

How to Write Content That Matters, a conversation with Sean D'Souza

By Jessica Albon

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A master of metaphor, Sean D'Souza writes articles that astound readers. He gives readers what they want, and then some.

You might think writing articles as powerful as D'Souza's would require epic talent, but in fact, D'Souza says, it all starts with a headline.

When I sat down to interview D'Souza, I was worried he might hesitate to share his secrets for writing engaging content. Instead, he was as open about the behind-the-scenes aspects of his newsletter as he is in each issue. Offering advice from the candid: "The unsubscribe is only an email away," to the poetic: "Problems are whirlpools," he clearly explains how you, too, can write great content.

Jessica: Sean, thank you for agreeing to this interview! To get started, what do you try to accomplish with your newsletter, PsychoTactics?

Sean: I want people to learn that marketing can make them millions. But make sure you get into a customer's brain first. Think like they do. Understand what they really want. They want you to literally second guess.

They want to buy. You do stupid things and actually prevent them from buying.

Jessica: In your newsletter, you provide specific advice on making your marketing more effective. You offer readers information they can't get elsewhere online, so clearly, there are benefits to being a reader. How does the newsletter help you, as the publisher?

Sean: People writing in saying how their lives have changed, how their business has improved. Empowerment has been the best reward. People write looooooong five page letters.

But seeing that it's a powerful tool to generate business and real money in the bank, has been pretty gratifying too.

My credit card register clicks through all the time because people trust that I will give them good

stuff. We don't ask for business any more. It comes to us.

That way, the newsletter is a bit like a view into your soul. We started a membership just today and we already have had dozens of people sign up. They know they can trust us.

If you do things right and promote it well, your audience will materialise. It's a monster, but a likeable one.

A newsletter is the BEST Tool you can ever have. Don't underestimate it for one second! But you can't get away with trash. If you're going to have a newsletter, put out something momma would be proud of.

Jessica: How do you write the articles that, as you put it, your momma would be proud of? How do you keep your perspective fresh?

Sean: Reading, reading and reading. Nothing will make more ideas pop into your head. The second way is clients or helping other people. They ask weird questions, and the ideas go wild. I've got about 10 book ideas in my head and about 30 article ideas. I have to write them down or they give me the slip.

Be bold. Don't be boring. Anything that isn't boring is fresh. But also look at it from different angles. Look for examples. They help you explain and help the audience understand.

Jessica: What happens when you run out of fresh ideas?

Sean: I read. I talk to people. But I don't have that problem any more. Now I just think of headlines and write them down. Dozens of them. That makes it easy. Write what you know about.

It's making the article powerful that's difficult. Filling it with emotion, creating little twists in copy. That takes ages. It's like a good plot. You have to get the timing just right. I take four times as much time in the rewrite, than I do in the actual process of writing it. Thinking it through takes four times as much time too. So the actual writing is the shortest part of the whole process.

Jessica: So, you start your articles with a great headline?

Sean: First the headline, then the outline of the story. Then you think about it, create the story in your brain while you're walking or doing something else. Then flesh it out. Then edit, edit, edit, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite. (You're getting the picture.)

Headline writing is a skill developed like everything else. You can't find it. Write dumb headlines to start with. Then look around and see what headlines grab your attention. Headlines with questions always do. Headlines with curiosity do. Headlines that have nothing to do with the subject like "Why do twins have the same last name, and different first names" work. That's because people are intensely curious. If you appeal to their curiosity, they will pounce on your headline.

But far by the biggest headline attention getter is the one with a problem in it. Problems are whirlpools. Do you make these mistakes in English? Are you struggling to attract CEOs? These are absolute killers. Identifying the biggest problem your client has and then putting that in the headline. I can assure you, the attention will be yours to keep.

Jessica: After you've got the headline written, how do you keep your articles appealing?

Sean: Break up paragraphs. Write good subheads. Keep it flowing.

Use lots of examples. Finish with a flourish. Write like you're going to say it in a speech.

The purpose of the every line is to make you read the next line. All communication must lead to change. That's the biggest lesson of all.

Readers are deadly. The unsubscribe is only an email away. You can't fool them with the word Free. It has no meaning. I don't want Free. I want good stuff. Readers can be quite demanding even when there's no charge. It keeps you on your toes.

Jessica: And part of the "good stuff" readers want in a newsletter is about personality, right?

Sean: Personality is everything. What are you without your personality? What is your product, your service and your brand without one?

Be pink or orange or purple, and let that show through. If you're a serious number cruncher, be dead serious. Give only figures and serious statistics. There will be a niche for you.

If you are a mad Psychotic like me, don't be afraid to show that through. That's literally your thumbprint. It's got to shine with a million watts. Remember, that a billion people are vying for the same spot.

As Dire Straits sang, "Sitting on the fence is a dangerous course. You could get a bullet from the peace keeping force."

Jessica: We're just about out of time. Earlier, you mentioned ending with a flourish, so, I'm curious, how do you write great endings?

Sean: The ending is a not just a wrap up of sorts. It is a clear reflection of the headline.

Different words. Same stuff. It can be again, like a movie. Sad, dramatic, unexpected etc. but it is always a mirror of the start.

If you write a great headline, you have a great ending. They're twins. They just sit on either side of the bookshelf. Sometimes, it helps to start with the end in mind. If you can turn out articles with the last line first, you'd become a bloody genius!

If you'd like to see more of Sean, visit him at his site <http://www.psychotactics.com> where he shares specific techniques for engaging buyers online and off. His insight into buyer's brains will make you wonder if he's got any cadavers in the basement.

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