

S2: E198: Why You Need a Golden Thread in Your Brand

Hey there, and welcome back to the Make Your Message a Movement podcast. This is your host, Tiffany Neuman, and I'm gonna dive right into the juiciness today because there is a particular kind of business I've been noticing lately where there's a funnel, they already have a lead magnet, The welcome sequence is written. There's probably a webinar, a CRM, a nurture campaign, a content calendar, impressive diagram somewhere showing exactly how someone is supposed to move from stranger to subscriber to a client. And on paper, that machine looks great. But when you actually see the results that's coming out of it, and the message moving through all of it, there's nothing there that makes you stop.

Nothing that makes you think differently. Nothing that people would really get excited about. And you could replace the name at the top of the website with 2 different people, and with a few small changes, almost everything else could stay Exactly the same. And when I see a business like this, I know that the problem isn't probably the funnel, how the funnel is set up, because the funnel is doing exactly what it was designed to do.

It's moving a message, but that message does not have enough gravity to create results. So I want to talk about this today because I think we've spent years in the online business world obsessing over what I'll dub today as like the machinery, in air quotes, of marketing. You know, where does someone opt in? What happens after they opt in? How many emails should be in the sequence?

Should the webinar be live or evergreen? What's CTA? How many touchpoints do people need before they buy? And these are all valid questions. Funnels can work.

Email sequences can work. Landing pages matter. So I'm certainly not suggesting we should stop thinking strategically about the customer journey. In fact, that's a big part of what I help clients do in the branding process. But what I'm finding is established experts in particular need to think about this differently, which is thinking, why would someone care enough to enter the journey in the first place?

Because a funnel can organize the attention that's coming through. But an idea has to earn that attention. And before we spend another month optimizing the journey, we first need to make sure that there's actually something worth following in the brand. And if you're listening and thinking like, okay, my funnels aren't converting, this is very often why. Or maybe you don't have a fancy funnel yet, and just things aren't converting in general, I want you to know that there is

no reason to build a funnel because the funnel won't function if you don't have a strong foundation in place first.

Because it's a traffic problem, not a tech problem. And the traffic problem is because You have a messaging problem, most likely. Now, I'm making a few assumptions here today, so this may not apply to everyone listening. However, I've seen this so many times, especially lately, where people come and they're like, well, maybe we just have to tweak the CTA, or maybe it's that. And most often.

It's not that you need a better funnel, you need a stronger point of view. And so if you, like I said, if you haven't built a funnel yet, you're probably in the best possible position because if you get to learn this now before you build the system around a message that does not carry enough weight, you'll save yourself a lot of time and energy. And for those of you who have spent a lot of time building a funnel that's not converting, stay with me because we're gonna talk through this, how to shift it. Now, last week, I'm just gonna go back for just a moment. We talked about the idea that the expertise economy as we've known it is changing, right?

We know information is abundant now. Competence is abundant, and there are more smart, qualified people in almost every category before. Plus, we have the layer of AI, which means simply knowing a lot is not enough to create a meaningful movement. So one of the biggest things that creates authority which will allow that abundance to come to you because people will see you in that position of authority is having a strategic point of view. Not just an opinion or a hot take, but a real point of view is the interpretation you have developed because you've spent years inside the work.

It says, this is what I see, This is what I think we're getting wrong. This is what my experience has taught me instead. And most importantly, this is why seeing it differently matters to you. So that's very different from simply sharing useful information, right?

So to get this point across, I want you to imagine 2 restaurants. Both have beautiful entrances. Both make it incredibly easy to reserve a table. Both send a confirmation text at the right time. Both have friendly hosts, efficient systems, and a smooth checkout process.

From an operational standpoint, both customer journeys are excellent. But one of those restaurants serves a meal you are still talking about 3 days later. Yeah. You tell your friends about it. You remember the one dish you never would've thought to order.

You start thinking about, when can I get back there to eat it again? The other restaurant's fine. Nothing went wrong. The food was okay, but you didn't really keep thinking about it. So no amount of optimizing that second restaurant's reservation system, or ads are going to make the food remarkable.

So sometimes I think we're doing the equivalent, like the marketing equivalent, of obsessing over a reservation system when what we really need to do is work on the menu, which in this case would be the messaging. Because your funnel can make it incredibly easy for someone to move towards you and really get into the depth of your ecosystem, but it cannot create the thing that makes them want to step into it. That comes from the substance of the brand. I keep repeating myself, but this is why it's so important. It only can come from your unique ideas and perspective.

Your intellectual property, your ability to help someone see a familiar problem in a new light. And that's what I'm talking about when I talk about message gravity. A powerful point of view will literally create its own pull. So someone hears you explain an idea on a podcast, goes to your website because they want to know more, or someone reads a LinkedIn post and sends it to a colleague with, this is exactly what we've been talking about, or someone hears you speak and does not simply think, oh, that's a good idea. They think, I need to go talk to her after this talk and have a conversation with her.

So brand demand is really what we're talking about today. When you have message gravity, that will build demand of your brand. And one of the fascinating things about brand demand is that it often begins long before the funnel can even take credit for the conversion. We love things we can measure in marketing, right? And for a good reason.

Conversion rates matter, traffic matters, email performance matters. We should know whether our marketing is working. But not everything that creates demand fits neatly inside a dashboard. How do you measure 6 months someone spent hearing your ideas before they finally became ready to buy? How do you attribute the The podcast episode a colleague forwarded to someone 8 weeks ago?

What value do you assign the phrase they heard you repeat enough times that now your name automatically comes to mind when the problem appears? Those things are harder to put into a spreadsheet, but they are incredibly powerful. Powerful. And that is where we need to understand the difference between capturing demand and creating demand. A lot of traditional marketing is to build— built to capture demand that already exists, right?

So someone knows already they need, say, an executive coach, a brand strategist, a consultant, what whoever that is, maybe it's you as a coach, they begin shopping and your marketing helps them decide whether you're the right person to buy from. So funnels can be fantastic at that. But an authority brand will do something even more valuable. It will change the way someone understands the problem before they even begin shopping. So you've probably heard me use this website example before because I experience it all the time.

Someone comes to me saying, Tiffany, I just need a new website. That is an existing demand. They already know the thing they believe they need. But once we begin talking, we probably discover that the website isn't really the root problem. Their business has evolved and their positioning has not, and their message no longer represents the work that they do.

Maybe their intellectual property is buried or old. Their expertise has expanded, but the brand is still presenting the version of them, say, that existed 5 years ago. Now that conversation has changed. I do not simply convince them to choose my version of the thing they were already shopping for. I actually helped them understand the problem completely different.

They're no longer just shopping for a website, they're shopping for a complete authority positioning and a new website. And that is the power of that point of view. The highest level of authority is not simply being chosen when someone is shopping for what you offer. It's helping shape how they understand the problem in the first place. And you can see how dramatically this changes positioning when you compare experts who from the outside could easily be placed next to each other, right?

So I have 2 clients that are a great example of this that I'm working on, that I've been working with recently. So one woman whose work— well, actually, so they both are in the leadership space, right? They're both leadership coaches. I've worked with a lot of leadership coaches, and we could have positioned her with all the language you would expect, you know, leadership development, executive coaching, Better teams, stronger culture, higher performance. None of that would have been inaccurate, but it wouldn't give the market a reason to remember her because that sounds just like every other leadership coach out there, right?

So as we dug into her work, a much stronger belief emerged. She believes that the next level of organizational growth Does not require leaders to become bigger heroes, but it really requires them to be better builders of the people inside the teams. Her work is about helping companies scale without sacrificing their people.

In the age of AI, She really takes this people-first approach, which directly corresponds to her ideal client, who she knows care about their people. She has no interest in working with companies that don't care about their people. So when we put it in this people-first culture lens, then We have a point of view. She's not simply another person helping leaders become helping better leaders. There's an argument underneath the work about what sustainable growth actually requires.

Now I have another client, a man who also is in leadership, and he works with the founders, CEOs, and leadership teams. Now again, if we stayed at the same category level, we could easily end up with that same generic language about leadership growth. You know, these 2 clients could literally almost look the same on paper other than maybe a few credentials and things like that. But his perspective is quite different because he built multiple companies and has taken 3 of them through successful exits. So his point of view comes from being in the trenches, such as like making payroll, navigating growth plateaus, sitting in boardrooms, and ultimately understanding what makes a company valuable enough to scale beyond the founder and eventually sell.

And he believes that founders need someone willing to tell them what's actually broken. Identify the overlooked growth levers, make smarter bets, and help build a company that works beyond the founder. So again, both of these clients are in the same broad universe, leadership, but there's completely different weights of gravity that we've built in to position them as authorities. And this is why simply niching by job title or industry is not enough. And why so many people are flailing because they want to be broad enough they're not excluding anyone.

The market does not only need to know who you help, it needs to understand how you see the problem. And your point of view is what turns a category into positioning. And, you know, I want to make clear, we talked about this point of view a little bit in the last episode, but I also want you to be clear that it does not mean you have to invent something that no one has ever thought of or taught before, because we all know that this day and age there's barely any new ideas anymore, right? But it's the collaboration of the ideas in your head. It's the way that you connect those dots that's going to create the perspective here.

So again, the woman I described is not the first person in history to care about people-centered leadership, and the man is not the first advisor to help founders grow company from this unique leadership perspective. But both of their authority comes from the particular interpretation they have earned through experience and the language we built around it when building their authority brand. And that is what makes the message theirs specifically, because then we put an added layer of their language, their IP, and so much more in the frameworks and the ecosystem

of their brand that it becomes undeniable it's coming from them. In fact, one of them is now writing a book about the frameworks that we've developed together. I also want to point out that a real point of view does usually come with some tension.

So if there's a way that people commonly think about a problem, and then there's a way that your experience taught you, then it might create some tension and you have to learn to be okay with that. So, you know, in my industry, so many people say the riches are in the niches, or the niches, however you say it. But after working with established experts, I know for a fact that sometimes a niche can become too small to hold the body of work someone has built, right? We can go in both directions. We can not niche down enough, but I also spend a lot of time helping experts who have niched down so small that it's driving them crazy and they've kind of worn out their market do what I call a reverse niche.

So that is something that I often talk about disagreement with other brand experts.

Another one is everyone says build your personal brand, but maybe you wonder if making yourself the center of the brand is actually the best term— long-term strategy. Well, it depends. Are you planning on exiting? You know, do you have things in place? Are you already a personal brand?

Are you not? Like there's so many things to look at, and so these are points of view because they create a shift in interpretation of something where we hear all the time, like you have to build a personal brand, or the riches are in the niches. When you can go against something. With your expertise and backing it up, then you help people see something they haven't seen before, right? It doesn't mean you have to disagree with everything in your category, but when that happens, your marketing becomes much easier because you're no longer inventing disconnected topics every week.

Your unique point of view becomes the center of the conversation. One strong idea can become a podcast episode, a keynote, an email, a LinkedIn post, all the things. And so instead of saying, what content should I make today? You're asking, what idea that I own and I'm trying to make known today? And this is a fundamental reversal that I want you to think about today, because most businesses create content first and hope that over time all the pieces will somehow add up to a recognizable brand.

But authority brands begin with the thinking, and then the content becomes the distribution of your thinking and authority. And that is exactly why a business can have a sophisticated funnel and still feel like every launch starts from zero. Because if there's no larger idea connecting everything, what I call the golden thread, every campaign needs a brand new hook. Every lead

magnet becomes another isolated piece of information, and you continue to kind of throw spaghetti at the wall. Every week you're feeding a machine that is hungry again the moment you stop.

But when the business has a clear point of view, the ideas compound. People begin recognizing the themes. Your language starts becoming familiar. Your next piece of content strengthens the last one instead of replacing it. And then, the market begins learning how you think.

And that is so much more valuable than simply teaching people what you know. I can say this from experience with my own business. If you've been following over the past month, I've been recovering from a pretty traumatic car accident. And the beautiful thing is I was able to see my own brand and positioning hold its weight. Well, I rested and my team took over. Yes, I did record a couple podcast episodes from bed, but because I have my brand operating system in place and my team knows the drill, they were able to create my emails, my LinkedIn posts, and everything from that content in my voice.

It's the same thing that I teach all of my clients to do. So when I was down for this past month, I didn't have to touch anything and the machine kept working. I onboarded new clients. I had podcast episodes I had already recorded released. I have speaking engagements that were already lined up for October in New York City that, thank God, I'm able to. If all goes well, I'm still planning on going to because I'm healing well, and that's something worth its weight in gold.

I don't have a really fancy funnel with upsells and downsells and all of the things. I have my own unique brand operating system that works for me. Behind the scenes.

And this is why I'm also wary of building a business entirely based on other people's marketing advice. Now, mind you, I'm giving you advice here now, but this is from a perspective of me saying it really depends on your business. I will never say the riches are in the niches, but I may say that for your particular situation. I may say that, you know, you need to be on Substack, but XYZ person who does the same thing you're doing does not. Right?

And so over time, it's so incredibly easy to collect so much external strategy that your own perspective disappears underneath it. Maybe you borrow someone else's niche and another person's content pillars, someone else's way they built their funnel, the language from a mentor that you worked with, a headline format that's working for someone else on Instagram, a prompt that produced a great performing post once. And individually, none of those things is necessarily a problem, but eventually your marketing can start to feel like a not very well-made collage. Maybe technically pieces of the puzzle worked for people, and maybe it converts

sometimes, but there's no center of gravity because we cannot tell what you actually think. Your funnel should distribute your thinking.

Not replace it. So if you're wondering whether your business has a strong enough point of view, I wanna ask you 3 questions today. Well, actually give you 3 questions to ask yourself today. First, what does my industry commonly assume to be true?

What advice gets repeated so often that no one even questions it?

Then ask yourself, what has my experience taught me that adds to, challenges, or complicates that assumption? This is where your years in the work matters, not because you need to be contrarian just for the heck of it, but because your experience will produce discernment and a different point of view. And, and of course, this can be done for multiple— I asked you, what does my industry commonly assume to be true? Like, you may have a full list of those things, and then this can all really start for you to create your own point of view that's completely different. Now, maybe you already have some of that But how do you double down on it?

And then finally, the third question is, why does that difference matter to the person I serve? And this is probably the most important question because your point of view is not valuable simply because it makes you sound clever. It's valuable because seeing the problem through your lens changes something for your audience. It helps them build better decisions, maybe avoid a mistake, see an opportunity, understand themselves differently, create a better result. And that is where an opinion becomes your intellectual leadership.

And this is a huge part of the work that I do with clients because we don't simply sit down and try to write pretty messaging or create a pretty logo. We look for the thinking underneath it all. So what have you seen enough times that you are willing to put a stake in the ground for? What do you believe your market needs to hear? And what language could become associated with you specifically?

Because great positioning doesn't tell people just what you do, it again gives them a lens through which to understand why your work matters and what the outcome will be by working with you. So yes, by all means, build a funnel, improve the landing page, write the emails, automate what should be automated, measure what matters, all of those things. I love good strategy, and I will always advocate for good systems that help a business grow. But before you spend another month optimizing how people move through your marketing, make sure there's ideas that are strong enough to pull them towards it. Because your business doesn't need more journey points toward the same message everyone else is sharing.

That's just going to have you blend in with everyone else.

Again, it needs a point of view so the right person will join you on the journey. So next week I want to take this conversation somewhere even further. But for now, I want you to go ahead and if you realize your marketing isn't quite working the way you want it to, I want to personally invite you to something brand new I'm hosting on September 24th called the Authority Advantage. This is something that is entirely new, I've never done before, that has come together over these last weeks where I've really taken a step back after my accident. And I've realized what we need to talk about is the advantage that you can step into by having an authority brand.

And I'm calling it The New Rules for Becoming the Obvious choice in a market full of experts, because experts abound everywhere. I've been saying that over and over again, and we really need to position you as the authority so you have the advantage. So I'm going to show you what it takes to turn your expertise ideas and point of view. First of all, find out what that really is. What's the golden thread Or maybe you have some of it, but how can we make it stronger and make you the obvious choice?

So grab your spot through the link in the show notes, and I'd love to have you there. Let's make sure the authority that you spent years earning is actually positioning you to become the obvious choice for these next years where I truly believe that the next thought leaders are going to rise up. And my job, my goal is to help as many new thought leaders rise to the top, become known, and make their message a movement. So go ahead, check that out in the show notes, join us, and I hope to see you there. And we'll see you next week on the Make Your Message a Movement podcast.