



How to Create a Remarkable Experience on Your Life Science Company Blog

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Hello and welcome back to the podcast. My guest today is an irreverent copywriter and marketer. She's on a mission to stamp out gobbledegook and add sparkle to boring business blogs. She's the author of two five-star rated books about writing and blogging. "Blog to Win Business. How to Enchant Readers and Woo Customers" is the highest rated business blogging book on Amazon. She's a regular contributor to popular marketing blogs like kissmetrics and Copyblogger. I'm thrilled to have Henneke Duistermaat on this podcast. Henneke, welcome.

Henneke: Thank you. I'm delighted to be here. I didn't even know that my book was the highest rated business blogging book.

Chris: Well, I looked, I just typed in "business blogging" and yours was at the top when it came up.

Henneke: Right.

Chris: Which honestly, I would have been surprised if it weren't.

Henneke: Yeah, well that's great.

Chris: Today, we're going to talk about why it's important to create an experience for your readers on your B to B blog and a little bit about how to do that; but first, please tell my listeners a little bit more about your background. What was the path that brought you to this?

Henneke: That was a very undulating path. It was a strange one. My background is in traditional marketing. I've done several marketing jobs from product management to marketing communications, in both big and small companies. And some time, a few years ago, I was getting really fed up with my job. I decided to make a jump and start my own business. That's around the time I started to learn how to write. I never thought that I was a writer. I always thought writing was some magical talent that I didn't possess, but I thought if I wanted to launch my own business, I needed to be able to write, so I could promote myself online.

I started studying writing and I loved it so much that I decided to focus my business on writing. And I wrote a lot of blog posts, lots of guest posts, started freelancing as a copywriter. Now I really spend most of my time training business owners and freelancers to become better writers.

Chris: Fantastic.

Henneke: Yeah. It's a crazy story and I'm not even a native speaker, as you can hear from my accent.

Chris: What I like most about this story is that you didn't consider yourself a writer before you started looking into it. I just think that gives a lot of people, I think hope and inspiration that, you don't have to be one of those people who has always loved writing to learn how to do it really well.

Henneke: That's correct. I think everybody can learn to apply simple techniques to make their writing more engaging, a pleasure to read and more persuasive. We can all do that. Not that we are all going to become best-selling novelists but that's not what is required to write for business.

Chris: Right, so let's start off on the blogging topic by talking about the fundamentals. Why should a business have a blog at all? What are the benefits for them? Then what do their customers or potential customers get out of it?

Henneke: Yeah. There's lots of business benefits from having a blog. It can build your authority. It has search engine optimization benefits or it can increase your traffic. It's a way to connect with prospects, to start conversations with them, to become really a trusted partner and it often is the hub of a social media strategy. You publish content on your blog and you share that on social media. If you don't have a blog, then your social media strategy will be really more curating other people's content rather than having your own voice.

I think what a lot of people think is that a blog is something where you share company news. This is not how I see a blog at all. If you're just sharing product news and company news, then it's quite boring for most people. The way I see a blog, it's really the heart and

engine of my business. It's where I start conversations with potential customers for me. It drives leads into my business, by getting people to sign up to my email list and then giving me an opportunity to sell to them.

A blog is not about selling. I really see a blogger as a mentor or a coach. When we are thinking about a blog, what we do is share valuable tips and encourage people to implement them. We solve people's problems and that's how we build our authority, gain brand awareness, get a social media following, drive more traffic and increase trust.

Chris: Nice. You touched on this a little bit, but what do the customers get out of it? Maybe we should even spin that around. What are they looking for? What do you think a customer expects when they come to a blog?

Henneke: Yes. There's so much information online. We're all overwhelmed. We don't want to waste our time reading stuff that doesn't do anything for it. People are looking for entertainment and they're looking for information. They are looking maybe even for some kind of comfort, sort of the feeling, "You're not alone" in certain industries.

But with B to B, I think the focus will be mainly on sharing valuable tips, giving people useful information, but to do that well, we can't just share our valuable tips, because that doesn't pull people into our blog posts. What you really have to do as a blogger, as a good mentor is first, you have to empathize with your reader. You show him that you understand him and then you give him a sunny destination. You tell him look, "You might be struggling with this problem at the moment, but I can help you out with it."

Then you share your tips and you also need to keep in mind that you have to inspire your readers actually to implement your tips, because the only way to build a real authority is when people actually follow your advice and do something with it. Just reading your stuff isn't enough. People come to your blog really to learn something, to get better at something. You have a blog about productivity tips. Well, they want to find a way to get more relaxed and get their work done in less time, so that they have more free time. If you have a B to B blog, it can also be about what can people do to make their job easier so they can get a promotion or they can get less stressed. They can impress their colleagues, whatever. There's always needs to be a benefit for the reader in your content.

Chris: I like that. I like of course, encouraging people to do something. I was going to ask you a little bit about this later but since it's come up, you're asking people to follow your advice, which I think in our industry is probably a missing element. There's a lot of blogs that have helpful tips about how to do something, but really making it an explicit call to action, to get them to try it, change how they do something is a key part there, to really get people to come back and really bond themselves with your writing and your business.

Henneke: Correct. And that really requires you to become a little bit like a psychologist, because you need to think about what is stopping people from implementing my advice. Did they feel overwhelmed or then maybe you need to tell them, "Okay, what's the first step I need to take?" Maybe you're sharing too much. Do they think they can't do it? Well, maybe they need some pep talk. Are they unclear how to do? You need to maybe, I don't know, give them a download and a step by step plan or form that they can fill in.

Really think about - writing is really always thinking about the reader and how does your writing transform that reader? What does it do for him and how can you help take the next action?

Chris: I think in our industry, all those suggestions are good. It might look something like - what I want to point out is - getting people to do something that is independent of your product, being helpful to them without having to make a purchase first, right?

Henneke: Correct, yeah. I think, sometimes you can share sales messages on the blog but that shouldn't be the main part of your blog. It should really be about helping your reader. That should be your blog purpose. "How can you help them?"

Chris: Excellent. A lot of blogs in our industry tend to be based around thought leadership. Some of them certainly are providing helpful, and some curated content or talking about their technology leadership. I think all those things are completely reasonable. I think sometimes a company is trying to exhibit its technology leadership. I look around and I think, there's a lot of smart people and a lot of smart companies in the world, so being smart or having a technology leadership position isn't necessarily going to make you stand out. You're just one more smart business in the crowd. How can a business stand out from its competitors? One of those competitors we're talking about is just your prospect's busy life.

Henneke: Yeah, there's different ways to stand out. One way is to target a more specific niche because if you can speak more strongly to a specific audience, then it will be much easier to bond with them. If you try to engage a very wide audience, it will become difficult. That's one way to do it. Another way to do it is make your content even more valuable. If you look at a company like HubSpot, the information they publish for free and all the e-books, it's quite insane, but that's how they stand out. By just being incredibly useful to their readers.

Another way to stand is being more personal. I think there is a tendency on the web to forget that we are human people and we're talking with humans. Often the content becomes a little superficial, a little generic, a little corporate and it doesn't really make the reader feel that a real person has written it. It's almost a little bit robotic. By creating a stronger voice, a more human voice, I think you can stand out especially in the B to B sector

as well. Of course that's also visuals. All those boring stock photos that many companies use, they don't make your website stand out. Have you heard of Kronos? They are something with human resources, I think, a B to B company as well and they publish cartoons.

Chris: Right. Yeah.

Henneke: ... employment law and problems with stuff like that. That's also a way to be different and to make people look forward to your content, because that's what it's all about. You want people to not read just one blog post, you want them to sign up to your email list and then open your emails week in week out.

Chris: Exactly. Those cartoons would create anticipation because now someone, whether or not the topic of the blog of that week is relevant to them, they want to know what's coming in the cartoon. It's something to look forward to.

Henneke: Correct. As you know I create my own drawings for my blog. I know that some people click through because I want to have a look at the drawing; not so much because they want to read my blog post, but they want to have a look at the drawing, and once they are there, they'll probably read it as well.

Chris: Yeah, and honestly, I've taken the same approach lately. I hope I can keep it up but I'm creating my drawings on the Paper app, partly because I can make a decent drawing. I'm not a great drawer but 1), it's fun for me. 2) it's way faster, believe it or not, than searching through gazillion stock photos that do nothing.

Henneke: Yeah, I like your drawings.

Chris: Thank you. I like a couple of things you said there. Obviously being personal and more like a newspaper columnist. That's what I think people's expectations when they go to a blog is really to, talk to or hear an expert from within the company. In our industry many people would know the people in research and development who, if you could get them to produce content, whether written or in audio form for the blog and then transcribe, they would love to hear insights from someone they know.

Henneke: Yeah, that's great. R&D people want to hear from R&D people, not from marketers.

Chris: Right.

Henneke: I mean that's maybe a bit extreme way to say it but there's a lot of truth in it. There's a lot of authority with the people who work in R&D.

Chris: Yeah, exactly. So the scientists on the outside want to talk to the scientists on the inside and really get the inside scoop, not filtered, edited, polished version that is boiled down to next to nothing maybe.

Henneke: Right. Yeah and the stories behind the scenes are much more interesting than the polished marketing stories often.

Chris: Right. Tell me, Henneke, a little bit, give me a few of the key elements that make an enchanting blog post?

Henneke: We were just talking about writing styles. I think that is very important. Too often people write very long sentences, very long paragraphs. Use a lot of difficult words and that makes it hard for the reader to read a blog post. Of course, if you're a technical or writing for a technical audience, we don't want you to dumb the text down. You need to use the words that your audience uses. I'm not against using technical words or jargon and such, but be wary of your readers and do they understand it. But two ways to quickly make your content more readable is to reduce your overall sentence length and to break up long paragraphs and introduce more white space.

Then we were talking earlier about a blogger as a mentor and the roles you have of showing empathy, sending destinations, sharing tips and being inspirational. Now these four rules you have as a blogger translates very well into an easy blogging template.

An enchanting blog post starts with showing empathy for the reader, because when you showed a reader, you understand the problem he has. He's more likely to listen to you. That's what you do in your opening paragraph and then you tell your reader also that look, you might be struggling with this problem, but I'll help you solve it in this blog post. Then of course, the main body of the blog post is about sharing the tips and how to actually solve that problem. Then the last paragraph is about inspiring your reader, to actually take action and really think about overcoming any objection to getting started. What can you do to really make that person take the first step to implementing your advice? There's lots of things to talk about with blog post but I'd say those are the key elements.

Writing for your reader, make it easy to read by cutting your sentence, making the paragraphs shorter as well so that it's more relaxed to read, with a lot of white space. Then writing for your readers so that he really gets pulled into reading your post and wants to keep reading on and is excited to implement your advice.

Chris: Those are all fantastic tips. I love how you just packaged all those into the complete template for writing a blog post. I want to point out a few things. The number of words in your post is unchanged, regardless of how you break up the paragraph. I see a lot of large,

large paragraphs in our industry and I don't know if we're trying to save paper, but there is no paper on your screen.

If you think about it, when you start to make really small and short paragraphs, it really is more inviting to the reader. I just want to reinforce that. It makes it so much easier to say, "I'm going to jump into this thing and it will keep going, but it's just easier to read." It's easier on the eyes.

Then when you are talking about short sentences, I want to put a link in the show notes to the Hemingway app, which I find hugely helpful for letting you know how difficult your text is to read. It really helps me with the long sentence problem. Sometimes, I'll let them go, because it has to be said that way, but I always look at it and say, "Can I break this in two or three pieces?" I just go through everyone it pulls out. Can I make it shorter? I definitely get an easier to read blog post. Again, if you want people to come back, easy is better, right?

Henneke: Yeah and I think the other thing I see happening a lot in B to B blogs is that the fonts is very small.

Chris: Yes.

Henneke: That's so uninviting as well. I have a look at a blog like Medium, or Forbes. Look at the font sizes they use. Try and introduce that on your blog.

Chris: Honestly, think about your audience. In our industry, the people you want reading your blog are probably approaching wearing the same readers I'm wearing right now. I had a product manager point that out to me when she looked at our their website and she goes, "How does anybody read this?" Did we make that bigger? I don't know. Anyway, make it easier to read.

Let's talk about gobbledygook, because this needs to be called out. I think people recognize it but first of all, tell us what you think gobbledygook is and then explain the experience that someone gets when they read it, which is probably different than what the person who wrote it thought they were going to get.

Henneke: Yeah. Gobbledygook are words that usually had some clear meaning in the past, but they have been so overused that they really lost the meaning. They sound empty. I'm talking about words like: awesome, amazing, ultimate, revolutionary, pioneering. These are all typical marketing or PR words that make people sound good but in reality, make the text just sounds like marketing and not like a real human person talking to you.

There's this confusion often about power words and there's a lot of talk about using power words in our writing to make it more powerful, attract attention, but that doesn't mean that we need to use these words that are so overused; because pioneering, is it really

pioneering, what you do? Yeah, if you were the first person to climb Mount Everest, you're a pioneer definitely. Possibly, if you invented the first MP3 player, although unless you find a cure for cancer, I don't think what you're doing is that revolutionary or that pioneering. Let's just be real with people and talk about the specifics. What is it that is that special about your product? What is it you want to talk to people about?

It's a little bit, it's not a gobbledygook word, but people tend to use easy words like “good” or “nice” or “bad”, but if you really think about it, they're not very specific, because let's say you share presentation tips. You describe a situation where a salesman did a very bad sales presentation. Yes, you can say it was a bad presentation, but that doesn't explain to me in what sense was it bad. Did that guy come across as creepy or slimy? Was he utterly boring and dull? Was he talking in a very monotonous tone? What was the problem? Were his slides so cluttered, you couldn't figure out what he was trying to tell you?

A lot of good writing is about being more precise, being more specific about what you want to tell people and avoiding these bombastic words that people put in PR releases because they don't really know what they're talking about.

Chris: Yes, I love that. I think there's a great example. You covered a couple things there.

Henneke: Yeah, I'm going a bit fast maybe.

Chris: No, I want to turn that around. You talked about pioneering. A lot of people in the life science industry they do create products that are new and different and special and they may be pioneering, but the reality is every other company is creating pioneering things too.

To use that word, you're still not standing out and yet, your example of the presentation - let's be specific about what this does. Without saying pioneering, if you can explain what your product does that so special, that makes it different in a specific way, first of all, it's more attractive and more likely to stick with somebody and in my opinion it sounds more confident.

I think people hide behind those words like pioneering, revolutionary, “your most challenging application”. That's my pet peeve. It leaves it open to the reader to figure out what that is. You may think they all know what that is, but a specific example even if it's not the one that's particular to that specific reader is still more engaging than a broad statement.

Henneke: Yeah, it's really about filling in the details. This technology is completely new because this is different and this is what it does for the people who used the products.

Chris: Right.

Henneke: Good writing is about painting clear pictures in people's minds and making them feel something. The words like pioneering and awesome, they don't paint a clear picture. People can't visualize that. It's just words. What you want to do is really think about, "Okay, how can we make people imagine using these products?"

Chris: Yes. You could have been reading ahead in my notes, because my next question was to talk about, so we just talked about specificity but also a question, just to talk about sensory words, which may not seem intuitive to our life science writers, but it's that whole thing about painting a picture. If your blog can paint a picture and make people see something, you're heading...

Henneke: Yeah. Paint the picture or make them feel something. There's really some science behind this as well. There has been research and I can pass you some links about, if you paint a clear picture then people will remember your words. It's more likely that they remember what you told them. Also there's some neuroscience research into the use of sensory words and this was, I'm not sure whether that was specifically related to restaurants but there's also research about restaurant menus. It really shows that, when people read a word that is about a texture or like fuzzy or furry or rough, then the area in their brain lights up, as if they are feeling it. You engage more of the brain when you use sensory words than when you use normal words. If you say, "I had a rough day," people will experience that slightly different than from when you say, "I had a good day."

Chris: Yes.

Henneke: In restaurant menus, they did research and they found that if you use more sensory words or more nostalgic words, you make people feel something and they're more likely to buy those dishes, too.

Chris: Nice. And just to point out, people don't use different parts of their brain when they're at a restaurant than they do when they're in the laboratory. That advice applies everywhere.

Henneke: Yeah, correct. That's a good point. We are all human beings. We want to connect with human beings. We don't want to hear from companies. A blog works better if it's a human voice.

Chris: Let's talk about going back to human. I skipped over this and I want to come back to this now, because we talked about some power words that lacked meaning, but it is also possible to use power words to grab attention and maybe specifically in headlines. But not necessarily in headlines only. This is one thing that is a constant battle for me. Sometimes just to think of them, it's not a willingness to use them, but in our industry life science and chemical analysis, people tend to take things seriously. They think our customers take

things seriously and they do. They take their science seriously. But how can a blog writer in this industry get comfortable using the right power words without feeling like they are going over the top and risking their credibility?

Henneke: Yeah, you don't want to overdo it and start using those words like ultimate. If we think about words that attract attention and headlines, they can be for instance, unusual words like pizzaz. It's an oddly written word, and not often used. When you use that in a headline, it will grab attention. I don't think it's a word that makes it feel over the top or something like that. All the power words are words that are a little, are sensory as we talked about before. Rather than saying bad or good, think about whether you can use slightly more sensory words like delicious or seductive or persuasive or just something that has a little more flair. You don't have to push it too far. Just go a little step out of your comfort zone. Write it down, leave it overnight and look at it the next day and see whether you like it or not. Power words can also be more emotional words. Sorry, I'm just losing slightly here.

For instance, a phrase like “warning signs” is very strong. When you read “warning signs”, you feel some reaction, almost physical. You think, "Warning signs, do I know these things?" If you write a headline with “Seven warning signs your next project is going to fail” or “your scientific test is going to fail.” That's quite powerful. Fail is a powerful word too because we all want to avoid failure. The warning and the failure might cause a strong headline.

Chris: Exactly, that's exactly what I was looking for, is to think about your word choice. “Fail” as opposed to “won't work.”

Henneke: Yeah, I always say, turn the volume up a little bit. Don't go overboard and put it at a maximum power, but just turn that up a little bit. Just go for slightly less often used words, slightly stronger words in terms of emotion or slightly sensory words. I mean even “dull” is better than “boring” often.

Chris: Right, thanks. I'm getting close to wrapping up here. We talked already about having a call to action, at the end of your blog post, to try to make people do something. This always sticks in my head, because I heard it from you, but secondhand through the Copyblogger folks. I think it was Jared and Demian talking about something but the phrase, "Shrink the change." Do you remember that?

Henneke: Yeah. “Shrink the change” is a phrase that Chip and Dan Heath use in their book, Switch. The idea is if we want to implement a change in an organization or with a person, then we need to make it easy to take that first step. One way to do it is to shrink the change.

Don't expect people to go from being a very bad writer to being the most engaging, most popular blogger just by reading one post. I think about, "Okay, what's the change? What is the difference people can make after reading this post?"

For instance, the change could be, "Okay, next time you write, go and have a look at the white space. Reduce your paragraph, everything over six lines long, cut the paragraph in two or three. That's a very small change, everyone can do it. It's very specific and it will make an immediate change to how the blog post is perceived.

Chris: Excellent and in the laboratory, maybe it's use this checklist next time you start up an experiment to make sure that everything's going to go right for you. Download the checklist.

Henneke: Correct. Yeah. Make it easy for people to implement your advice.

Chris: Right. I love that. I want to just highlight, making a call to action at the end is really important. I think it's something that we're not always used to doing especially in something that I would consider long form in marketing, maybe it's probably a different definition from what you would think but you write a fairly lengthy post, maybe 1,000 words and it's very descriptive but the point is to get people to do something.

Henneke: Correct, yeah, because if I just read it and then go back to what they were doing before or read the next blog post, yeah, you've missed an opportunity to make a change in their lives and to make them remember you. Even a small change is a change. Small changes over time will add up. If you can help people do their work better then they'll appreciate you. You'll be recognized as an authority. You'll become the go to brand.

Chris: That's - Bingo, that's what we are shooting for. I'm going to wrap up a little bit here; just point out a blog is a fair amount of work for companies, to find the person who can write or people, several people who can write. It's an investment of time, if nothing else. I think it's worth learning how to do well. We've talked a lot about blogging. Where can people go to find out more about you?

Henneke: Yeah, you can find me. My website is enchantingmarketing.com and all the contact details are there, on the About page as well. Happy to get emails with questions or connect on Twitter. My Twitter handle is HennekeD, that's

H-E-N-N-E-K-E-D.

Chris: I highly recommend you. Check out Henneke's blog. You will learn something every week. It makes it easy, it's fun. This whole conversation has been fun and enlightening. Dare I say enchanting? I want to thank you so much for joining to me and sharing all these tasty tips on blogging.

Henneke: That's great. Thanks. Delighted to speak to you, been a pleasure.

Chris: All right. Thanks Henneke.

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