuring client testimonials into the your services description helps reinforce how credible your services are because it is backed up by client testimonials specific to that service. The original attempt of just having a page devoted to client word of praise is a bit contrived. We already expect to read good things when we visit that page so it tends to fall on death ears when we land on that page. However, by sprinkling words of praise into an unexpected area such as this will catch the reader's attention more. You may also want to consider a link to a case study that specifically showcases some of your services in action.

2) Published Work and Awards

Publicity

Have you had work published elsewhere? Have you written articles for newspapers or syndicated columns? If so, this is a great way to enhance your credibility by showing that your work is a trusted source of information. Make mention that your work and/or specific articles have been mentioned elsewhere with a link to the site and its articles. Nothing says that you are a trusted professional than to have been mentioned in the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, or other media outlets.

Case Studies

Did one of your clients have great success through your services? If so, go publish a case study for heaven sake! Go brag to the world that you are the go-to professional in your field.

Your case study should highlight the following;

1. Existing problem of the client prior to implementing your services.
2. Methodologies and solutions implemented to solve client's problems
3. Lessons learned and the benefits that the client received from your services.

Case studies are a great way of taking one of your services and giving your readers a real world example of how it can be applied to their existing problems.

White paper

As defined by Wikipedia; *"A white paper is an authoritative report. White papers are used to educate customers, collect leads for a company or help people make decisions."*

The typical content of a whitepaper will consist of

- Market situation,
- Current problems,
- A solution to the current problem.

Most whitepapers will somehow favor your company's service as provider of choice for your reader's problems. You must ensure that your whitepaper is not too commercial whereby it advertises your company heavily. The primary goal of a whitepaper is to educate the consumer.

Some benefits to publishing a white paper is that it can;

- Establish you as an authority in your field,
- Increase exposure and contact to the media,
- Educate and inform your readers.

Awards

If you've been given an award for your exceptional service, be sure to make mention of this. It is a great honor that someone out there recognizes the quality of service that you provide. Don't cheat yourself by not mentioning this on your website.

3) Philosophy and methodology

Prospective clients come to you believing that you are the expert at what you do. But they are clueless when it comes to how you do it. They need solace and comfort that you truly are who you say you are.

Offer them solace by explaining your methodology and how you do business with clients. Be transparent and give them an insider's view of your business practices. If you are a marketing consultant, explain the steps that are taken to offer the appropriate marketing solution. If you're a virtual assistant, explain precisely and succinctly how you partner up with your clients to offer them the appropriate administrative solutions. People want to know if they are dealing with professionals or just some rookie.

For example, if you are a consultant who helps companies with their brand image, I've found it helpful to create an image or diagram that shows what the steps are in your consulting process. If you are working with a web designer to create your new site, ask your designer to create a simple diagram that will outline how you work with your clients. This visual tool makes it easier for your clients to know what the steps are at all times when they consult with you. It educates them while creating an image that you are transparent in your process. Remember- customers want to deal with professionals who are transparent in their process. It helps alleviate any fears that they are dealing with some professional who is just flying by the seats of his pants.

4) Why Us?

It is rare that anyone would consider putting up a page called, "Why Us" on their website. But when you think about it, it makes perfect sense to put up such a page. The whole idea of a content development strategy is to create content that will make you stand out from the competition and enhance your credibility. What better way than to create a page that shows all of the different ways that you are different from your competitors?

List as many ways that you differentiate yourself from the competition. Why do people want to buy from you rather than the guy next door? Can you make life easier for me that they can't? What is your competition missing that you seem to have? What is unique about your services? Do you have a success story? Go on, brag about it.

5) About Us

The underlying concept is to humanize your online presence as much as possible. The more people can relate, the more likely they are to buy. Most websites out there have an about us section but so few of them are not utilized to their fullest potential. Here are a few tips to get the most out of it;

- Make this section personal. Remember; customers buy you. They can easily go to another business professional who provides the same service. You don't think there are tons of other professionals who are online and don't do what you do? Of course there are. But so few of them understand the methodology into creating an appropriate web content development strategy. Make this section about you because people come to you because of you, your personality, and what you exude.
- Do your best to exude you on this section. Be personal and show us your favorite hobby or some quirky and funny nuances that we should know. Make people laugh.
- Share the story of why you created your company. Behind every successful entrepreneur is a story as to why they started their business. What caused you to sacrifice so much to do what you do now?
- Do you have something quirky about you? If so, share it. Maybe you have a dog that can count to 20. Perhaps you have this fetish for Reeses Peeses peanut butter cups.

Below is an example of a bio of an employee of the branding agency, Brains On Fire, <http://brainsonfire.com> .

It takes a certain kind of number cruncher to work in a creative environment and that's why Kathie is so valued around here. Sure, she does that accounts receivable/payable thing, but she also has been known to be a source of wisdom for other creative companies who seek her advice when it comes to profitable billing, estimates and all that other good stuff that allows the rest of us to have a paycheck.

Now isn't that a more fun and interesting description about an accountant than what you are used to? It's certainly more interesting than other boring blah blah profiles that you typically get on other websites.

Here is a profile that I have of myself;

Aside from wanting to help companies communicate better through his services, Dean founded Sachi because he really hated working for The Man. Despite being Asian, he just loves country music. His CD collection includes country music artists such as Carrie Underwood, Sugarland, and Rascal Flatts. He has overcome the biggest fear that most people will ever have- skydiving out of an airplane at 10,000 feet in the air. He hopes to do that again and again in the coming years.

He calls himself Chief Web Evangelist because, well, CEO and web designer, sounded oh so boring. Not to mention that he just loves evangelizing and spreading the gospel of how fantastic the World Wide Wow can be for his clients. Hallelujah!

Now, it's your turn to do the same. Have fun with your biography and don't hold back!

Tell Your Story

Story telling has become an emerging tool for people to communicate and relate to. Stories have been around since the dawn of man when we gathered around campfires and told stories to keep our spirits high and pass on lessons learned from previous generations.

Stories can;

- Get your audience to relate to you,
- Teach a lesson,
- Connect and build an emotional bond,
- Influence others into your way of thinking.

Most of the clients who come to me for my services are entrepreneurs and founders of their business. I have always advocated that you, the founder and sole visionary of your business, should put up the story of your business and why you started it. Chances are pretty high that you started your business because of an existing problem that you envisioned could be fulfilled by your services. Chances are also very high that your prospects may be sharing a similar pain. But they'll never know how much commonality exists between the two of you until they know of your story.

While it's great that you can brag about your core competencies and how great you are, sharing a personal story of yourself is the ultimate relationship-building tool. Your story should include;

- The specific situation(s) that caused you to launch your business,
- The pain and troubles that you had endured during this time,
- Why you felt, at the time, that your business could benefit others,
- What your vision was and how it was going to impact others.

Through your story, you are creating a conversational tone that reveals your authenticity as a human being. As the adage goes, "We do business with people whom we know, like, and trust." There is no greater form of rapport and trust building than through the telling of a story- your story.

6) Frequently Asked Questions

Many of the people who visit your site have tons of questions racing through their mind. You may as well start to compile a list of frequently asked questions that might be on the mind of your customer. A FAQs page tells the customer that you can anticipate their initial queries. It shows that you have been there and done that with previous customers and can do it again with this prospective customer. It helps accelerate the decision making process from, "I dunno and have more questions to ask" to "Ah, that's the answer that I'm looking for. Now let's talk business."

It is a great timesaver for you because you do not have to answer the same questions repeatedly over the phone or email. Having a FAQs page shows that you care for your customers, you can read their mind, and anticipate their needs. It says that you are listening during this entire conversation that exist between you and the customer.

Think of each of the sections that I just talked about as representing a new dialogue within the overall conversation. When someone visits one part of your website, they have a series of thoughts and questions running through their head. It is your goal to not only answer it but also communicate those answers in a clear, concise, and credible manner. Be conversational. Talk but listen to their needs as well.

Great conversational content is all about conveying authenticity and credibility in how you communicate. The web can become a viable communication tool between you and your potential customers. However, too many of us hide behind the façade of corporate jargon. In reality, none of us talk that way in real life. We need to get real with how we communicate with our customer base.

7) Client List

Successful marketing is all about being relevant. It is about your customers perceiving you and your services as being relevant to their needs. Some will call this section a client list. Others call it a portfolio. Regardless of what you call it, you want this section present within your site. Potential customers want to know if you've done business with a similar clientele. If so, what services did you provide to them that will make them feel like your understand their current problems?

If you have a lot of customers, it may help to segment your client list into their appropriate vertical markets. Pick a few of your best client projects and briefly list the type of services offered to them.

III. Webcopy Writing Techniques

How to Fine-tune Your Webcopy

Writing effective webcopy is a very difficult endeavor. Most of us aren't skilled writers by any stretch of the imagination. This is not meant to be a comprehensive guide into webcopy writing, but aims to offer and highlight some points of reminder when writing your content. Beautiful design is nothing unless there are powerful words backing it up. Behold, the power of the written word.

- **Show some personality.**

There isn't a need to be outright hilarious, but subtle humor always works. If you're not good at injecting humor into your webcopy, other forms of personality such as sassy, lighthearted, or warm also helps. People buy people. We don't buy stone cold words and jargon. If your webcopy make a potential customer chuckle a bit while browsing your site, then that only adds to a great overall experience.

- **Avoid jargon.**

In an effort to impress our readers and potential customers, we use big words and corporate jargon in our webcopy. Avoid at all costs. This is jargon- "We believe in providing measurable solutions-centered platforms to help small enterprises grow." Huh?

- **Get to the point.**

Use short sentences. If you can say it in 6 words rather than 10 words, then do so. Time is ticking and readers don't have time to waste. Rule of thumb is to take your rough draft and try to reduce the word count to half. Do a bit more editing and that should be your final webcopy.

Don't stall by injecting hyperbole and jargon. The more you stall, the more you frustrate the reader. Get to the point.

- **Write for scannability.**

Research shows that only about 16 percent of all readers read through every word on a website. The rest of us are too impatient and scan for keywords and phrases. That makes sense doesn't it? Who has time to read through every word when the majority of us are too impatient and just want the right information?

Try to bold a few of the important phrases that you want customers to key in on.

Be sure to write in bullet points for any thing that deserves a list. This helps slow down the scanning eye and gives focus.

- **Avoid 3rd person. Write in 1st person.**

Avoid writing in 3rd person such as this, "David Smith can help provide solutions for your business." Writing in 3rd person tends to be impersonal and the copy doesn't speak to the customer. Acknowledge your customer. Use your words to make them feel important.

I prefer to speak directly to a customer by writing like this, "You've got issues with your website. You are looking for capable professionals to fix your headache. You need a design team that understands how you feel. We can help you." Writing in 1st person says that you acknowledge that the customer exists. It allows you to create a conversational tone with your customer. You are talking to them rather than at them. You are saying that you understand and can articulate their problems and provide a solution in simple human language.

- **Write one key idea per paragraph.**

Devote one subject per page. Talking about more than one subject per page tends to confuse the reader.

- **Acknowledge needs and problems.**

Every prospect that comes to your website has a problem that needs to be addressed. Is your webcopy acknowledging how great your company is or is it acknowledging how painful the problem of the prospect is? By addressing the challenges that the prospect is enduring, you start to build trust with them because you know how they feel and you really want to solve their problems. You are showing empathy through your words. You do want to solve their problems, right? Then show it through your words. Tap into their yearnings. Acknowledge their problems. Address their needs.

- **Don't oversell on the homepage.**

One of the most critical mistakes that website owners do is they squeeze everything on the first page of their site. Does the front page of your website have content about your services, biography, contact information, methodologies, and published work? If it does, then you need to take all of that content and break them up into smaller parts and scatter them through out the website as opposed to cramming it onto the front page.

I understand the way you think. You are thinking that you give them all of this information on the front page of your website so they don't have to make time to wander around. But giving someone too many choices is like giving them no choices at all. The human brain can't process that much information all at once. Designing an effective website is like fine dining at a restaurant-- it's all about the experience. This is the first time that your potential customers are being exposed to your business and you want to make a positive impression on them. You want to give them an appetizer first. Then move onto an entrée. And finally, give them desert before asking for the check.

- **Search Engine Friendly Copy.**

It can be a lonely place on the net if your web content doesn't include keywords that can help your prospects find you. Is your webcopy properly optimized for keywords? If not, here are some ideas.

Research shows that having keywords in your header help impact search engine rankings more than having the same keywords in your paragraph. It's important to do both, but if possible, try to maximize your search engine rankings by ensuring that keywords are in your header.

For example, let's assume that you are trying to rank well for the keywords phrase, "Miami Relocation Agent" But the heading on your homepage says, "Welcome to our Relocation Website." Talk about a waste of keywords in your content development strategy.

How about we try something like this, "**Nikki Johnson: Your Miami, Florida Relocation Real Estate Agent.**"

This new header helps achieve several benefits;

- It helps readers decide what your site is about. People don't have time to read into the 2nd paragraph to figure your business out. Good webcopy helps readers discern what your business is about within seconds and not minutes.
- It helps creates Personal Brand Identity. PBI is simply the concept of humanizing your website with a face and name. People don't want to do business with words or an entity. They want to do business with people. PBI is all about personalization.
- Third, this new header achieved a double bonus. You include two keyword phrases people might be searching for,

"Miami Relocation Agent" and "Miami Real Estate Agent"

- Use anchor text in your webcopy.

Another SEO technique that will improve search engine rankings is the use of all-in anchor text links. All-in anchor text link is simply the concept of taking your keyword (phrases) and using that as your hyperlink.

Using our previous example again, let's say that you want to rank for the keyword phrase, "Miami Relocation Agent".

On your homepage webcopy, you write out a sentence that encourages visitors to visit a section of your website that includes a FAQs on your services. The sentence looks like this; "[Click here](#) to learn more about our Miami Relocation Services." Using the words, "click here" as your anchor text is not the proper way to improve your search engine rankings. Instead try this, "Our [Miami Relocation Services](#) section is a littered with great information to help you decide how we can best help you move to beautiful Miami, Florida." Notice the distinct difference b/w the two methods.

By using appropriate anchor text linking, you help improve your chances with how search engines decide to rank you. The other benefit is that you make it clearer as to what the reader should expect before they click on the hyperlink.

Info

What To Do With This Guide

You have unlimited rights to print this guide and/or to distribute it electronically for your personal or professional use.

You can print this out and read it at night before smacking yourself on the forehead wondering how much money you may have lost with your website.

You can forward it to other friends and colleagues who run their own professional service firm and let this be a hint that they need to start having a conversation with their customers as well.

You can download this guide at <http://www.sachistudio.com/docs/talktome-guide.pdf>

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