



## Seven Oaks Consulting Webinar

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### Trends In Technology Marketing – What Works, What Doesn't

#### The Panelists

- Jeanne Grunert, President, B2B Content Marketing Expert, Seven Oaks Consulting
- Melissa “Lisa” Watts, Senior Sales and Marketing Strategist, ABM Expert
- Ryan Dube, Subject Matter Expert, Digital Transformation Director

#### Webinar Transcript

**[00:27] Jeanne Grunert:** Hello. So, everybody, and welcome to our very first Seven Oaks Consulting webinar. My name is Jeanne Grunert and I am the President of Seven Oaks Consulting, and I'm really glad that you could join us this evening. Tonight, we're going to be talking about trends in technology content marketing. And if you're wondering what content marketing is, we'll probably get to that at some point.

But before we hop into the topic at hand, I wanted to introduce my colleagues this evening. They're both people I know. Melissa Watts, who is our expert in all things sales and marketing, ABM and technology. Melissa, I'm going to invite you to say a few words about yourself in a minute.

Melissa is someone whose marketing experience, particularly around the strategic aspect of marketing, I highly value. I'm sure you are one of the

most brilliant marketers I've met. So, I'm really grateful to have you on our call tonight.

Also on our call this evening is Ryan Dube. Ryan is in digital transformation with a manufacturing company here in the United States and he serves as the Seven Oaks Consulting subject matter expert. One of the things that distinguishes our marketing agency from others is that we ask subject-matter experts to review our content before it goes back to the client. It's an extra step that we do to make sure it really resonates with the target audience. And Ryan serves that purpose for us in the IT realm and manufacturing realm—mostly in the IT department, because of his extensive experience with IT.

And Ryan and I actually met as both writers and editors on a website that we wrote for many years ago and we still collaborate for some client projects together outside of Seven Oaks. It's really interesting how our worlds have sort of moved off and on over the years. But whenever I think of an expert or an editor that I want to work with, I think of Ryan and I think he has flattered me on occasion by calling me up and saying, "Hey, do you want to do some work for me?"

So, welcome to you both. Melissa, why don't you go first and tell us a little bit about yourself, to the folks watching at home, so to speak. Share a little bit about yourself if you don't mind.

**[02:42] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Sure. Absolutely. First of all, thank you so much, Jeanne, for inviting me. It's a pleasure to be here. I mean, marketing is really a passion. And we've known each other for several years now, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to work together on some really great projects, some tough projects.

**[02:59] Jeanne Grunert:** Yes.

**[03:01] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** But the good thing about working together, is that we really produce some really great work. And so I'm really flattered for your intro and really great to be here. So, where do I start? I've been in marketing for over 20 years now, and mostly in a strategic form. I've lead

teams from demand gen to field marketing, to just ABM. I have been ABM certified before it was cool.

**[03:40] Jeanne Grunert:** Before it was cool. I love that.

**[03:42] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** And I've worked for several different companies, mostly. The last 15 years of my career has been in mostly SaaS enterprises. I've been with Adobe, I've been with Harness, I've been with from large enterprises to small startups. And so I've seen it all, everything in between.

And companies like Cisco and Rockwell, I've been all over the place, sort of dating with myself. But I'm just happy to be here and happy to talk about what really makes me get up in the morning, which is marketing and how it's changed and how we have to adapt as we look at what's coming and what we've done, where we're going.

**[04:33] Jeanne Grunert:** So, thank you. I love it. Thank you so much. Ryan, why don't you take a few minutes to introduce yourself as well? Tell us about yourself, Ryan.

**[04:42] Ryan Dube:** Yeah, sure. So, I'm happy to be here. I'm actually looking forward to learning a bit from both you and Lisa about the approach marketers take, being on the receiving end of these things. I've been in one form or another of digital transformation in the various companies I've been in the last 25 years of my career. Early on, that was manufacturing automation. This eventually grew into data collection, data analysis, visualization.

I worked in aerospace, life sciences, the chemical industry, and as well as a few years as an application engineer for a software integration company. So, I've seen mostly the manufacturing industry, and I've seen a lot of types of marketing coming in the door at those different companies. I look forward to it.

**[05:33] Jeanne Grunert:** Awesome, thanks. So, to get started tonight, like our topic here is trends in content marketing, what's working and what's not. So, before we even talk about what's working and what's not, I think we

need to have like a shared understanding of what content marketing is all about, it's what my company does. Melissa probably understands it pretty well, and Ryan you're on the receiving end of a lot of this stuff, but essentially, I'll define it and then let you guys see if you want to add to my definition.

But according to the Content Marketing Institute, what content marketing is, is "it's matching materials, whether it be audio, visual, written, to the buyer to engage in and inform and help them to connect with a product or service." So, essentially, it's using various forms of materials, I think mostly to educate the end buyer and the end consumer, which eventually makes them more motivated to make purchasing decisions.

If they get to know your products and services in a 'non-salesy' way, let's say, they're more likely to do it favorably and they're more likely, I think, to feel empowered to make a purchasing decision. And all of the different ways that this plays out are in the materials that you've all seen. I mean, right now we're on a content marketing tactic. A webinar is a content marketing tactic, which we'll talk about. And Ryan, you've probably seen a million invitations to webinars, right, every day. My inbox is full of them, from the big consulting firms, the Gartners, the Deloitte, Salesforce, loves doing them, Oracle, they all do them, right?

Because it's a form of content marketing that works. It usually provides the end viewer with a great deal of value. But there's tons of other forms of content marketing: blogging, article marketing, white papers, case studies, podcasting. I've often joked, if somebody could think of like an animated cartoon that could be technology content marketing, it would probably go gangbusters because it would cut through the clutter and all the geeky people that we love and belong to, would love to see it—no offense to my end customers out there because we use that term lovingly here in the company.

But to think about all of this stuff that floods your inbox, Ryan, what do you think is really effective in terms of content marketing? Is there anything that particularly stands out in form of marketing that you get, they maybe didn't

even know was marketing because you're just like, oh wow, that's cool. I didn't know they were marketing to me at that time.

**[08:08] Ryan Dube:** Definitely. So, the various forms you just described, I've definitely seen. Cold calls, emails are probably the most common. Webinars, I have to say, are some of the most valuable to me because it really hits on... A lot of times a webinar is very focused on the gap that in the industry we're facing and trying to find solutions. So, webinar, the reason I think it works so well is because people see it as, hey, I could learn something about what's an innovative approach to filling this gap, to solving this problem that I'm trying to solve. And so that's why webinars work so well.

Website content probably works almost as well. You too may know better the stats on how well which one works. I know for me, website content means I'm already looking for a specific solution. So, if I landed on an article, you've got me already. You're very specific, you're relevant to the issue that I'm looking forward to fix. So, for me, webinars and website content are probably the most effective on hitting on the things that I'm looking for as a consumer.

**[09:18] Jeanne Grunert:** What about you Melissa, what do you think is really effective? From your perspective, you've had more high-level corporate jobs in this industry. I tend to work with small and mid-sized systems integrators and data companies and things like that. And I know you've worked with data and analytics and some other types of technology companies out there. But you've had a more strategic role than I've had. What's your feedback on that question? What do you see as working really well to reach our target audience?

**[09:59] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Yeah, it's interesting because one of the key things that Ryan said was, 'for me.' And that is key because everyone consumes content differently. And so we're in a different world today where, you know, 10, 15 years ago, it was the spray and pray. This is what I have. I have a webinar. This is what you'll take. I have a case, this is what

we're taking. In today's world, smart marketers really have to think about not just the persona but the person and not just the vertical, but the channel.

And so it really depends. And so you'll say, for example, you look at someone who is CMO, C-suite. So, they tend to be a little bit warm and fluffy. You'll find them on Instagram. You'll find them just getting data from different places, looking at articles, looking at blogs. You can also then look at someone who is from an engineering background, in DevOps. And those people are really looking for information for content. They want cases. They want to see comparisons. They want charts. They want data.

And so we've really grown in our content and how we look at it and how we deliver it. And so it's really about... and I don't want to go too far too fast, but just from an ABM perspective, you really need to understand the customer. And in my case, I said to me, this is what I like. And you really have to get down and really find out that persona or that function. Where do they like to acquire the data? Where are they? And then you have to go where they are, whether that's in LinkedIn, whether that's in a webinar, whether that's in a small cartoon, someplace that you create.

**[11:50] Jeanne Grunert:** I think I need to find an illustrator and start that idea, the cartoon idea, because it keeps coming up as a joke, and I'm like, "Wait, people are going to like this."

**[12:04] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Exactly. So, it's really about... and especially today's doing less and working smarter and not harder. And so it's really understanding that person and it doesn't matter if the organization is enterprise, large, mid-sized, or even small. The key is really understanding that customer and where they go to retrieve their content.

**[12:29] Jeanne Grunert:** So, that brings up a great point. Ryan is our customer. So, Ryan, where do you go to retrieve your information? I mean, I don't think you have time during the day to be like hanging out on LinkedIn, checking out everybody's messages, because everybody's like, go to LinkedIn, market through LinkedIn. So, where do you go to find information?

**[12:45] Ryan Dube:** Well, what she just said, I think she hit the nail on the head, because for me, it's when a marketer or a company that does marketing has attended... So when I go to industry conferences, there's a lot of networking and I come across a lot out of the booths where they may not be there... I mean, a lot of them are there to sell their products, but I think they're there to do what she just recommended and it's learning about their customer and what the needs are and what the gaps are in a specific industry.

I think a lot of marketers probably go too general, they go too broad and they try to market to all companies out there in the whole world. Instead of, you know what? The aerospace industry, I know has very specific gaps that they're looking for technical solutions for or the life sciences industry, totally different things that they're looking for. They have technical problems that they need solutions for.

As a marketing company, if you're in those conferences and you're having conversations with people in the industry and trying to identify the gaps that they're trying to solve that they're struggling with, then you can do what she just suggested and that's targeting your marketing to the things. You can mention things in the email that raise eyebrows, like, "Hey, we have a solution for this problem that we know you're facing in this industry," more of the customers who get that email aren't going to throw it in the trash bin.

And our industry, they understand the things we're trying to focus on that specific problem. So, that's definitely key. It needs to be relevant to the customer and prove that you understand the customer's needs and gaps.

**[14:34] Jeanne Grunert:** So, Melissa, do you want to respond to that? Melissa goes by both Lisa and Melissa, which is why she's Lisa on screen, but I keep calling her Melissa. It's just for the readers at home. It's the same lady. So, how do you respond to that?

**[15:55] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** 100%. The only thing that I would add, I think Ryan's spot on hit it, especially from a customer's perspective, he's telling you, look, find out what I want, and then find out where I am, and then give me what I need. And then now we can dance this dance along the journey. The only thing that I would add to that is, within that, just learning

where they are in that journey. Are they in the education stage? Are they in the stage where they're looking to purchase? So, where are they in that journey too, will be the only thing that I would add to that?

And we get complex as you sort of think about content. But we're at the top of the funnel, or someone who is just nosing around, just know that they have a problem, and just sort of fishing around. And then someone who knows that they have the budget and they want to make the decision. And so it's a different kind of content and different kind of information that we will give to them. But I think Ryan has spoken like a true customer, and that is so important, just to listen to that.

**[16:03] Jeanne Grunert:** So, Ryan, when you're shopping, though, let's say like you've got this problem, man. You've got this, I don't know, systems architecture that you're just struggling with. And you're like, "Man, I really need..." let me just put something at you. "I've got this legacy ERP. And this thing is just gigantic. And my company acquired a whole bunch of other companies, all with each little ERPs they brought in and everybody's on different platforms. And now they've handed me this project."

So, that's a point at your process, for example, you've got a critical need. Where would you go for information to solve that problem of, I've got six different ERPs, none of them are communicating to each other. And I don't have anybody in the IT department to solve that. I'm just throwing that out as a straw man to see, where in fact you would head to look for information from a company that could help you with that. And what would you look for? What would you read or look at? What would help you make that decision, I guess?

**[16:58] Ryan Dube:** That's a good straw man because that's probably one of the most common issues companies are facing, dealing with legacy, connecting legacy systems is something that even today, we have meetings about all the time. I'll tell you a secret for marketers and you may already know this but I'm just putting this out there for anyone who doesn't know, most companies have a center of excellence. They're the group that is looking for innovative solutions that they may be struggling with in-house.



They may not have the resources or that they may want to be looking for a solution that is more affordable than having all of their resources developing this from scratch. So, I would say use... Like, Lisa just recommended it earlier, LinkedIn is great for finding a center of excellence contact in a company or conferences and starting with the center of excellence, putting your solution out there as a potential way to solve this gap and especially I would say any company that has a solution that is viable for connecting legacy systems is probably something every company is looking for as an example.

But usually, the approach they want to take is center of excellence looks for innovative solutions. They will be the first person, probably one of the few contacts in a company that are more willing than most to talk to marketers because they're looking out there for solutions, but what they're usually looking to do is to launch a pilot. So, if the content is focused on, "Hey we have this solution. We're willing to do a pilot for you at this discounted amount" or there's some kind of deal where they just... a lot of companies can get in the door especially for a large enterprise by offering to do a pilot and knowing that there's going to be a discussion with purchasing about establishing a contract.

The last thing I will mention too is overpricing is a big problem. So, we have a lot of integration companies who come in, their marketing team did a fantastic job getting to the center of excellence contact, did the pilot and I've seen this happen more times than not is then the conversation starts and no one had that conversation at the beginning because we don't usually discuss finances when we're doing a pilot. And then all of a sudden, we realize that this company is charging an amount that is way higher than it would have been just to have our internal resources develop this in the beginning.

So, pricing needs to be a big conversation in marketing too from the beginning, just be transparent and upfront about look this is where we are in the market and this is what we offer and this is how much we charge upfront is a really important.

**[19:39] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah. Pricing is one of what they call four P's of marketing. When you go to marketing school, they teach your Product, Price, Place, and Promotion – four P's. And almost every marketer along the way tends to neglect price, I find, because it often set by some other department or Finance department, you know, they push the numbers in the background. And I think in business-to-business marketing, which is what we're talking about, it's often one of the underutilized marketing levers.

You have experience where you have a company that has done great work and you're like "Wow the pilot went really well. We'd like to talk to them further." And then they come up with a number and you are like, "Whoa, where did that number come?" So, it's a really important point. It's not content marketing, that's okay. But it's super critical because it's one of the foundational elements of a good marketing strategy, is where is your pricing at? How does it compare to others in that market? And how did you come up with it? Melissa, how would you respond to that? What are your thoughts on that?

**[20:44] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Yeah, I would agree. I think it is definitely important, but it is a slippery slope. And I say that because especially when you're looking at enterprises and you're looking at typical sales cycles, seven to 12 months, sometimes even longer, deals from several hundred thousand dollars to millions of dollars and implementation and services and all those things that go into these deals. From marketers, from an enterprise, usually in SaaS are totally out of the pricing. We wouldn't touch it because of all of the people that have to go into it.

Having a sales person, to Ryan's point, it is the responsibility of the salesperson to have those conversations, not necessarily come out and say, this is going to be X, Y and Z, but to establish those relationships and at least those parameters very early on in the conversation to at least... because part of what we do from a marketing perspective is at least target and utilize folks that you know have a budget.

And so once we do that or we know you're at that purchase point or that decision making point, which means that you have a budget someplace, then

we then hand it off or as we collaborate, especially when you are an ADM, those conversations, you have to work hand-in-hand. You have to be kind of joined at the hip, because pricing is strictly looked at from a sales perspective or you may have to work that out doing those relationships. And then when we get down to the contracts, all the red lines, what comes in, what stays out, why, what's negotiated, what is negotiated in as, okay, this is your first time or this is part of a proof of concept.

So, there's so many things that go into when you're looking at the larger deals. But I think that they're also in companies, so many SaaS that have the product like the POGs, where you can have those trials, where you can try it out, usually in engineering, DevOps, things like that, where you can have the trials and sort of see if it would help in your project and how you utilize those.

And if it's worth it to you, if in the POG and the product-led experience, if it's worth it, then you continue to have those conversations, but we really need this. And so here's our budget, what can you do for us? So, from a marketing perspective, it's a bit of a slippery slope, but I do agree that those conversations are really important, but they also tend to be very tender points as well.

**[23:29] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah. And I think if the experience is they're coming in super high, there's probably a disconnect between a salesperson and their contact within that center of excellence or within the purchasing system. They haven't had that conversation around budget, or they've had it and the salesperson didn't understand it or there's been a miscommunication, that sounds like in that process.

Because my experience is similar to yours, Melissa, where it's the salesperson who is filling out the budget requirements of a client, because it's like building a house, right? You can build a mansion or you can build a log cabin, it depends on your budget. And I think it's the same with any corporate purchase, right? You can have big dreams and big visions, but if you've only got the budget for a log cabin, you're not going to be able to get your mansion.

And I think that conversation has to happen early on in the process, or else the two parties are going to be disappointed because one's coming up with the mansion schematic, "Here's your blueprint," the other guy is like, "I've only got X." So yeah, interesting. So, coming back a little too is a whole content marketing thing and what's working. In terms of as a marketer, I know what I think works and I know what I found works in my little marketing bag of tricks.

And we've talked a little about—Ryan, what appeals to you as our target customer. Let's talk about case studies for a little bit here. We as marketers value them very highly. I find that customers like them. Ryan, do you like case studies as a customer? Do you read them or look at them as part of your buying process?

**[25:10] Ryan Dube:** With technology, yeah, most of my experiences around applications, so case studies are very important. You want to know what's been successful with other companies. So, yeah, I would say it plays a big part in at least the application technology field.

**[25:25] Jeanne Grunert:** Does it matter to you if the company is stating the name of the client in the case study or if they had to redact it? Because often I'll have large companies that have legal teams that swoop in and say, "No, no, no. You may not say our name in this case study." And so we're kind of stuck. So, does that matter to you as the end client?

**[25:44] Ryan Dube:** It's unfortunate because larger companies, or actually any company really they want to protect their competitive edge so they don't want people to know they're using it. Yeah, I mean when we read a case study and we hear, GE is using this for their SAP system, obviously most people see that as a big bonus. But I can see your limitation in marketing that you just sometimes can't...

**[26:08] Jeanne Grunert:** Sorry, that I spoke from experience there, having my wrist slapped by my numerous departments and say no, no, no, you can talk about it, but you can't say our name or where we're from or what country we're in. Pretty much anything you've used for your end customer.

**[26:21] Ryan Dube:** Although the testimonial side, a lot of times they may be willing to do at least testimonials about what they've done. And that helps, just to hear the experiences from people in the same industry. Maybe they can't mention their company name, but you know they work for a company in the industry. So, a lot of times if we can find other companies in the industry who have given a testimonial about the solution, that works just as well.

**[26:48] Jeanne Grunert:** Melissa, have you used case studies a lot in your marketing efforts from the companies you've worked with?

**[26:54] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Oh yeah, for sure.

**[26:57] Jeanne Grunert:** Case studies, yeah!

**[26:59] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Definitely. And you're right, sometimes it's very difficult to be able to utilize the names. And it depends on the industry. I've seen both, mostly, "No, you can't use our name" and so you have to say, "One of the top five largest financial institutions in the world."

**[27:22] Jeanne Grunert:** Right. Let them guess, what it is?

**[27:24] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** But for sure, yes, and it may work. And Ryan is also correct. I find it hard sometimes to get the customer testimonies. It is tough. And something that we used to talk about a lot in several of the companies that I worked for and with is that, putting the pressure on sales to negotiate that into the terms that you'll have this price if you allow us to do a case study and use your name or something like that.

And that way you get it up front in the deal is going to be part of a leverage at some point. And that way you know you can come back after implementation and purchase and then you know that you'll have this case study because you need them. It doesn't always work, but it is something that we have talked about in different companies in different situations.

**[28:20] Jeanne Grunert:** Okay, interesting. So, let's have some fun now. And this is always more fun than talking sometimes about what works and that is, what is not working? And I'm really curious to hear from you guys

what we can learn from things you may have tried that haven't worked or things you thought would work and didn't from Ryan's perspective, what came over your desk and you went, "Goodness gracious what are these people trying to say to me?" No naming names, let's not name companies.

**[28:53] Ryan Dube:** Wait, we only have an hour here or...?

**[28:55] Jeanne Grunert:** Exactly. But for the viewing audience at home, tell us ladies and gentlemen, what is not working in terms of marketing for tech companies and content marketing, in your opinion, for your needs.

**[29:11] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** The first thing that pops to mind is what doesn't work in really a lot and it's getting even more relevant is, generalization.

**[29:24] Jeanne Grunert:** General ad campaigns. Same emails going to everybody.

**[29:26] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Doesn't work. There has to be some level of customization, even if it's not customized to an individual's name, but you have to match their pain point. If you're just talking about...

**[29:46] Jeanne Grunert:** How great we are.

**[29:48] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** That does not work.

**[29:52] Jeanne Grunert:** I knew where you would go with beating the chest. I knew it. "Well, what do you think about my product? I think I'm great." "Well, thank you. I think I'm great too." That kind of marketing doesn't work.

**[30:02] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** No, not at all.

**[30:09] Jeanne Grunert:** Ryan, what's not working on your end as a customer, in any given day?

**[30:14] Ryan Dube:** Yeah, I would say all my examples that I could give, I think Lisa just explained it. It's those general. And the funniest thing for me is they play...I see the games. I call it 'games'—I apologize. But it's like

marketing tactics, they're old school, where it's like, I'll use your name, so you think that I'm directing it directly at you.

Or the new one I love is, "I've spoken with your boss— and this is his name —and he said to talk to you." Like I know he didn't. I can go down the hall and talk to my boss and ask him. Or using the CEO's name, it just doesn't work, it goes in the trash bin. What goes in the trash bin are, 90% of the things that come in are, like Lisa said, they're so general, and they are covering things, I think are probably important to other companies or other industries, or even other areas of the company that I don't even work at.

So, they're contacting me in an area of the company that might be digital transformation, and they're talking about a sales issue, or they're talking about a supply chain issue, which I have no interest in. I'm not looking for a solution there. So, like Lisa said earlier, understanding who you're contacting and what they do at the company, and what their focus points are. I know it's hard to get that, to find out that much about a company, about a person in the company, but if you can, and you can tailor it for what they're specifically interested in, that's a home run.

Those are the ones where I see, I've done this so many times, actually this week I saw a webinar come in, and I'm like, that is a topic that I'm working on this week. I have projects that are focused on that topic. I want to learn more. And webinars are so great because, there's no commitment from me, I'm there to learn about an innovative solution. There's no sales pitch, I may not even be the only person there, so I don't have to feel pressured to answer to a sales question or anything, it's just I'm there to learn.

And if I like what I see and what the company does, I'm going to take the next step myself. So, for me personally, that's it. It's not generalizing, being very specifics, right down to what that specific person is doing at the company and what they want to work on.

**[32:31] Jeanne Grunert:** I love your point about the gimmicks because I see way too many gimmicks, whether it be through the emails, like you said, those are some really old tactics. I don't want to say how old I am, but those were at the start of my career a million years ago, where those are the kind

of tricky things that they did. And that actually hails from the direct marketing industry a little bit, which I come out of. But it's really interesting to see that some companies are still trying that and are not keeping up with the times and understanding that it's relevance, relevance, relevance.

It reminds me a little bit of when I'm in LinkedIn, where every day I must get 10 pitches in my inbox from people wanting to meet my assistant. And it's the same thing. They'll say, "I saw on Fiverr that you liked assistant XYZ. I'm an assistant too." And I've gone back to them and said, if I liked an assistant and just left a positive review for her, why would I want your services? And he got very flustered, but it's kind of like that where it's sort of like a trick that they were taught somewhere along the way to use. And I don't fall for it. They're trying to make a living, I'm trying to make a living.

But my point is, tricks and gimmicks don't work. And there's a content marketer that I like on LinkedIn—she's another Melissa and I can't remember her last name. But she posted something today and she said, "Hooks don't work." And what she means by hooks are the gimmicks. The clickbait headlines on articles, the email subject lines like, your boss told me to send this to you, Ryan. You're like, "No, he didn't. I talked to my boss five minutes ago. He didn't mention your company and your name. Trust me, this is not on his mind."

All of those kind of gimmicks we've all seen, we've all experienced and they're real big turnoffs. I remember the companies that do gimmicky things. And I'm like, I don't want to do this. Melissa, do you have any other things that you know in that realm or have you seen that? Because I know you change companies. If you go into a company and you see them doing that and you're like, no, no, no, you don't do that on my watch. I know you.

**[34:42] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** I think, to add to this, just the feeling of disingenuousness. I think the best thing that you can do... I always say that I'm an emotional marketer and people always look at me and say, "What do you mean, crying?" And I said, no.

**[34:58] Jeanne Grunert:** Crying, yeah **[inaudible 35:00]**



**[35:01] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Exactly. But my role is to understand you and invoke positive emotion that will allow you to at least pay attention to me now because I understand you, because I'm reaching you. And so not leading with empathy, especially today, the world has changed. It's not what it was, not even when I started years ago. Just three years ago, just four years ago, just a year ago, very different.

And so you have people that have a lot of pressure, they're doing more with less, they have less of a team, they have more that they have to do, that they have to learn. And so my job as a marketer is to help you understand that I understand your pain, and I understand where you are and where you're going, what you're going through, because I need to understand your business.

And so now what do I do? I find out where you are, and then I create content to help you connect with me, the company, the person, the asset, whatever it is, but to be able to invoke emotion. And so you have to be genuine and not disingenuous. So, I think that's the thing, just very flashy advertising, but with disingenuousness, generalizations disingenuous, I think that's not going to work.

**[36:27] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah, people can sense it when you're insincere. I think even if you do manage to hit maybe some aspect of what they're interested in, if you're not sincere or if you're just trying to sell, sell, sell, they see that, they feel it somehow. And I don't know what that is, but I've seen that over and over again. And I see it in branding a lot. And this is way outside of content marketing, but branding is also one of my areas of expertise.

I see it in branding when companies mistmark with their brand's identity because they're trying to package something that's not there. Their core may be around innovation, but they're trying to package themselves as something else. Or maybe the opposite. I've seen brands that are what I would call a trust brand, meaning maybe they're an older brand, and they have a certain clientele and a certain trust factor in what they do. You know, you can count on the same experience over and over again. And then they suddenly try to

do with some kind of edgy ad campaign. And it falls flat. Because people know the brand and they say, “That is not right. That doesn’t match who these people are, what they are, why are they trying to be hip and edgy or something like that.”

And I think it’s similar to that where if there’s a disconnect between the core and the heart of what it is you’re trying to say and do and what you’re expressing, I think the customers feel it. And in marketing and in content marketing, where that comes in is what you’re saying is that disingenuousness. It’s if you’re trying to be push and sell, push and sell, push and sell, buy my service, buy my product, it’s all about you again. It’s not about the customer and what they need. It’s about me needing to make a sale, not about your problem and me helping you solve that problem.

**[38:12] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Yes. I couldn’t have said it better myself. Exactly 100%.

**[38:16] Jeanne Grunert:** I have a good tutor from you. You and I have had many conversations around this, I think, back in the days when we worked together and did projects together. But, Ryan, do you feel it, like, when somebody sends you something and it’s just like, “No, no, no, this is all about them. It’s not about me.”

**[38:32] Ryan Dube:** Yeah, I would. And when Melissa was describing that type of content, I was feeling emotional because I-

**[38:38] Jeanne Grunert:** You feel emotional **[inaudible 38:41]** emotional marketing.

**[38:42] Ryan Dube:** Yes, because I love those emails. I’ve gotten some emails like that in the past where they might write something like, “Are you spinning your wheels trying to customize your data sources to get data into a data warehouse?” I’m almost like, have they been watching me over my shoulder and watching me? And that goes back to the thing that we talked about earlier where instead of generalizing, you’re being very specific. And this is an issue that I personally am dealing with every single day.

And so that definitely does hit that nerve, I am so sick of struggling with this. And so when a person feels that way, now all of a sudden, you understand their problem. And here's the potential solution. And I would go a step further where... and I hate to go back to spend, because I know marketers don't have control over spend. But companies that you're working with on marketing, sometimes suggesting, "Hey, could you do a tiered approach? Could you offer to prove to this company that you can really solve that solution, that problem they're dealing with, with maybe a small-scale, low-cost pilot?"

Pilots are beautiful, by the way. I just love them because it proves that you are actually really good at what you do as a company. And it proves that you're good to work with, that you're enjoyable to work with. And once you get your foot in the door and you prove that you can solve a small problem in a small part of the company, that company may actually be more willing to go up in their price point because they know you're good at what you do. So, that's the other piece.

**[40:14] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah, I see that as well. I mean, they're called different things in different companies. Some companies call them pilots, some call them jump starts or whatever it is. But whatever it is, it's a small project that bites off just a bit of the major problem or a pressing problem and it enables the company to prove their worth. We know our stuff, we're good to work with. This is what it's like to work with us. So, you as the customer know what a long-term engagement is going to feel and look like because you know what it's going to be like.

Can you get hold of your project manager? If you have a problem, can you talk to somebody? Are they meeting their deadlines? Are they producing what they promise to produce? All of that is so important, because you're talking multi-multi-million-dollar projects in a lot of cases. And nobody's going to fork over that much money without a proof point. And the best proof point is in the interaction and you only get to that point if you've bridged the gaps that we've talked about which is all around understanding who you're talking to as a marketer, hitting their pain point, understanding the need.

And then once they agree to a small pilot project proving your worth, because if you don't hit all those marks, it doesn't come together. Melissa, anything to add on that?

**[41:33] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** I one hundred percent agree. I think you hit the nail on the mark. You're absolutely right. All of those things are so intricate and important, which is why, you know, I joked a little bit in the beginning when I talked about ABM, being a cool buzz word.

**[41:55] Jeanne Grunert:** Before it was cool. You were an early, I wouldn't say adapter, but a student of ABM before it became the buzzword amongst sales teams.

**[42:05] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Yeah, it's been 10 years.

**[42:08] Jeanne Grunert:** You were certified with the original organization, if I recall.

**[42:11] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Right. But what helped me is even before that, in my early career, I was in sales, in sales background, in sales management. And so when I say "fell into" marketing, I had that understanding of relationships, and being genuine, and putting myself in that person's place. So, I was doing ABM without knowing that it was a thing called ABM. So, ABM came quite natural to me. So, when I went and found out about this thing called ABM, I was like, "So they have a thing for this thing that I..."

**[43:50] Jeanne Grunert:** It is a name for what I do. Hooray! That's how I felt about content marketing when I was like, "Yeah, this is what I do."

**[43:58] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Right. So, it's really back to the content, it's really mapping the content to the person and understanding the person's pain points and what they're trying to solve. And so it's really about that. Whenever I consult or even looking for a job or looking for new opportunity for myself, the two questions that I always ask, was your content team like, what are your operations team like? Because you need to optimize, so you will be able to see how your content is performing, if it's getting to the right

person and how they are and what the behavior looks like. And so those are the bread and butter of marketing today, content.

**[43:44] Jeanne Grunert:** Somebody said that to me about content like three hours ago, that exact phrase, “You are the bread and butter of what we do with this company.” That’s so interesting. It’s really true. Thank you. And that’s really what I said.

**[44:00] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Yeah. I’m by far not a writer at all, but we need you. We need you and people like you. So, for example... I don’t want to get off topic, but I just want to talk about what you’re so good at. You and I will be in meetings and I will come and sit and give you all of this emotion. I would say this, this, this, and this, and this is what it is. And this is how I feel and this is what it should look like. And you’d go away and it would show up on a paper. I can’t do that. You do that and you do that really well. And that’s so important because that’s how you reach people.

I can’t go to a customer or every customer and say this, this, this and that, but you can take my emotions and how I feel and my insight and my strategies. And you can put it on paper and make my campaign soar.

**[45:00] Jeanne Grunert:** And if we get to that person at the point like Ryan said, where he feels like, is somebody watching me over my shoulder? I thought that was so funny when you said that, but it’s so true. Whoever sent you that marketing, Ryan, really got it. Really understood what we’re talking about tonight because they clearly understood what you do in your organization. They clearly understood your daily life. And most importantly, they understood your daily struggle. What is really going on in your type of company and with your type of organization.

And I think that really is important and it gets exactly to what Lisa was saying earlier. And what she’s talking ABM, it’s account-based marketing or account-based management, right? That’s the acronym is ABM. I’m just spelling it out because there may be somebody watching this who doesn’t know.

**[45:52] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Yeah. Account-based marketing. The term is now ABX, account-based experiences, because now they're looking at...

**[46:02] Jeanne Grunert:** Oh, okay, like customer service becomes customer experience because it's encompassing multiple facets of the customer journey, gotcha, okay. Didn't know that. That's interesting. But it's really honing in on specific organizations, specific people and getting to know them to the point where, to Ryan's point earlier, it feels like you're watching over the shoulder because it's like, "Wow, they really get me."

And it's a very fine-tuned one-on-one marketing that at least in my experience, it's tend to be used at larger organizations or when you're marketing into bigger companies because there's just so much going on and so... And also with higher ticket sales, you're not selling a \$100 app for their firm that's going to help them be productive. You're selling them a \$100 million system or a million dollars' worth of services or something like that. And they have to really develop a very high level of trust over time and ABM to your point is what does that.

So, pet peeves, what else in content marketing is just like, no, please don't send me this, please don't do this, like is there anything else from you guys that you're thinking of or that you tried and then you went, "Oh, that didn't work," and you don't have to state examples because I know you're awesome. But it's just like, we all have those flaws. Oh, I should have done that a little differently.

I think for me, I know what doesn't work is what Melissa said earlier, which is that general approach. And also treading very carefully between the email that's about the customer's pain point and saying enough about the company that I'm marketing to prove that we know what we're talking about. That to me is a struggle because often when, for me as a content consultant or service provider, I'm sitting in meetings with top executives who are reviewing the copy. And a lot of times they want to put in more about their company.

They'll say, "Oh, you didn't mention that we have 30 years of experience doing this. Oh, wait, you have to mention our award. Oh, wait, you have to

mention such and such.” And it ends up bogging down the message and detracting from the portion of it that spoke to the pain point. So, for me, that doesn’t work. And that’s always a balancing act between saying enough about the company to prove to the recipients of the communication or the reader of the article or the listener of the podcast or something, that the company providing the information knows enough, they’re really experts in this and not making it all about me, me, me, me. My favorite song is me, me, me, me.

That to me, I think is what doesn’t work, but it’s also a struggle as a content provider or consultant because my customers, often the enterprise or organization selling the technology service, they want it to be all about them because they know they are great and they are, they are wonderful. I mean, my customers past and present are all wonderful. And my future customers are all wonderful too. But there’s only so many points, I think, that need to be expressed to sort of reflect that. Go ahead. What are you going to have there, Ryan?

**[49:30] Ryan Dube:** So, I would say, what you said is very accurate because it’s almost like... this is a really bad analogy, but I’m going to use it. It’s like, it’s like dating. When you’re on a dating website or something, what is it they say, you have one chance to make a first impression, right?

**[49:50] Jeanne Grunert:** Some slogan or rather...

**[49:51] Ryan Dube:** Something like that.

**[49:52] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah.

**[49:52] Ryan Dube:** You basically have a little profile of three lines and a picture. And so do you really want the profile to be like, I’m awesome because of this, this, and this, or do most people realize that you want to tell the other person what you offer to them?

Like I love walks on the beach. I love reading books—things you have in common. So, if you have a limited space, you really want to get to the point of what is relevant about you that solves the pain point. And I know it’s just like dating. A lot of people are like, I want to say all this wonderful stuff

about myself. And you just don't have time to do that. And that's kind of how I see it.

**[50:31] Jeanne Grunert:** We use that dating analogy a lot in conversations about the sales process because often customers will also want people to buy something on the first email. Like they expect to get lead in the first time they're communicating and I say, wait a minute, that's like offering somebody an engagement ring on the first date. It's not going to happen. So, it's similar to that.

**[50:54] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** I think the average... I haven't looked at the stat in a while, but it's somewhere between seven to 12 touches or content before someone actually takes action, before you get some kind of conversion. And that's several different pieces of content that we may be using from the webinar to email to an ad to several different ones. And so through the dance that I call dance, there's several opportunities to give little pieces of yourself if it's relevant. It may not be, it just solves my problem. And come here and let's talk about it.

People are so busy. And so again, I can't emphasize enough the importance of a content team or a person who does content organization or content consultant programs, you really have to look at who you're talking to. I'll go again to DevOps, I know engineers don't want to hear anything about you as far as how great you are. They want to know the speed and how is this going to help me get my job done, get my project completed, give me more time to do something else because I have a million things to do. How is it going to solve my problem? That's just what it is. And so, again, it's really about knowing in today's world, I think in the finances, it is know your customer.

**[52:36] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah, the KYC in banking.

**[52:39] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** Well, now it's the same thing in marketing, the kind of business that you really have to educate yourself if you're going to be successful. If you're going to, for us as marketers, using content to drive the pipeline, to put business in the pipe, leading to downstream revenue, you have to know your audience, you really do.



**[53:04] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah, for sure.

**[53:05] Ryan Dube:** So, one more thought on that, Jeanne, is just I was thinking as Melissa was talking is, I noticed the difference when a company hasn't invested in their marketing and they have a marketing company that does a shotgun approach and you can tell it's very mass generated. They've sent out, who knows how many hundreds of thousands of emails. And I've never understood that because it, those inevitably are the ones that end up in the trash bin.

But you can tell the gold star marketing companies when they have taken the time, you immediately recognize they have at least figured out what your industry is interested in or what pain points your industry has. Let alone if they know what my personal pain points as a digital transformation leader, I mean, if they know that, then they go up another level. So, I think it's just important for companies out there who are looking for marketers to understand that cheap marketing is not going to get them what they need. It's going to get them in the trash bin. They have to invest into good marketing.

**[54:04] Jeanne Grunert:** I would also add to that, not just cheap but old school marketing. Like there are some firms that are not cheap that still do that. And I know them because I've known them throughout my career. And they are very good because of their brand cachet or their name that convincing companies that this is a way to do it. And I've seen it because I'm often called in to clean it up after it ends in the trash. And that's how I know when I see it. But I just want to caveat that it's not always cheapness, it's sometimes just a lack of keeping abreast of current marketing needs.

And marketing is like any profession. It changes the role all the time. What we did five years ago is no longer what we do now. Brian, you and I work with publications, digital publications a lot. I have my own websites that are outside of the technology sphere. So, we're well versed in Search Engine Optimization. How do you get Google being in all of the search engines to recognize your content, archive it, index it and raise it up in the search engine results so people see it?

And what we know today to do differs from last year or the year before that or 10 years ago. When we worked together at a large website, what they taught us to do there, nowadays, you don't do that now or other websites that we've worked at together. So, it changes all the time. And my point being is that you have to keep up with what is working in your industry. You have to keep up with how it's changing. Just like Search Engine Optimization has changed dramatically five, 10 years ago where, you could do all sorts of shenanigans and trick the search engines into archiving your content. You can't do that. It won't work. You'll waste money.

But yet, I still see companies pitching me on paid link exchanges. And people are still spending money on it. I mean, I know again, I've had to clean up business owners who have wasted money on things like that. So, I think some of that is lack of knowledge. Some of it is people making decisions based on name of company rather than on quality of results. And it's bad, but it is marketing. Bringing us back the whole circle to what does not work. It's what doesn't work, because you can't spray and pray, to Melissa's point earlier. You just can't do that in this industry.

Maybe it still works to some extent in consumer marketing. I don't know. I guess a bag of chips is the same. If you like chips, you could put the commercial on TV and people who will eat that food, will like that food. I don't know. I don't know consumer marketing anymore. But I know for this industry, that doesn't work. Melissa, any last thoughts on that? And then we're actually out of time. I could sit and chat with you guys forever. It's so good to be with friends.

**[57:10] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** I love it. Just one thing we didn't touch on, and I think it's important just to mention, I feel really strongly about it, and it is involved around content. You hear a lot of people talking about AI, ChatGPT, so I just kind of wanted to bring that up. That's going to be...

**Jeanne Grunert:** Thank you for bringing that because I forgot to do that. That was on my list. So, escaped my mind as usual.

**Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** But I just wanted to say that I think that those things are doing some pretty cool stuff. It's shortening some of the time that you

have as far as research and doing those things. But I'm a firm believer is that the minute that you think that marketing is going to be successful when you take the human element out, you're going to be blockbusted. And I say blockbuster because where is Blockbuster today as opposed to Netflix?

I don't think it's going to work. You need the human element because that part of marketing is what connects people in the relationships, in the content that you build, in understanding the persona, in the understanding the problems, and then opening the doors as we should be with our content and our marketing, opening up the doors for sales to go and do what they do. The minute that you take that element out of it, I think you're making a huge mistake.

And so I just kind of wanted to make sure that I brought that up because, and this is my personal opinion. I'm sure people will think very differently with AIs.

**[58:38] Jeanne Grunert:** Yeah, I've gotten into some good arguments online about AI. But I'm actually teaching, for those of you interested in this, you can spread the word, I will be teaching a free masterclass in AI and content marketing in September. It's going to be recorded and out on YouTube for anybody to watch. You don't need to jump through hoops to see it. But I have done extensive research into it and I'm seeing so many marketers trying to shortcut their content using AI and it's very dangerous. There are appropriate uses of AI with content marketing and inappropriate uses.

And to exactly what you were saying, I'm just going to touch on this lightly now because you brought it up for which I'm very grateful. But the AI tools, it's called Generative AI. The ones that actually write for you. So, the tools that are out there and you can give it a prompt and say, write 300 words on, why is a goldfish a good pet? And it spits out 300 words. Right now, it's a legal quagmire. There are multiple lawsuits winding their way through the courts that will not be solved for years about the source content that was used to train the AI models.

I follow because I'm the branding and marketing expert for the National Association of Independent Writers and Editors. I'm on their expert panel of the board. And so I follow very carefully the industry and it's like five really well-known authors are actually suing Microsoft for using their books as source content to train the AI model. They said, "We never gave you permission to use it for that purpose."

So, it's scraping the web. There's a legal quagmire with that because it is actually digesting copyrighted materials and spitting it back out. And sometimes it's picking things up verbatim, which it's not supposed to, but it does. So, there's that. Perhaps more importantly for those who are interested in this topic, which I will dive deeply into in September in the masterclass, is that all of the AI tools that we use now, there's something called digital watermarking which is done within the text.

And Google has the wherewithal to recognize digital watermarking. And guess what? In the webmaster guidelines in Google, it says very explicitly, AI content is not allowed. So, if you're using AI content, trying to generate say search engine optimized copy, for example, and slapping it up on your website, Google's bots can recognize it based on this digital watermark and it will immediately suppress it and not index it. So, if you are trying to shortcut your way through your marketing, it's not going to work.

There are, however, very appropriate uses which you touched on, outlining things. Great source. I had to outline a glossary for somebody which is just mind-numbing work, but they wanted a hundred terms related to their industry with the definition of each. I didn't have to think about it. I used an AI tool, I said, spit out a hundred terms, it didn't define them for me, I did the definitions for them. But those hundred terms, it was able to do in two seconds where it would have taken me several minutes, several books pulling off my shelf, thinking about, etc.

So, there are very appropriate uses of it. It can help you enhance titles, it can help you outline things, it can help you create a list of vocabulary words or glossary words for a student. It can do stuff like that. But to generate original content, it is absolutely the wrong tool. And the reason... I'm going to get

off my soapbox in a minute, but I'm so passionate about this, because I love tech. And I actually get to work with some really brilliant people who know AI, they've been working with AI for years and they're really upset at what they're seeing being sold right now. And by sold, I mean all of these people that are slapping up ads on social media saying, buy my tool, it'll write all your content for you.

Buy my tool, it'll do this and the other thing for you. And people are falling for it because they want the shortcuts, but there really are no shortcuts to really good human generated content. Ryan, you look like you want to add something to that. So, I'll let you have the last word on the AI topic. And then everybody needs to tune in to the September topic because it's going to be me just yakking and presenting for an hour and boy, oh boy, that's a treat. No, I'm kidding, it is topic am passionate about.

**[1:03:16] Ryan Dube:** So, if it's okay, AI, I feel exactly like you just described. I don't really have a lot more to add on that note. I would like to end my final comments with—and I don't know if this is for new marketing companies out there or established marketing companies, but for my own sanity and my trash box, I plead marketing companies to do your due diligence. I know it's more expensive, it takes more time. But please, just do that due diligence, find out about your target customers, follow the advice that Melissa was going over multiple times about getting emotional.

To me, that's the marketing that matters. To me, that's the marketing I care about when I get it in my inbox. To me, that's the only effective marketing. You may disagree, but that's my final word.

**[1:04:04] Jeanne Grunert:** Thank you, Ryan. Melissa, what's your final word?

**[1:04:09] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** I agree totally with what Ryan said. And really, we want to touch Ryan, we want to give him what he needs. And he said it so eloquently, that's what it's all about, to do good work and to really be human and empathetic about the work and really want to solve someone's problem. Then you have great marketing. And you can be all kind of

creative with content and channels and things like that. But if you start there, then you can end up not just having a customer but a partner.

**[1:04:49] Jeanne Grunert:** Wow, very powerful thoughts guys. Thank you so much. Melissa/Lisa Watts, thank you for joining us this evening. Ryan Dube always a pleasure. I love bringing people that I admire together and you two are too as I said at the beginning of the call, you're two of the smartest people in your respective industries and people that I really value highly. So, thank you both for joining me here this evening for our kickoff webinar here. I really appreciate it.

And for those of you who are interested in getting in touch with Seven Oaks Consulting, that's my company, we are a business-to-business content marketing agency and we sponsored this webinar this evening. And I hope that you will visit our website at [www.sevenoaksconsulting.com](http://www.sevenoaksconsulting.com) and get to know us. So, Ryan and Lisa, thank you so much for being here with us this evening. I really appreciate it. And for those of you watching, thank you for joining us.

**[1:05:51] Ryan Dube:** It was a pleasure, thank you.

**[1:05:53] Melissa (Lisa) Watts:** My pleasure, thank you.

**[1:05:55] Jeanne Grunert:** Bye-bye.