



**This is an edited transcription of the July 08, 2015 Smart Solo Business podcast episode titled – [Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell Shares Branding and Website Design Tips For Small Businesses and Solopreneurs](#).**

Announcer: Are you a hard-working, self-employed professional striving to work smarter, find more clients, and build a more profitable business? There is help. Welcome to the Smart Solo Business podcast featuring candid conversations about successful self-employment.

Stephen Lahey: Welcome to the Smart Solo Business podcast. I'm Stephen Lahey, and I'll be your host.

Have you been feeling less than satisfied with your website, but you're so busy that you haven't done anything to change it? If so, I can relate to your situation. Not long ago, I was dealing with the same challenges, until I connected with today's guest.

I'm joined on the podcast today by Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell. Stephanie began her career in marketing 14 years ago. She worked for a variety of interesting companies, including McClatchey Broadcasting, Connexion Technologies, and Fast Lane to name just a few.

Five years ago, Stephanie made the leap to full-time self-employment launching [Blue Elephant Creative](#), a web development and marketing strategy firm focused on helping small businesses and solo entrepreneurs like us to grow their revenue. (By the way, Stephanie is also the owner of [TradingPounds.com](#), a 2000-reader-strong site dedicated to helping people lose weight and regain their health. Stephanie herself has lost more than 200 pounds over the past five years.)

Are you ready for some fresh thinking on how to improve your online presence? If so, get ready to take some notes and enjoy this interview with Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell. Welcome to the podcast, Stephanie.

Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell: Thanks, Steve. I really appreciate you having me back.

Stephen Lahey: Before we discuss the rebranding and launching my new website, as it relates the listeners, since it may be something they're considering doing as well, can you tell the listeners a little bit about your professional background and why you decided to become a solopreneur, Stephanie?



Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell: Sure. I've been in marketing and website development and design for years now. It kind of started way back in 1996, in college. I started experimenting a little bit with design and development and transitioned that into a full-time marketing career. I really appreciate that early part of my background because it taught me a lot about customers and trying to help these companies communicate better with potential clients and existing clients. I got to experience this in both a large company setting with a lot of people working towards the same end, as well as within smaller independently owned companies where it's kind of just you and the guy next to you and he's in sales and you're in marketing and everybody is working to help make the company more successful and it's a very tight knit, close group.

I think the thing that motivated me to become independent was that I loved working with different people and always having something new and challenging coming into each day. I wanted the opportunity to work on projects that meant something to me. It took a little while to get there full-time, and I had to work a marketing job as well as starting my business on the side. Eventually, I was able to make that transition, and it's been such a rewarding move for me because I really get a lot out of working with business owners and that passion and excitement that they have for what they're doing and the people they're serving. It just really makes every day unique and different and challenging and interesting.

I started this company five years ago and I have yet to have one day that feels the same as another. I get a lot of energy and reward out of that.

Stephen Lahey: Interesting. Now, when I was referred to you a while ago—I guess this was early 2014—there was no [StephenLahey.com](http://StephenLahey.com). But my original site, SmallBusinessTalent.com, was already online and I had been publishing my original podcast for a while, I had launched that in January of 2013. At that time when I was referred to you, I was thinking – I need help creating a better process for growing my email list. I had just developed an email opt-in bribe, as they call it, basically a giveaway for people who subscribed. It was a LinkedIn guide. Then I wanted to tweak the email opt-in process, create a whole separate squeeze page, and so on. You helped me do all that, and the site became better and my conversion rate went up.

But then you became a coaching client, and after a while you said something that really made me stop and think. Basically you said, Steve, your current site does not fit my experience as a client. So why don't we just take a couple of minutes, Stephanie. Let's delve into that issue,

because it's a pretty common one and many listeners may be dealing with it too.

I would just say to the listeners, you may have clients right now that love you, that you enjoy working with, but if they were to evaluate your website, they might say it's a bit disconnected with the reality of working with you. That was the issue that I had. So, talk us through your thinking on that as a client and why you felt that way at the time, Steph.

Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell: Sure. When we started, it was really a very straightforward project, as you mentioned. You were looking to increase your email conversion rate and we took a look at the site and see where opportunities for conversion were being missed. We put things in place to help capture those opportunities. And you and I developed a great rapport working together on that project, and we started talking about the transition that was happening in my own business. It was just a natural fit for me to say, you know what, I think it would be great to have you come in with an outside perspective on my business and help me understand where I could make improvements.

So, we looked at the way that I was evaluating potential clients, the way that I was bidding my projects, and my initial sales and marketing process and really start to hone in on what it was that I was actually delivering as a marketing consultant and website developer to these clients.

And so, in going through those coaching calls with you and really getting a firsthand experience of how you could help me see and understand my business in such a different way was just very eye opening. I had been at this for probably about three years before I asked to go through this coaching process, and so I gained a lot of insight into what you as a coach could deliver to your potential clients that just started making me question why I wasn't seeing this on your website. When I would go to your site at that time, SmallBusinessTalent.com, it just wasn't resonating with my experience. My experience as a client was that there was such a depth, and an intuition, and an understanding that you brought to our conversations that it was, I mean, at times you feel so vulnerable when somebody can see you so clearly, but you were just spot on. And it really, in my opinion, allowed us to focus on what I needed to address to get the ball rolling and making some fast forward momentum, even though we'd only been through a few coaching sessions together.

And so, I kind of just came back to you and was like, Steve, working with you was such an in-depth experience that has just brought so much return

to my business, I feel like you're missing a big piece of the puzzle when you're trying to explain to potential clients what you can do for them on your website, and that's a problem. We really need to focus on addressing it so that we can bring to the forefront what you're actually delivering, the same as you just did for me in the coaching process regarding my business.

So I think I kind of planted the seed there that over the following months really started to take hold and just grow until you were kind of like, yeah, you're right. Let's do this and let's see what we've got in front of us.

Stephen Lahey:

Yes, and I was very fortunate, really, to have that input from you. Because, I think, like a lot of people, it's really hard for me to see myself clearly. As the saying goes, you can't read the label on the jar you're in. And I think some of it was insecurity on my part. I think the website was—it was accurate in terms of the services I provided and it laid things out logically, but the emotional aspect wasn't there. What I was doing—and maybe some listeners are doing this, too—I was sanitizing my website and it was sort of a “just the facts” kind of a thing.

That triggered me to say, Stephanie, do you think I should redevelop my site? And you were kind of like, um, yeah, I definitely think you should. And I started to think then how can I reflect on my site what I bring to potential clients in a way that is true to the experience that a client actually has with me.

So, working with you in developing and launching the new website, we made a lot of changes, and I wrote all new content. The emphasis is now more on my intuition as well as on my business experience, a combination which sets me apart.

It was scary to put it all out there, but you urged me to look at this a little differently. Can you share that perspective with listeners? It may help them if they're kind of struggling with that too.

Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell: You bring up a lot good points there. First, I would say that the beginning of the branding and website development process for anyone with a business is the same, whether you are huge and have a lot of employees working with you or you're a solo entrepreneur. The place that this begins is what your company means to that customer. Because we throw around the word brand a lot, and it is very important that we have a strong brand and that we're consistent in the way that we present our message and our products and our sales and marketing to the



customer, but I think a lot of people get a little bit lost in what that word actually means.

Back in my early marketing career, there was something I read that, to me, just summed up branding perfectly. Your brand is the impressions, feelings, thoughts, and opinions that the customer has about you.

A lot of people get caught up in the colors, the design, the way we're wording things on a website and stuff like that, but it all has to translate to the potential client in a way that resonates. They have to understand what your company stands for. They have to know what their experience with us is going to be like. Those are the things that are the heart of the brand you're creating for your business.

As an entrepreneur, especially a solo entrepreneur, you're so caught up in running the business and just doing the work day-to-day and serving the clients that mean so much to you that it's hard to stop and think about what *they're actually experiencing* and what matters to them when they're working with you.

And this was an interesting process for me when I was working with you. You not only challenged me to think about who I want to work with, but how I serve that person and what it is that I deliver that sets me apart, in their experience, from any other website developer or marketing consultant out there.

You had already walked me through that process of seeing the whole picture and understanding what my brand, Blue Elephant, meant to my best clients, and why those clients actually continue to come back to me project after project, and the real value that I'm giving to them. So, on the flip side, when we then started thinking about *your brand* and how you could show people the experience of what it's like to work with you, the idea of the [\*Expand and Improve Your Client Base\*](#) workbook was born.

That initial workbook project guided a lot of thinking going into your rebranding, because your focus really is to help your clients find more and better clients. So we sort of started with that foundation. Then we looked at who you are as a person, as a professional, and as a solo entrepreneur, which is important for everyone going through this branding process. There's a reason that you do the work that you do and why you're willing to take the risk to do it solo. Because that's a big risk and that's something that not everybody is willing to do. So I think really



understanding who you are, what you can deliver and what that actually means to the customer is step one.

And then from there, what I like to do for all of my clients is to help them really understand their customers, what their life is like and how your product or service fixes a problem or helps them grow as an individual or as a fellow entrepreneur. Once you've got that understanding of who your customer is and how you can best serve them, then it's time to sort of bring all of those together in the way that you communicate to them.

Then we start working on writing website content. We start thinking about what we need to communicate to this person, our customer, how can we best communicate it, and, most importantly, how are they going to hear it? Because people interpret information in different ways, it just depends on how they're set up to receive. You've got some people that catch everything that runs across social media. You've got some people that like a little bit of a slow burn, so they've got to see consistency between your social media. They want to read through all the website content. They want to make sure that they're diligent and they gather all the information they want before they're going to be ready to make a move. And you've got to make sure that's available for them, because if it's not, then they're going to check out early because you're not giving them what they need.

Then of course you've got the I'm so crazy, busy, I don't have time to do anything, person. They're thinking, I'm just going to skim this website and if I can pick up on the right keywords that's going to tell me that this guy is the right guy for me to work with. You've got to make sure that you're addressing that type of person as well. So there are a lot of factors to consider in how your message is communicated. I'd call that step three.

And then once you've got that customer understanding, then you start designing around that user and asking questions. Where does this need to be on the website, how many clicks should it take them to get to this piece of information, etc. So you're building that infrastructure out and making it function well for the user. Because, at the end of the day, although a lot of people will tolerate a less than well-designed website, if it takes them longer than about, I don't know, five seconds to find where they want to get to and what they want to know, then they're gone. You've got to make sure that you're putting the information that needs to be there right in front of them so that they can easily find it.

And then the last step is when you bring all of that together, and you're doing the due diligence to test your website. Because from a user perspective, there's nothing more frustrating to any of us than clicking on a link that doesn't work or that doesn't take us where we expect to go. So you've got to make sure that you're putting yourself in the shoes of that potential customer and saying, okay, am I enjoying the experience of looking through this website, am I finding the information I'm looking for, am I getting to where I want to go with as little effort as possible?

Stephen Lahey: I'll say another thing, which may comfort people if this seems like a lot. First of all, it really helps to have a guide who can help you to read the label of the jar you're in to help stay true to your authentic brand identity. And whether you're a marketing consultant listening to this, or you may not be an expert in marketing, it doesn't matter. Ultimately, you still need that outside perspective.

And as I touched on before, one of the things that I experienced in developing a new brand and a new website was the need to inject emotion, authentic emotion, onto each page. The fact that I tend to write in a very direct and straightforward style versus being very emotionally expressive, well, that's actually reflective of my coaching style. But the emotion comes from the accuracy of the insights that I'm bringing to the client. They're saying, wow, that's spot on. Well, that's emotion. Unfortunately, it's not easy to make that come across on a web page, so one of the things that we decided together is that we needed to create a website that had images that evoked the emotions that clients actually experience. We added a lot of images to the website, and I think the design of the website itself evokes emotion.

Talk us through that a little bit, just in a brief way. How would someone think about design as a way to evoke emotion?

Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell: Well, you bring up a great point, Steve. I think that what we tend to default to is sort of this corporate business website mentality. When I talk to potential clients about websites, I kind of get the same initial kickoff to the conversation, which is I want to grow my business, I need a new website, let's build one. Put my stuff online, here's my services, and if you want to buy something here's the cart, etc. But the thing that people tend to forget is that being online and using a website, well, that is a customer experience. The way that we help that customer understand our brand and business offerings is both through text and, like you're saying, images.



So when we're creating that online environment, we want to make sure that the elements that represent us on our site are integrated into that user's experience. That's not only making sure that technically everything on the site works, that it's a smooth, understandable process, like a lot of user experience experts will tell you, but also that we take them on a little bit of a journey through the experience of who we are and what it's like working with us. And when we can't do that with words, we need to do that with images and the way that elements are placed and the space that we put between the headline and the start of the paragraph, right down to the size of the font we're using because when we combine all of these different elements, we trigger certain just psychological responses within that person. When they land on the website, they feel something.

And I'll give you an example, because you mentioned earlier that I run two businesses, and that's true. I have [Blue Elephant Creative](#) and I have sort of my passion project in life, which is [TradingPounds.com](#). And so when I was working to create [TradingPounds.com](#), went through an exercise, and I put a lot of my clients through it as well, ask 10, 20 of your friends and family members, if they could only use one adjective to describe you as a person, what would that adjective be? So, when you do that you collect all these different words that people you know feel describe you and your personality. Once you've got that list, hone in on the adjectives that feel truest to you. And as you start to cull down that list, you start to create an emotional roadmap, if you will. And so from this roadmap, you can really choose design elements that reflect you as a person.

And so for [Trading Pounds](#), I was described as sort of a comforting, kind, welcoming, sweet type of person, and so if you look at [TradingPounds.com](#), my design inspiration was I wanted it to feel like a place that you've always known so that when you land on the website, you feel like you're home. Because I talk on [Trading Pounds](#) about a very sensitive subject, which is weight and weight loss, I just wanted that safe, warm, comforting emotion to be evoked from the moment someone landed on that site.

When we were first talking about developing your new website, [StephenLahey.com](#), and trying to understand what elements we should bring into the design, the things that we focused on were a lot of the things that came across when I was your coaching client, which was just that deep, intuitive sense, that calm, it's okay, I know you might feel overwhelmed, but you don't have to be, like you're in a space where

you're safe and it's okay to be vulnerable and you're understood here. We really tried to choose images that reflected both openness and just a natural sense of being and also invited a user into the site, and that's why you see a lot of images that have a vibrancy to them with color and openness, and they reflect that feeling of possibility that's created in the coaching relationship.

I know it t seems like a lot to think about, but when you hone in on how to best reflect your true self and what your customers need from you and then choose images, then start working on the design, well, it actually makes the process a lot easier. I find that a lot of people will start sort of like, oh, well, I really like this image, oh, this is a beautiful image. Trust me, there are a million beautiful, breathtaking, gorgeous images you can find and use on your site, but, in the end, if they're not creating that visual environment where your customer feels excited or energized or comfortable or whatever adjective you would choose to describe what it feels like to work with you, then you're missing a big piece of the puzzle.

And so you've got to think through the experience that you're trying to create on that website and then build the design around that experience, and having someone that understands how to evoke emotion through design help you through this process is really invaluable. I'm not just saying that because I do it for a living, I'm saying it because I've seen time and time again through clients that I've worked with, through clients that colleagues have worked with, just how much of an impact this makes on how people respond to what you put in front of them through your website, and how much it gives back to the business in return for making that time and financial investment in getting it right.

Stephen Lahey:

I couldn't agree more. And I would love to talk more about this, and maybe we'll have a Part 2 of this interview. At the same time, I know we're at about a half an hour now, and I want people to get to know you, and especially if they're thinking they might want to have a conversation with someone about their own website. Should they relaunch? Should they rebrand? Having a conversation with you is something I would highly recommend. So tell us how to get in touch with you.

Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell: Sure. You can find me online at [BlueElephantCreative.com](http://BlueElephantCreative.com), and my email address is **Stephanie@BlueElephantCreative.com**. And the thing that I would encourage anyone to do, if you have that inkling in the back of your mind that you're not quite happy with your website, is just open that line of communication with a professional. It's so important to have a sounding board, and I give half an hour absolutely complimentary



to any person considering my services just to talk about where they're at in their business and what their concerns are, what the website is not delivering to potential customers, etc. I feel like a lot can be learned in that conversation, both for me as the potential web developer, but also for them as someone who's just sort of thinking through what does this website need to really, truly reflect me, what I do as an entrepreneur, and what I deliver to my clients.

Stephen Lahey: Yes, it's great to get an expert perspective. And I would emphasize the word expert because anybody can call themselves a web developer, but Stephanie's got the right training, business mindset and artistic sensitivity, and I think it's a combination that can't be beat. So there you go—an unsolicited testimonial, Stephanie. And thanks for joining me.

Stephanie Wetzel-Cottrell: Well, thank you, Steve.

Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, visit [SmartSoloBusiness.com](http://SmartSoloBusiness.com) now and subscribe by email and along with fresh podcast and blog content, you'll also receive my new interactive workbook, *Expand and Improve Your Client Base*, which I know you'll love. Thanks again for listening today and best wishes for your success.

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