



Marketing Moxie Podcast

Episode 54: B2B Doesn't Mean Boring With Jessica Mehring

Show notes at: <http://www.maggiepatterson.com/episode54>

MAGGIE: Today on Marketing Moxie Show, we are talking about how B2B copywriting does not mean boring. My friend, partner, and amazing copywriter, Jessica Mehring, is here to enlighten us, and we are going to talk about copy, but we're also going to have a chat about books and reading and how that can help you with your copy because Jessica and I are both avid readers. Let's dive in!

INTRO: Welcome to Marketing Moxie with your host, Maggie Patterson. This show is dedicated to practical and proven, online and offline, marketing ideas that you can take away and apply to build your business, all with Maggie's signature, to the point, style and sass. Let's go.

MAGGIE: Probably about a year ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Jessica in a copywriting group, and we just clicked. I'm a big fan of, when someone else is a really great copywriter, getting to know, like, and trust them because clients all have different needs.

Jessica's real sweet spot is writing B2B copy. She is the director and senior copywriter at Horizon Peak Consulting, and I actually get to work with Jessica week in, week out on a very sizeable client project. We're able to just get a lot done because we have a lot of things in common when it comes to writing B2B copy that is not boring. Let's listen in on my conversation with Jessica.

Hey, everyone. I have Jessica Mehring who is joining us today. A little fun fact: Jessica and I actually work together on quite a few client

projects. She is an absolute wiz at B2B copywriting. I often get things from her and don't have to touch a word. She is the perfect person to talk to us today about how to make B2B not so boring. Jessica, welcome to the show.

JESSICA: Thank you so much for having me.

MAGGIE: This just feels like an exciting meeting for us, but we actually never speak in person. We do everything by chat and email, so Jessica and I are going to spend some time together today. We are going to talk about why B2B copywriting is so darn boring sometimes. Jessica, let's start with that. How do we actually make B2B copywriting more fun and interesting?

JESSICA: Yeah, yeah, so it's true that B2B and B2C are two different beasts in a lot of ways and that B2B customers typically do more research than B2C customers do.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

JESSICA: Really, they base their buying decisions more on value than gut feeling or how much they like the person or the business. This can lend itself to some really boring copywriting. I think it's when people hear *research*, that B2B customers do more research, they think academic. I don't know why that is, but what they forget is that they're still communicating with human beings. That's my first tip is to be a human being.

MAGGIE: Yeah, that's such a good tip because I think that a lot of times B2B copywriting devolves into feature and benefit talk really quickly.

JESSICA: Right.

MAGGIE: I'm sure you've written that kind of copy. I've definitely written that kind of copy. What do you think is the biggest mistake people make with B2B copy?

JESSICA: Well, the biggest mistake that I see a lot is just writing overly technical or complex copy. When you think about your audience, an office manager or a small business owner is not going to spend the time to read a technical manual. An executive doesn't even have time to read anything.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

JESSICA: Their info is usually coming from an underling, which means your writing needs to be understood at the team lead level, the manager level, or the director level. My rule of thumb for that is make sure a high schooler can understand it.

MAGGIE: Yeah, that's a really good rule of thumb. For a long time I worked for a B2B software company that was in the HR space. I can tell you right now: HR professionals, they don't want to read about features and

benefits. They want to know how this is going to make them look good in front of the CEO.

JESSICA: Right, right, exactly. Although, features and benefits, I think, in the B2B space, they really do need both to feel confident about buying a product. Of course, lean more on the benefits because that makes the emotional connection. I think, in the B2B space, it's a little more okay to also list the features. Just make sure you have those benefits as well.

MAGGIE: Yeah. I think the reality is probably just like that grounding in fact or actual metrics, things like instead of just saying it's going to help you increase your revenue, inject a customer example.

JESSICA: Yeah. It comes back to the value statement that I made early on in this conversation is that people need to see the features to see, okay, this is what I'm getting for my budget. It's that value thing again.

MAGGIE: What is probably the biggest thing if we're writing, we're a coach, we're a consultant, we're a small business, that is selling more of a personal brand or a service? What kind of things do you think we can learn from B2B?

JESSICA: Well, it's all about providing value to the reader. I write everything from blogs to white papers to ebooks, newsletters, website copy, but they're all focused around providing value to the reader. I think that's the biggest lesson that people can take away from this is that before they are going to buy from you, they need to see that value. Providing helpful content is a really great way to engage them.

MAGGIE: We talked a little bit about the research that customers will do going into this from a B2B point of view. What are some of your favorite ways to kind of figure out what is the value for customers, because it's not always obvious? I think a sales guy will tell you one thing, but when we really boil it down it's something different than what we might think it is.

JESSICA: I think it comes down to listening. If you can't ask the customers directly what it is you need, what problem can I solve, then pay attention on social media. Google it. Listen to what your target customers are actually saying about what they need. Then provide a product or a service that has the features that will solve that problem for them.

MAGGIE: It's kind of interesting to me when you think about software companies. I know you've worked for software and hardware companies. You think about they have this continuous improvement process. I think that continuous improvement is a really core part of software because they're always getting feedback from customers and improving their products. Starting to think about that within your own business, no matter how small your business is, no matter who you serve, "How can you constantly get that feedback to always be improving?" I think that's such a thing we miss.

JESSICA: Absolutely. In the startup world, they call that *iteration*.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

JESSICA: That's a little word for you guys on the other end of this podcast today. *Iteration*, your vocab word for the day.

MAGGIE: That's why you have version 5.2.1.3.

JESSICA: Uh-huh.

MAGGIE: You're like, what version is this? Oh, is this .3 or .4? I don't know.
[Laughter]

JESSICA: Yep.

MAGGIE: Jessica, I think B2B companies do a really great job of content marketing. I don't think B2C or smaller brands are doing a great job. What kind of lessons can we learn there?

JESSICA: Just about doing a better job with copywriting? Is that the question?

MAGGIE: Yeah, copywriting. Content marketing, in general, because I think we all have this idea that we should do content marketing, but I don't even think we really understand what that is and how it works.

JESSICA: Yeah, yeah, and again it comes back to listening to your customers and paying attention to what they need and where they're hanging out. When it comes to content marketing, give them whatever content they are going to most easily digest. For example, if you're talking to an executive audience, white papers are a really great way to go. If you're talking to small business owners, blogs are really, really powerful with the small business owners.

Get to know your target customers. Find out how they are digesting content. When I say content, of course I'm a copywriting, so I talk about written content a lot, but there's also webinars, podcasts, and all of that as well. Find out how they're getting their content, and then provide content in that format to them.

MAGGIE: Yeah, and I think that's such a solid lesson. I often talk about a really, really, busy, busy mom doesn't have time to watch your 15-minute video.

JESSICA: Exactly. Yeah.

MAGGIE: They're just not going to do it. They're like, "I've got to prioritize. This idea of self-care is great. Give me the three bullet points I need. I don't have time to watch a video of you waxing and waning poetic about it."

JESSICA: Exactly. Myself as a writer, I like to read.

MAGGIE: Yes.

JESSICA: Podcasts and video series that don't have transcripts, a lot of times I skip over those just because sometimes I'd just really rather read it.

MAGGIE: Okay. I'm so glad you brought this up. I was actually talking to someone about this and how, if I take a training or a course, I can't watch the videos. It's literally, like, I don't have the patience. Also, too, that's not my learning style.

JESSICA: Mm-hmm.

MAGGIE: I literally will read the transcripts. That's the only way. If there are no transcripts, I am so done for.

JESSICA: I'm so with you. Yeah.

MAGGIE: Yeah, so just something to think about from a course design perspective is those different learning styles. I know you're a huge reader, and I'm glad you brought up books. What are some of your favorite books you're reading right now? I know I'm just totally throwing that out there, but I love talking about books.

JESSICA: Oh, my gosh. I'm always reading, like, ten books. I'm terrible. I read whatever I'm in the mood for, so I've got a stack of books on my bedside. I just pick and choose each night what I'm going to read.

I finished Gary Vaynerchuk's *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook*, a few months ago.

MAGGIE: Yeah, it's a great book.

JESSICA: That one, as soon as you asked about books, I'm like, oh, I need to say one that because just totally changed the way I look at social media.

MAGGIE: I think that's such a great book. What about fun books? I'm always on the lookout for fun book recommendations, not those business ones.
[Laughter]

JESSICA: Oh, my goodness. I love my sci-fi, fantasy, and young adult novels. I admit I'm one of those people that read the *Twilight* series voraciously. Yeah, *City of Bones*, that series.

MAGGIE: Yep, totally read part of it.

JESSICA: I loved that.

MAGGIE: I haven't finished that one.

JESSICA: Oh, it's -- yeah. Oh, I really get into that world.

MAGGIE: I've got to say, with *Twilight*, this is totally random, but we'll talk about this. I picked up that book, and this was before it was really, really popular. It was on some sale table at Target or wherever I was. I picked it up. I got home. I had no idea it was a young adult novel, right? I go to get the next installment at the bookstore, and I'm like, "Why isn't this in the adult section?" That was so interesting to me because it totally turned me onto that entire genre.

JESSICA: Oh, yeah. Young adult, that's not just for teenagers anymore, I'm telling you. I read that stuff like crazy.

MAGGIE: Yeah, it's kind of a misnomer, really. [Laughter]

JESSICA: It is. I think it brings us back to that point in our lives, though, too, that you remember the first love and how exciting everything was when we were teenagers.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

JESSICA: I think it really does bring us back to that point.

MAGGIE: Yeah, and I think that there's something to be said for reading fiction. It kind of gets you thinking about different modes of storytelling. From a copywriter's perspective, pretty much every copywriter I know reads a lot.

JESSICA: Oh, heck yeah. Yeah. I think, even in our realm of copywriting, and me specifically in B2B copywriting, there are a lot of elements to fiction writing that we can bring into our marketing copy.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

JESSICA: One of the things that automatically came to mind is, in the B2B space, there's a lot of technical topics going on. It's really easy to slip into a monotonous voice.

MAGGIE: Yes.

JESSICA: I don't know why that happens, but it does. From the fiction world, you can bring in some of that evocative language.

MAGGIE: Yes.

JESSICA: Really engage the senses. I'm not talking about writing poetry. Be judicious about it.

MAGGIE: [Laughter]

JESSICA: I do think that every type of reading that we do feeds into our ability to write better.

MAGGIE: Yes. If you're listening and you really want to start, you're doing your own copy and you're really kind of struggling, I think taking time to read really gets you thinking about language, word choice, and all those different things in a really, really powerful way. I see this with my ten-year-old. The more he reads, the better his vocabulary is, the better his writing is. It's amazing to actually watch that unfold.

JESSICA: That's funny you bring that up. My husband is a comic book collector. He's a rabid comic book collector, and so he's reading comic books all the time. He gets his weekly delivery and everything.

MAGGIE: Oh, wow!

JESSICA: You don't think much of it. You think comic books, kind of simplistic, right, a lot of pretty pictures.

MAGGIE: Yeah.

JESSICA: But my husband's vocabulary is insane. Sometimes his vocabulary is better than mine, and I'm a professional writer. Just because he's been reading comic books his whole life, he's got an incredible vocabulary.

MAGGIE: Yeah. Comic books, they use very sophisticated language in a lot of cases. They tell complicated stories. I think that this is not an *Archie* comic.

JESSICA: Right, right.

MAGGIE: Saw Jughead getting into trouble.

[Laughter]

JESSICA: Yeah. Every form of reading can feed into this.

MAGGIE: Yes, so that's our power pro tip for today: Go read some books. In fact, once you're done listening to this podcast, go out and get yourself some awesome books at the library.

JESSICA: Or comic books, yeah.

MAGGIE: Yeah, even comic books. To each their own. All right, Jessica, where can everyone find you if they want to learn more about you and what you do?

JESSICA: My URL is HorizonPeakConsulting.com. That's a great place to go to find all my contact info, all my social media links and everything. But I also love to use Twitter, so you can find me at [@HorizonPeak](https://twitter.com/HorizonPeak) on Twitter.

MAGGIE: Awesome. Thank you so much, Jessica. We really appreciate it.

JESSICA: Thank you, Maggie. This was awesome.

MAGGIE: It was short, sweet, to the point, and you got some actual fiction reading tips. What else could you ask for in an episode of Marketing Moxie? Let's get into our takeaways.

Number one: Jessica brought up the point about making sure that people understand the value you deliver. This has come up a couple times in this copywriting series. It's really important that people understand the benefit, a hard, tangible benefit. Are they making more money? Are they saving time? Especially in B2B copywriting, you can't get stuck in featureville. No one cares about the features. They care about what this is going to do for them.

Number two: Do your research. It's so important with B2B copywriting. Especially in that business-to-business environment, market research matters so, so much. You need to know how they're going to receive content, what questions they need answered and deliver it. You might look at your audience and realize that doing videos is not appropriate. Maybe they need audio content. Maybe they need white papers. Maybe they need technical data. Maybe they need research reports. Find out from your audience and from your clients what they need the most and deliver that to them.

Most of all, takeaway number three: If you want to write copy that's not boring, start reading: books, magazines, blog posts. When you're reading and consuming that type of content a lot, I do think it makes you a better writer, like Jessica and I discussed. I'm so glad we got onto this topic because this is where I get ideas for headlines, story structure, and more. I know Jessica does the same.

She talked about her husband and his amazing vocabulary because he reads comic books. I see this in my son, as he's reading, how his vocabulary is expanding. He can write better paragraph structure. The same applies for us.

Writing is really an art and a lifelong thing. Especially with B2B copy, it doesn't have to be all solid and stale. It can be a little bit cheeky. It can be a little bit fun. It can be a little bit surprising, so don't be afraid to use those things to your advantage.

If you want to learn more about Jessica, you can hop on over to <http://www.MaggiePatterson.com/episode54> for the show notes and links to Jessica. If you'd like to continue the conversation, you can join us over in the Marketing Moxie Facebook group at www.MaggiePatterson.com/group. Over there, we have lots of conversations, everything from the B School Affiliate Hunger Games right through to what's on my last nerve right now. Hopefully you'll join us over there. Thank you so much for listening. I'll talk to you all soon.

OUTRO: Thank you so much for listening. Hop on over to our home base at <http://www.MaggiePatterson.com> for the show notes and more episodes.

And you can join the Marketing Moxie Facebook group at www.MaggiePatterson.com/group. And remember, as Yoda says, "Do or do not. There is no try." That's what having moxie is all about.

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