

Lee Price ([00:00](#)):

You know, if you're the marketer trying to help your company find your voice, ask that question. What do we believe or know about this industry that no one else is saying? From Managing Editor Magazine, this is Margins. If you're using content to solve business problems, we made this podcast for you. We'll explore what it means to communicate in the digital age. We'll share stories about the messier side of content marketing, what works, what doesn't, and the big questions we're all asking at work. In this no advice and no checklist zone, you'll hear from marketers, creatives, and leaders. You won't walk away from this podcast with all the answers. Instead, we hope we help you think about the questions you should be asking. I'm your host, Lee Price. In every episode of this podcast, we're going to break down one big theme. Today, let's talk about voice. People have voices. Brands have voices, I guess. How do you find your voice? And why does it matter more than ever? I'm here with my partner in crime, managing editor Mary Ellen Slayter. Hey, Mary Ellen.

Mary Ellen S. ([01:18](#)):

Hey there.

Lee Price ([01:20](#)):

You and I have worked together for a long time, I think seven years maybe at this point. And we've basically spent seven years on the phone talking about how content marketing and our work is changing. And so we decided it was time to take it off the phone and into a podcast.

Mary Ellen S. ([01:40](#)):

I'm really kind of over the marketing hacks and the tips and all these quick tactical things that people look ... They want you to do as marketers. That stuff is changing too fast. And it just keeps getting faster and faster. What I'm interested in having is a deeper discussion around the edges of content marketing. I really want to get into the margins of what we're doing. These things are fuzzy. They're ambiguous. You don't have a checklist to solve these problems. Those are the things that interest you and me I think the most. It's that messier side of marketing.

Lee Price ([02:11](#)):

You know, there never has been a quick hack. Content marketing has always been a long game. But it's gotten even more complicated, I think. And what your competitor is doing, or what the business down the street is doing, even if it's working for them, it might not work for you.

Mary Ellen S. ([02:25](#)):

We can tell when people are just following the formula. I can totally look at someone's site and tell when they're in that copycat mode, when they're just making a checklist, when they're just trying to follow the rules, and then hoping that the magic output of this is going to be followers and sales. One of the exercises that I like to perform with people now is I go and I look at their blog, because again, every company has a blog, even the most tech oriented, esoteric, B to B firms, they all have these blogs. And you can go there, and you could basically say, "Look. If I took your content off the site right now, and I dropped it on the blog of your competitor, could anyone tell the difference?" And this is usually a really horrifying realization because they realize the things they're talking about are the same things that everybody else is talking about. And they're not bringing in a unique spin. They're not really bringing in a unique perspective. Often, it's very horrifying because in many cases, they've been really pumping out this content and producing a lot of it.

Lee Price ([03:24](#)):

We all agree, voice matters more than ever. But what does that mean in your work? On today's episode, we'll get three voices on the idea of voice. We'll talk to voice coach, [Eda 00:03:36] Olsen and get literal about how to use your voice and get people to listen to you. We'll talk to ghostwriter, Cathy Ericson, about how she learns other people's voices. And we'll hear from marketing consultant, Katie Martell, about why voice matters so much right now, especially in B to B marketing.

Mary Ellen S. ([03:55](#)):

Voice is something I've been thinking about for a really long time. I grew up in the deep south. And one of the things that I heard growing up over and over again was that if I wanted people to take me seriously, if I wanted them to think that I was smart, I needed to get rid of my accent. As we were thinking about voices, I decided I wanted to start my research with an expert on our physical voices. And so I called up Eda Olsen, my favorite voice coach.

Eda Olsen ([04:33](#)):

You've heard of the expression verklempt, or even being choked up, it's physically your throat becomes closed and you cannot get the words out. And this doesn't happen all the time for everybody, but it happens when the stakes are high, so when we really want something, it's not going to happen so much at Starbucks when you're ordering a coffee. But it's going to happen when you really need something, and you need to communicate your message very clearly in order to get something that's important to you. And so our bodies literally go into fight or flight when we get nervous. When we're branding our firm, our company, our products, and we're putting it out there and saying, "This is who we are as a company," but then we kind of become afraid.

Eda Olsen ([05:18](#)):

There's some high stakes there. I'm making a decision and I'm going to say, "Hey. Here's who with are." And I'm going to put myself out there, but you're right, you can get choked up. And you can be, I don't like to use the word afraid because I think people are afraid to admit they can be afraid of things, but yeah, I think it can definitely stifle the message that's trying to come out.

Mary Ellen S. ([05:38](#)):

When someone is trying to find their voice, what are some of the things that you advise them to do to get in touch with that real, authentic, clear version of themselves?

Eda Olsen ([05:51](#)):

I will tell you exactly what I do. It's crazy magic, but super easy at the same time. What I do is I teach people relaxation exercises. We do it in a way so that eventually just breathing in causes you to find whatever tension is in your body, and then breathing out causes you to eliminate that tension because, I don't know about you, but I could be on a deserted island with nothing but coconuts and good times, and I'd still find something to be nervous about, or freak out about, get stressed out about. I'm sure I would.

Eda Olsen ([06:24](#)):

We have to change the way that we react to the situations that we're putting in front of ourselves, so we are trying to strive for better and better, greater and greater success in our lives, and by building our

brands and building our message and developing it, and we have to just keep putting ourselves out there and doing more and more challenging things. Can't just hide in the closet and just say, "Heck. I'm not communicating well." You get rid of all of that tension, and you just learn how to breathe. I teach abdominal breathing, and that keeps you in your relaxed place.

Lee Price ([06:59](#)):

I feel relaxed now. Let's all take a deep breath in, and out. I know a lot of you out there are ghost writing for other people. I am too. And it's really hard work, so I wanted to call one of the best ghost writers I know. I talked to Cathy Ericson. She's ghost written for Fortune 500 CEOs, artists, and everyone in between. And I wanted to hear from her. How do you really get to know someone else's voice?

Cathy Ericson ([07:30](#)):

The first thing I try to do is put them at ease and let them know, A, that we're just talking, B, that they will get a chance to see what I write before it goes anywhere. And C, I ask them to pretend that they're talking to a client because I think that brings out their chattiest voice, because most of them are really good at relating to clients. And so I think that puts them in a different frame of reference than if they were talking to fellow C-suite executives or whatever. I think that if they feel like they're talking to a customer, or someone that they ... If they're not in a customer facing role, maybe it's someone on your team, someone that you know. And I feel like that brings out kind of the better voice.

Lee Price ([08:15](#)):

Right. And so what I hear you saying there is that if people feel like they're being interviewed for an article, capital A, they're going to give you a very specific version of themselves. Right? You just want them to talk to you.

Cathy Ericson ([08:27](#)):

Right. And I also, and this is especially true these days, people don't like to read formal business writing. It's kind of going away in almost every scenario. I mean, there's still some publications that have that formal voice. Almost everything is becoming way more informal. So I also just say, "Hey, think about the things that you like to read that are engaging for you to read." Think about the words that people use there. They don't use a bunch of buzzwords or super factual, lengthy, too much. Right? They're interesting to read because you can relate to them, so we're going to figure out how to find that voice.

Lee Price ([09:06](#)):

It's almost like we're in a golden age of voice these days. Right?

Cathy Ericson ([09:13](#)):

Yes.

Lee Price ([09:13](#)):

Because everything is more authentic and casual. And people want to know more about the human behind the writing.

Cathy Ericson ([09:19](#)):

Yes.

Lee Price ([09:21](#)):

I think for someone like you, who's trying to get information on to people, but also trying to help them build their voice online, this is a time where they can really let their voice shine.

Cathy Ericson ([09:31](#)):

And that's what people want to read. And when you read things that sound super stilted, or sound like they were crafted by a message maker, they're boring. They're not fun to read. And that's also where an editor can step in and say, "This is too company speak."

Lee Price ([09:49](#)):

That's why I think it's interesting that you have always brought so much research to your work. Right? And you just describe your process from the very beginning of your career is you would research everything that was being written around a topic so you could go in knowing kind of what's already been said. Right? And I think there's an element of voice in that too. Right? Like, okay, we know what you want to say. We know what everyone else is saying. Let's say something different, or say it in a different way.

Cathy Ericson ([10:13](#)):

Exactly. Let's try to be somebody who brings something new to this conversation.

Lee Price ([10:19](#)):

I love this advice. Saying something new is what it's all about. But that can be easier said than done. Right? I mean, the internet can be kind of a noisy place. It's always so loud in here. Hello. Can you hear me? Can you guys be quiet? Hello. Okay, guys. We can cut it. I know the perfect person to help us figure this out. I called Katie Martell. She's a marketing strategist. And she helps tech companies figure out this problem. First, she says you have to understand the market.

Katie Martell ([10:53](#)):

It's important to really understand the nature of competition in 2019 and leading into 2020. The truth is, there's more competition than ever in every corner of technology. We're seeing it with you and I. In MarTech, we're seeing 7000 plus different tools all being sold to the same CMO. It's really an incredible amount of pressure on the buyer to wade through these options. But we're also seeing it in other corners of B to B buying. HR technology is blowing up. Even accounting technology is blowing up for beleaguered CFOs. It's incredible if you think about it on behalf of someone who's got to make decisions about what tech to buy. When there's too much, and everything kind of starts to sound the same, it's commoditization. Right? Everything becomes meaningless.

Katie Martell ([11:44](#)):

The individual vendors all start to blend because there's just more options for the buyer no matter what corner of tech they're operating in. And when you add the fact that most companies invest in content marketing, I think the stat is 90% or 91% of B to B companies plan to invest in content this year, which is no surprise. But again, it creates even more noise because there's just so many companies deploying the same tactic. And so when you talk about differentiating and standing out from the crowd, it's just never been harder. We all know this.

Katie Martell ([12:17](#)):

And so unfortunately, I think some of the advice given to companies to kind of combat this is bad advice. I think companies feel compelled that they've got to publish. They've got to publish at all costs. They're going to act like journalists. And what that means is they kind of push out more of the same. Not only is their branding and their messaging very similar, but the content they produce is very similar. And they're just not equipped to ask tough questions, like a journalist really does. And so what ends up being published is lackluster, unoriginal stuff. My take on it is that the prevailing mantra of marketing today is maybe if our buyers just keep seeing our brand, they won't notice that we have nothing new to add to the conversation, which is a burn.

Lee Price ([13:02](#)):

Right.

Katie Martell ([13:04](#)):

I saw some research recently from the Fortune Knowledge Group. And I think it was very telling. I think we have to give buyers what they want today in B to B among this sea of noise. 60% of executives saying knowing what a company stands for is much more important than knowing whether it's innovative, or whether it dominates its market. And so I think that's a very simple question as we lead into 2019. Does the content you're producing make it clear what you stand for? If you stand for something, you're going to find people for you, and some people against you. But at least there's people in either camp. Right?

Lee Price ([13:42](#)):

You have to be saying something. It's not enough. I guess it's not enough to just say something. You have to really take a stand and say something that's different than what everyone else is saying.

Katie Martell ([13:51](#)):

You do. And it doesn't have to be wildly different. I mean, it just needs to demonstrate to buyers what your company stands for, and therefore what your product allows the buyer to achieve within that kind of vision. Some examples are well known. Look at Rand Fishkin with Moz. He was an SEO consultant back in the day. And he made it clear that his firm stood for best practices, for white label SEO practices instead of shady, black hat, SEO techniques. He made it clear just by giving education to the market that this is what good looks like, that that's what he and his team was equipped to deliver. Salesforce.com, in the early days before it became the behemoth, the world's largest cloud computing company, they made it clear that in the early days they were anti software.

Katie Martell ([14:42](#)):

They made it clear that the world was going to move away from on premise software. And if a buyer wanted to stay relevant, they get on board with Salesforce. HubSpot, of course, did this for marketing with creating the enemy out of outbound marketing. They stood for everything that inbound marketing promised. And it was a bit cult like in its execution. But it worked. It gave people a sense that HubSpot stood for a new way of marketing, and that they as marketers wanted to align themselves with that new way. I believe that too many brands lack an opinion about the space they operate in. I think it's not traditional marketing to do so, but I do think it's what buyers look for and what they will continue to make decisions based on in the future.

Lee Price ([15:27](#)):

That's our big challenge for today. Find your voice. Figure out what you stand for. Have something to say, and say it confidently. I believe in us. We can do it. That's it for this first episode of Margins by Managing Editor. We have a full season coming your way, so make sure you subscribe in iTunes, and tell your friends. We're working on episodes about email. Is it dead or awesome? We'll talk about being a thought leader. What does that even mean anyway? And we'll wade into the uncomfortable world of feedback. How do you give good feedback to your team? And how do you take feedback on your creative work with grace? Subscribe to hear all of this in the next few weeks. And speaking of email, to hear more from us, sign up for our Friday morning email. You can find us at managingeditor.com/subscribe.

Lee Price ([16:28](#)):

Thanks to the team who helped make this episode, our guests, Eda Olsen, Cathy Ericson, and Katie Martell. CEO of Rep Cap, Mary Ellen Slayter, our producer and editor, Wes Kennison, assistant editor, Taylor Stoma, and me, the managing editor of Managing Editor, Lee Price. We'll see you next time.

Wes ([16:57](#)):

Cool. That works. That totally works.

Female ([17:01](#)):

I feel like I'm just down to ... I'm getting ... I'm just ... My voice is gone, Wes. It's gone. I have no voice.