

S2: E199: How to Become the Obvious Choice

Hey there, and welcome to the Make Your Message a Movement podcast. This is your host, Tiffany Neuman, and today we are going to dive right in and we're going to talk about how to become the obvious choice. So if you're new to the podcast, welcome in. I am 100% human, and if you hear me botching one of my sentences, that is because we do not edit this podcast. And you may have noticed something unique.

We do not have an intro to this podcast. I don't know about you, but I scrub through all the intros anyways. And we're gonna talk about this a little bit today. Many brands have actually become overly polished. And in the age of AI, as we're moving into this new era, I found that being overly polished actually gives the wrong impression.

So more to come on that. But first, I want you to imagine that one of your best clients is having dinner, maybe with a business bestie or a colleague, and somehow the conversation turns to a problem that that friend is trying to solve. And your client immediately says, oh my gosh, you need to talk to insert your name here, right? She's brilliant. I really think she could help you.

Now, when you have a client speaking that highly of you to someone, that's about as good of a lead you can get, right? There's already trust built into the introduction. The person is not randomly trying to search for someone and finding someone online, someone they respect has essentially pre-sold you. They've given you credibility before you even know that the conversation is happening. So later that night, maybe the friend, colleague goes home, then they Google your name, and they land on your website.

After they see what comes up in the search feed. And now this is where something really interesting can happen. They can immediately say, yes, this person is the obvious choice. Or maybe your homepage is sort of vague and they can't quite figure out whether you can actually solve the problem they were referred to you for. Or maybe the visuals feel several levels below what they expected after hearing how incredible you are.

Maybe the site is talking about the work you did 5 years ago rather than the work you do right now. Or maybe there's 12 different offers and they can't figure out which one applies to them. So nothing is necessarily bad enough for them to consciously say no, although that could be the case too. But that's actually what makes this sort of dangerous. They might think, hmm, I'm not so sure.

And they close the tab. Now, of course, there is a chance that they'll trust their friend and still book a call and still work with you. But I've heard this situation multiple times, where actually a client came to me recently and told me a story like this, which is what gave me the idea to tell you the story.

She found out that somebody had recommended her and they never booked a call. They never showed up.

And what happens is they tell themselves they'll come back later. And you, like this person I'm speaking of, probably never even know that the decision happened. And I think about this scenario because and I wanted to bring it up today because so much of branding and positioning happens in moments we're never even present for. Your prospects are having a conversation with your brand before they ever have a conversation with you. And your brand's job in the moment isn't necessarily to convince them you're brilliant.

Someone, like in this case of the story, may have already done that for you. Your brand and your website's job is to confirm the expectation, right? So in this case, when my now client who told me this story and knew then she knew she wanted to work with me when her colleague had said, hey, I recommended this person, are you working with them? And she goes, no, I don't even know what you're talking about. Her friend colleague went back to the original person and asked, hey, like, what happened?

And they said, well, I Googled her. I looked at her website and I, you know, I know you said she was great, but I really didn't think it was a great fit. I hired somebody else. Needless to say, that really stung. And this person realized, wow, my website is quite outdated and it's not reflecting the level that I'm at, right?

And again, your brand and your website's job is to confirm the expectation that people have of you. And/or if somebody literally is Googling who's the best health expert, who's the best money coach, who's the best XYZ, and they happen to land on your website, we don't want them to confirm the expectation. That way we do want it to be clear that you're brilliant and the obvious choice, ultimately to make them think, yes, this is exactly who I hoped I would find. And to me, that is the most overlooked job of a strong authority brand, because we spend so much time talking about generating leads and getting more visibility that And we forget to ask what happens after somebody finds us. What are they experiencing?

What are they assuming? What questions are being answered? What questions are left unresolved? Because the truth is, the best expert doesn't always win. And I know that can be

frustrating to hear, especially if you've spent 10, 20 years becoming exceptionally good at what you do.

Because we have to remember that the person on the other end evaluating you cannot objectively determine who the best expert is. They have not worked with anyone that they're researching. They do not have access to your experience. They can't, of course, climb into your brain and see the nuance, the record pattern recognition, all the expertise that lives in your brain. They can only respond to what they are able to perceive.

And that's where your brand and your positioning becomes incredibly important. And I learned this long before I started working primarily with speakers, authors, coaches, and thought leaders. When I was a creative director working with brands like Burt's Bees, Stolli Vodka, Chase Bank, John Deere, so many more, we understood that the customer was never going to sit down with our strategy deck before deciding how they felt about the company, right?

And they saw a product on the shelf, they saw the packaging, the photography, the language, maybe the website if it was an online product. And all of those things were creating an impression before someone consciously stopped to analyze it. And this is why our visual brand is also important. Now, you might hear people say things like visuals don't really matter, strategy matters. And yes, 100%, the strategy matters.

The language matters. But the visuals also matter because unfortunately humans do judge a book by the cover. Like there's just no way around it. We teach our children not to, we say we don't, but if you land on a website that looks like it was built in 2005, which to many of us who are 40 and older, you're like, oh, that's not that long ago in website years.

It is, right?

And of course, beautiful typography cannot manufacture expertise, and a great photo shoot cannot create a point of view. But it doesn't mean that that perception is irrelevant, because perception is a big part of the strategy. And this doesn't mean smoke and mirrors and making you out to be something you're not. It's actually capturing your essence and your experience in a true way that makes you that obvious choice, right? Because again, the audience only experiences you through whatever you give them access to.

So the visual brand can't manufacture the authority, but it can influence whether someone expects to find the authority when they meet you. So think about it this way. If I, not me as Tiffany, but if I was a person considering bringing you in to speak to my executive leadership

team, maybe your leadership coach, I'm asking myself whether the experience of your brand feels consistent with the level of the room I'm inviting you into. If I am considering paying you a significant amount of money to advise my business, I'm looking for evidence that you understand businesses like mine. If I'm going to refer you to one of my most valuable relationships, I want to feel super confident that when they look you up, Their experience will reinforce what I just told them about you.

And I actually just did my first Substack live this week, this past week. Yes, I'm on Substack now. More about that soon, because right now it's just my podcast, which you're listening to. You can also access that on Substack, but I'm starting to write, and I'm really looking forward to that being another lane for my own thought leadership. But that's beside the point.

The reason I'm telling you this is on the Substack Live, it was actually one of my clients who asked me to come on to one of their shows. I'm actually speaking on her stage next month, and she told me a story that I hadn't heard before, that she had a different mentor, her business coach, who wanted to actually send leads her way because she had seen behind the scenes.

She knew that Sarah, is my client's name, was incredible at what she does, and she wanted to start sending people her way. However, she was very blunt and said, I don't feel comfortable because when I go on your Instagram, it looks like you do something completely different.

When I go to LinkedIn, something different is being said, and your website looks like it hasn't been updated for a while.

Now, this is super common. Sarah is extremely prolific and her business is doing quite well. But she had been blocking opportunities because the brand wasn't consistent and coherent.

Yes, a lot of the thought leadership and posts that she was putting out might have been more recent and made sense, but the actual footprint of her thought leadership and her brand and her authority had turned into what I call a Frankenstein brand. And again, super common.

We build the plane while we're flying it, and she was so busy helping her clients, she hasn't stepped back to look at that. And what she told me was, at first she was pretty upset. She was like, oh my gosh, I can't believe you just said that. But then she became grateful and said, wow, you've actually given me a gift to realize why I'm not growing at the speed that I'd hoped to. And her business mentor is quite well known and could actually send a ton of leads her way.

And she point blank just said, I would do this, but I can't until you fix this. So good news is we fixed it and things are really taking off for her. So much so that I'm going to speak at her live event that has over 100 people at it, which I'm super excited about.

So I say all of this to share that it's not vanity. A lot of people think brand might just be vanity.

Ooh, I want my pictures to look good and I want my logo to look good. It's actually all about trust because when everything reflects who you truly are and what you're doing and your true expertise, People can immediately trust that. And one of the things that fascinates me about the work we do with clients is how often the true value of someone's expertise becomes obvious to me in a conversation long before it shows up in their brand.

So, for instance, I'll be talking with someone for 10 or 15 minutes and they casually mention maybe a client result, a framework they have developed. Or a pattern they've seen over hundreds of engagements, maybe an idea that they've been thinking about for years and haven't taken action on.

And I'm sitting here thinking, wait, that is the thing. That is what makes you different, why someone should hire you, what you should be known for. But then I go look at their existing website or messaging, and I don't see it anywhere.

The thing is, a prospective client should not need a 90-minute conversation with you to understand why your work is extraordinary. That understanding has to happen before you get on a call. And this is where ease comes in.

I don't mean making your work more simplistic. Because your work, if you're listening to this, is probably nuanced. Your methodology is probably sophisticated. Your clients may have complex problems that require real depth, and I get that. But complexity in the work doesn't require complexity in the message.

And so many people don't understand this. The right person should be able to orient themselves quickly. Is this for me? Does this person understand my problem? What do they actually help people do?

What makes this approach different? And big one here, what should I do next? If they have to work too hard to answer those questions, they're not necessarily going to reject you fully. They're just going to keep looking. And like I mentioned earlier, that's so hard to detect because you don't ever actually get that feedback.

Nobody's gonna send you an email saying, hi, I was referred to you by someone who absolutely loves you, but I spent 4 minutes on your website and I couldn't understand what you do. So I decided to explore 3 competitors instead, and I went with one of them. Just wanted to let you know. I mean, honestly, that would be helpful, but of course it doesn't work that way, which is why I say confusion doesn't always make someone say no. Sometimes it simply makes them keep looking, and then in the end, you're not the obvious choice.

So another thing I want you to think about is While someone is reading your website, listening to your podcast, looking through your LinkedIn, IG, whatever your thought leadership lane is, checking out your speaker page, receiving your proposal, whatever engagement they have with you or your brand, they're asking questions internally. Of course, they're not sitting there with a checklist. But underneath the decision, they're typically secretly wondering, does she understand someone like me? Has he solved this problem at this level before? Would I trust this person in front of my team?

Does this feel like the caliber investment is aligning with The quality of work I will receive? Will hiring this person make me feel confident in my decision? Those are the invisible questions, and your brand is answering them whether you design it intentionally or not. And that is why the best brands do way more than communicate information. They reduce uncertainty.

By helping the right person move from, oh, I'm interested, to this person understands me. I trust the way they think. I want to talk to them. And ultimately, yes, I'm signing up. This feels like the right choice.

So, one of our clients, Nikki, recently described. Something after going through our process that really captures this. And she loved the final website. She gave us a testimonial. She asked me to be on her podcast to share it with other people.

She was proud to share the website. And of course, I love hearing all of that. It was amazing. And I'm a creative director at heart. I wanted the finished brand to be beautiful.

But part of her testimonial I care about even more was what happened underneath it. She said the strategy and mapping process gave her much clearer understanding of who she served, how

she served them, and what she wanted to become known for, even though she's been doing this work for— I think it's around 15 to 20 years. I'm not sure the exact timeframe. So even if you've been doing this work for your work for a long time, there's always more dialing in, more clarity, and really ensuring that people see you as the obvious choice.

And this allowed it so the visitor of her website does not have to connect all the dots. We connected them for them. You know, the message says, this is the problem, this is how I see it, this is who I help, this is why my approach is different, and this is what becomes possible. And then the visuals, experience, proof, the full website reinforce that same story. So it's a confirmation effect.

And of course, Nikki's business is moving further and faster than ever. So maybe someone originally found you because of a referral. Maybe they heard you on a podcast, saw you on a stage. Maybe your LinkedIn post made them think differently. Something created the initial interest.

They arrive inside your brand and everything The encounter says you are in the right place. That's what we want your brand to be doing. And this matters even more if the opportunity gets bigger. So say if someone's buying like a low-ticket product, \$50, you know, \$47, they may tolerate a little uncertainty. There's not much skin in the game.

However, if they are considering a significant investment or high-ticket investment, maybe introducing you to their board or booking you for their conference or referring you to a high-value client or attaching their own reputation to yours through partnership, those unanswered questions carry even more weight.

Which brings me back to the phrase that I've been using a lot recently, which is the obvious choice. And sometimes people misunderstand what I mean by that, so I just want to clarify really quickly that becoming the obvious choice does not mean convincing people you're objectively better than every other person out there. First of all, that's probably impossible to prove, and the truth is there's probably several extraordinary people who could help this person, right? The goal is not to stand on a mountain declaring yourself as the best in the world, although you may be. But what I mean is even simpler.

It means that the right person, your ideal client, that you would be just ecstatic to work with because you don't want to work with everyone either, right? We've all had the not-so-fun clients, the clients that we wish we wouldn't have taken on. I want you to be able to choose

who you want to work with, right? And so when your positioning is on point, the right person will think, they understand me. This is exactly what I'm trying to solve.

This perspective is different. I trust this. I can see myself working with them. And then choosing you is so easy, it becomes inevitable. And the best brands— and my goal as a brand strategist is that you do not have to pressure people into a yes.

We Remove the reasons for hesitation before people even get on a call with you.

And this is where the value is easier to understand, the difference is easier to recognize, and all of those invisible questions are answered working together, and you don't have to convince anyone. And this is where your sales conversations change because the person arrives with a much stronger understanding of why they are there. Your referrals become more powerful because the brand reinforces the recommendation instead of making the referrer do all the explaining. And your content works harder. You don't need as much content Because it's so coherent, they know what next steps to take.

And ultimately, my goal is that your website stops being a passive brochure and begins actively supporting the decision and having you be the obvious choice so people take action to work with you. And so that's why I suggest looking at your brand through 3 lenses. As we start to wrap up here today, I have some questions for you to sit with as you're thinking about your own brand and business. The first one is, how easy am I making it for the right person to understand my work and the value of my work? Because if someone needs a long conversation with you before the light bulb goes on, think about that.

What does your brand need to communicate sooner? So again, the first question is, how easy am I making it for the right person to understand what I do and the value?

Second, Does the perception match the caliber? Does someone— does what someone sees, reads, and experiences reinforce the level at which you actually operate? And said another way, if your dream client, maybe event organizer at the stage you want to speak in, publisher, or potential partner landed on your website, or in your brand ecosystem, which is really anywhere they can see your work, would their experience support the assumption that you belong in that room? We already know you do, but is the perception there?

And 3rd, what questions am I leaving unanswered? What might someone need to understand?

So choosing to work with you feels safe. Maybe they need stronger proof. Maybe the methodology needs to be clearer. Maybe your point of view is buried. Maybe your offer structure is creating confusion.

Because the buying decision begins much earlier. Than the sales call. And that's one of the biggest shifts I want established experts to understand. Your brand is not there simply to make you look good. And that's where I think so many people are confused with brand.

The looking good is icing on the cake, right? It's decoration. And it does help because we do judge books by cover. Like I said earlier, But your brand is participating in the decision. It's either making you easier to understand, trust, remember, and choose, or it's creating questions you may never have the chance to answer.

So, if you're listening to this and thinking, I actually have no idea what my brand is communicating when I'm not in the room. That is exactly what I want to, to help you look at. Or maybe you have some ideas, but you know, it could be better, or it could go further. So in October, on the 27th— oh, I'm sorry, I just said that wrong.

Remember before I said I'm not editing, so I totally messed that up. My brain's already in October. On September 24th.

I'm hosting a brand new live authority positioning workshop. This is the very first time, brand new workshop. I actually developed it— those of you who've been listening to me for a while, um, I had an unfortunate car accident and was healing for the past 4 months. I'm going to be talking more about that and how my business ran without me and how we booked new clients even during that season. So come listen to the next episode.

But during that time, I had a lot of downloads and time to think And this new workshop came to me, and I cannot wait to share it with you. So it's a focused 90-minute experience designed to help you look at your brand through the eyes of the people you most want to hire you, to refer you, to book you, to partner with you, or to bring you into bigger opportunities. We're going to look at what is helping you become the obvious choice. And what may be creating hesitation before you ever get the chance to have the conversation.

And if you've ever attended one of my workshops before, definitely still join me because the market has changed tremendously even in the last 6 months and a year. The way people evaluate expertise is changing and the way I am thinking about positioning and authority Brands has evolved right alongside it. So you can grab your spot through the link in the show notes, or

you can follow me on LinkedIn. I'll be talking about it there as well. Again, it's on September 24th, and whether you join me or not, I want you to take one question away from today: When the right person encounters my brand without me there to explain it.

What conclusion are they reaching? Now, of course, you have no idea because you can't see the label from inside the bottle, right? You can only guess what that is. But I want you to take an objective view at your brand, your website, or maybe ask some trusted advisors, some trusted colleagues, and ask them that question.

Because somebody may already be talking about you in the room you want to enter. Somebody may already be recommending you. Somebody may already be curious about your work, and your brand's job is to make that person think, yes, this is exactly who I hoped I would find. Thank you for being with me as always. Today.

Next week is going to be an incredible episode. It will be episode 200 of the podcast. I have a lot of juiciness in store, so make sure you join me back here next week, and I hope you have a beautiful week until then.