



**This is an edited transcript of the July 29, 2015 Smart Solo Business podcast interview titled – [How to Narrow Your Marketing Focus, Stand Out and Profit: Dianna Huff Shares Her Story](#).**

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.

My guest on the podcast today, [Dianna Huff](#), is an award-winning and passionate digital marketing consultant. She's also a thought leader who has made content contributions in acclaimed digital publications such as *Forbes*, *BtoB*, *Content Marketing Institute*, *MarketingSherpa*, *Marketing Profs*, *ClickZ*, *Response Magazine*, *Search Engine Watch*, and *Search Engine News*.

Dianna launched her marketing communications consulting practice in 1998. Since then she's developed and implemented web lead generation strategies and communications that improve search engine rankings, drive website traffic, generate sales, and increase profits for clients ranging from small to mid-market companies to the Fortune 500 in a diverse range of industries including industrial, manufacturing, environmental, nonprofit, construction, healthcare, enterprise software, IT, financial services, and consulting.

Dianna has clearly accomplished a lot as a business owner, and in the last few years she's also made a number of important changes. Perhaps the most significant change she implemented was to narrow her range of service offerings and her marketing focus. As part of that shift, Dianna changed her business name from DH Communications to [Huff Industrial Marketing](#) and rebranded her company. Today she is squarely focused on her passion – helping owners of small industrial manufacturing companies in the U.S. to grow their businesses through better marketing. Her consulting practice is thriving and, as you'll hear in this interview, she's never been more excited about her work.

Dianna is a wonderful example of someone experiencing the rewards of a more specialized consulting practice. *Can becoming more specialized mean achieving greater efficiency and increased profits for you as well?* If that's a question you'd like answered, then you don't want to miss the lessons that Dianna shares in this candid conversation. Get ready to take some notes and enjoy the interview.

Welcome to the podcast, Dianna.

Dianna Huff: Hey, thanks for inviting me.

Stephen Lahey: Before the interview, you and I discussed your professional journey and how you came to start your business. Tell us a little bit about that.

Dianna Huff: Well, I started in 1998 after my now ex-husband and I moved from the West Coast to the East Coast and my son was a year old. I had worked in the corporate world before and I really did not want to put him back in daycare. So I started doing marketing communications copywriting, which is what I'd been doing as a marketing professional. My tagline was copywriting for high tech and industrial companies.

By 2001 the dot-com bust hit hard and I literally was twiddling my thumbs. I had just started so I didn't have that many clients and those I did have all fell off. Someone called me one day and said I was searching all over the Internet trying to find someone to help me with copywriting and I stumbled across your website and it's not optimized. And I said what in the hell is that? Immediately after we got off the phone, I started looking up this thing called search engine optimization. I taught myself SEO, applied everything I learned to my own website, and all of a sudden I started getting all these inquiries. About a year and a half later, I knew I had made it when a Fortune 500 executive called me. She said I've been reading your newsletter and I know I need to hire you, we need our site optimized, I just opened a PO for \$45,000, is that enough? I was like, wow, let me sit down for a moment. My business just took off. I was doing SEO copywriting and most of my inquiries were coming off the Internet.

Stephen Lahey: Very interesting, and this was in the early 2000s. At that point in time the Internet was still fairly new. Now, you recently shifted, or narrowed, your focus of your marketing services. What prompted you to do that?

Dianna Huff: Well, I had become so busy and so fragmented because as all of these changes took place, blogs came in, social media came in, and every time something new came in, I would sort of pivot, learn about it and add it to my list of services that I provided. I even had companies calling and saying our CEO needs to have this book ghostwritten, can you do it? And because I was in that space, I said sure. I ended up ghostwriting three books for CEOs. But I was getting burnt out and I just sort of crashed.

So, then I spent time thinking through what do I want to do, where do I want to go, what do I want this business to really be, what do I enjoy doing? And it just kept coming back to I really enjoy working with these small industrial manufacturers. Every time one called my heart would light up, I would get so excited, and I just thought this is where I want to go. I thought about it for a long time and then made the shift last summer very slowly by changing my blog, my LinkedIn profile, my Twitter, etc. I just started focusing more on manufacturing to see if this was what I really wanted to do. At the end of that period I changed my business name to [Huff Industrial Marketing](#).

Stephen Lahey: And as I look at everything about your site, and I just subscribed to your newsletter. I think you call it *The Un-Newsletter*.

Dianna Huff: *The Un-Newsletter*.

Stephen Lahey: Everything that you're doing points to that particular target client, and I love your story, and I'll tell you why. Over and over when I talk to people who have been chewed up and spit out by Corporate America and they've been doing consulting work as a solo, a theme comes up – maybe I'm struggling because I'm not focused on the right market or market segment. But once they start focusing on the right market segment things get better. And you talked about the fact that it lights you up to work with small manufacturers in the USA—and that's a big deal because we work hard and burnout is a real thing. We want to actually enjoy our clients and have our work mean something to us, and that kind of personal passion really brings something to each client.

But those, quote, unquote, ideal clients doesn't mean it's ideal as in there are no problems, but it sort of all lines up with our passion and what we like to do and what we do best. So, just in a nutshell, your story is about



someone who has found a market niche that's just an outstanding niche for them.

As a website and marketing consultant, one of the things that you do is find a compelling story or hook that makes a company's services stand out as attractive to their particular target market. But how did you do that for *your own* company? Walk us through how you approached that iterative process.

Dianna Huff:

You nailed it. I work with small businesses, but I've also worked with consultants in the past to help them communicate their stories and it is incredibly difficult, and doing it for yourself. And so even though I can do it for other people and do it well, I had the same challenges myself. So, I spent a lot of time thinking about what do I like to do, what projects were successful, what projects weren't, why and why not, analyzing things, focusing on what makes me happy, what do I really like doing?

When I was thinking about, well, I want to focus on small industrial manufacturers, I have this colleague, Andrew Davis, who wrote *Brandscaping* and I heard him speak at a conference and he talked about niching. After the conference, I emailed him and said I'm thinking of going into this niche, small industrial manufacturing clients, what do you think? He immediately called me and gave me about 45 minutes of his time, went through my website and my blog and my project portfolio, and he gave me the best piece of advice anyone has—I wish I could just write him a check because it's priceless. He said don't say what you do, say who you work with. So I say now on my website I help small family owned industrial manufacturers market, grow, and succeed. Now when prospects call me they say I'm a small industrial manufacturer. And, as you said, it's all in alignment now.

And the other piece of advice that Andrew gave me was to write my story on my about page, which I had been very hesitant to do because I was a little embarrassed. I come from working class and I didn't want to say that, and he said, no, you have to say that. He said share your working class story because then the people who are hiring you will read it and immediately they will say, oh, she's one of us, and it will be your foot in the door. And it's funny, a prospect called and I went down to their factory and it was a brother-sister team and their father had started the

company, and the sister said I knew as soon as I went to your website and read your About page that you would listen to me.

Stephen Lahey: And everything on your website is—I guess I would just use the word harmonious. If you read your About page it's in harmony with your Home page, etc.

So how can a solo consultant, since most of the listeners are solos and consultants, of one stripe or another—how can a solo consultant listening to this podcast begin to develop that kind of engaging story that will help them to stand out with the right clients?

Dianna Huff: Well, the first question I always ask people is what makes you different? That's the first thing. So, as a solopreneur I would sit down and take some time with this. Really, what makes you different? It could be your education, it could be your experience, your passion, but really think about all the things that go into making you different.

For example, I have a colleague, Ginger Burr, and she's an image consultant. There are lots of image consultants out there. Basically, she goes shopping with you and helps you pick out your clothes and does your colors for you. There are lots of people who do that, but she has differentiated herself. For one thing, she is a passionate vegan. So if you go shopping with her, she won't say to you oh my god, that's leather, ah. She doesn't do that. But if you were interested in vegan fashion, vegan makeup, a vegan lifestyle, she will bring all of that experience to bear. And she doesn't hide it, so she sets herself apart.

The web designer that I work with, Rachel Cunliffe of Cre8d Design, she's in New Zealand. She has a spectacular story. She and her husband are both entrepreneurs. They have had multiple entrepreneurial ventures. They live on a farm. I think it's 2-1/2 acres. They grow their own vegetables and other produce. They have sheep. They have lambs. They live off their land. And they have four children. She's amazing. I mean, one of the things I've learned from her is don't buy into society's limitations. So she's doing all these wonderful things and if you go to her website, she has this blog where she has pictures of springtime lambs and sunsets and it's just—it sets her apart from other designers.



I work with manufacturing companies. So, for example, I have a client—they do one special type of metal finishing process. All of their competitors do multiple finishing processes. They focus on one. We're building a whole new website around that message. So instead of saying, well, we just focus on one, I mean, I really had to dig into that and say, well, why is that important? What is the benefit to the customer? How are we going to position you so that when people come to the website instead of saying, oh, this company isn't going to be able to be a one stop shop for me all my metal finishing needs, instead how do we make it so they read it and say, oh, I need to use these people? So always come back, you know, ask yourself, what makes me different and what is the benefit to the customer?

Stephen Lahey: That's a great point. And I know that what triggered this interview was a great article that you wrote on LinkedIn. I think there were four or five different points. What's the second point that you wanted to make around how can we think about differentiating ourselves?

Dianna Huff: Well, also how has your particular industry changed in the last three to five years? All of us have been affected by industry changes. I know even in my own work, mobile technology has definitely changed how I create content for websites. I mean, a lot of people create websites based on this old 8-1/2 by 11 paper paradigm or a brochure paradigm, and it's all different now. Mobile has rendered all of that stuff obsolete. And so that's just one small example, but think about all the changes that have come through and how has that affected you. And it's easy to focus on the negative, you know, this and this happened so now I can't charge as much, or I can't do this, or whatever, but I would say focus on the challenges and the opportunities.

For example, one of my own challenges is because I work with small manufacturers and they're busy running their factories, they're not online. They're not on social media. They don't read blogs. In fact, I have a whole survey that you can download where we did all this research that shows they don't even consider blogs and social media as part of the buying process. So when my prospects are looking for me, they're only going to look for me when they need me, so that's a real challenge. I see it as an opportunity. My opportunity is how do I find ways to reach these



people? How do I make sure that I'm in the place where they are at the moment when they're looking for me?

And then also, I try to make myself different. So when they do find me, which is typically through search, they get to my website, and instead of being in a blouse and pearls—which when I initially did my website I looked at a lot of women across the Internet and they all had a blouse and pearls—I put myself in this big flowered dress, which at first scared me to death because I thought no one is going to hire me because I look like a woman, but it has made me stand apart. And now that I am so immersed in this industry, women in manufacturing are very few and far between, so I stand apart.

Stephen Lahey: Let's just kind of circle back. What you were saying initially is that we need to be different. We need to be different in a way that's meaningful to whomever we're targeting. And then the second thing is changes in the industry. I'm going to guess that the small manufacturers you market to are probably as busy as they've ever been, that hasn't changed, but one of the things that has changed is their competitive landscape. It has rapidly changed and there has emerged this small manufacturing growth industry—and you told me something and it amazed me—there are 300,000 family-owned small manufacturers. You're saying what's changed in their world and how can I help?

Dianna Huff: Yes. In terms of being a solopreneur and marketing myself, I have to do it so that I meet these people in their world. Their world has changed dramatically with off-shoring and now there's re-shoring and automation and regulations and, I mean, there is just a whole slew of issues they're now dealing with. So marketing is an afterthought to them. And they see no value in social media or blogs, all of this stuff that's getting a lot of hype right now. So there is a dance between, I understand who you are. I understand all the pressures you're under. I understand that marketing is not high on your list. I understand that you know you need to market. So my marketing presents myself as the way I would market them.

Dianna Huff: Does that make sense?

Stephen Lahey: It really does. And I think what we're coming back to with your customers is something you talked about in the intro, which is SEO. As buyers of, let's say, website development services, your customers aren't constantly



online looking for someone like you. But are there people who are going to buy from them, in whatever country around the world, online looking for the type of services they provide? Yes, and that may be the only way they'll end up contacting them to buy.

For your customers, though, SEO is a black box. And if they've tried to work with SEO consultants in the past, they've probably been burned. That insight is also important to understanding their world.

So, perhaps they've been burned by slick SEO consultants. On the other hand, they can relate to your working class story and most people in manufacturing are rightfully proud of their roll up your sleeves working class upbringing. So it's a very interesting marketing and branding challenge that you navigate really well and we can all learn from this.

Now, we don't have a lot of time to cover everything because we're sort of running out of time, but if there is one last thing you could tell people about how they can zero in on engaging people in a new market segment, which is pretty much what you did, you said I'm going to zero in on that market segment called family owned, U.S. based small manufacturers. You told me that there are 300,000 of them. That's so inspiring because I thought manufacturing is declining in the USA. Well, actually it's growing, but it's growing in certain pockets is what you're saying.

Dianna Huff: Right.

Stephen Lahey: So you have picked this niche that you love. You've positioned yourself to speak to that niche directly and authentically, sharing your working class roots. You understand their world, you speak to them in terms of what they really want, which is basically SEO that gets them found by their customers, helping them tell a compelling story that makes them different in a way that their customers value, etc. But now if there was one last piece of advice on how my listeners can engage with a new market segment, what would it be?

Dianna Huff: I would say be yourself. So I already gave the example of Ginger Burr. I also have another example. Her name is Simone Joyaux. She is a consultant to nonprofits and NGOs and I helped her redo her website a couple of years ago. When I first got her, she was drowning in content. She was one of the top three consultants in the world to nonprofits and you

couldn't tell that by her website. It was terrible. And so working with Rachel Cunliffe, my designer, we redid her site.

One of the things that came out of the multiple interviews that I did with Simone is she gets hired by these nonprofits and NGOs because she asks what she calls "cage rattling questions". They hire her because she goes in and really shakes their cages and asks these really hard questions that no one else wants to ask.

And so in her old website she has this—she said this is my uncensored blog. She said I try to hide it because I talk about things that some people might find offensive. And at the time, a lot of people said don't address this on your blog, or don't address this in social media, or try to keep things safe. Well, people were hiring her because she wasn't safe, and I said, okay, let's take this blog and let's play it up on your website. And so we did that. She now calls it *Simone Uncensored* and she just goes to town on that thing.

If you go to her website now, she actually has testimonials from people who have written in. One person said I never had a reason to have a blog reader until I found your blog. So she's just grown her audience. We eliminated all this other content that she had up there that wasn't really doing anything for her. And now she is truly Simone and she is herself and she is shining and she's just all over the place now with all these interviews.

So that's what I would say, don't—and you just said it too. I was afraid to really say who I am. Say who you are and don't be afraid of it and really make yourself stand apart by being yourself.

Stephen Lahey:

I love that. And by the way, I looked at the Simone site before and after on your website and, wow, what a difference. Now, I'm sure a lot of listeners would like to connect with you online. How can they do that?

Dianna Huff:

Well, the best place is Twitter. My handle is [@DiannaHuff](#). Also you can subscribe to my Un-Newsletter, which is on my website. It's under the learning center. The reason why I call it The Un-Newsletter is because I got burned out writing all these how-to articles, so now I just do a little chatty newsletter, which actually I sort of got the idea from Simone—because she does it too—but more along the lines of here's interesting



stuff I'm finding in my travels. I did the inaugural issues a couple weeks ago, people emailed me back and said we're so glad you're publishing again, so I'm very excited about it.

Stephen Lahey: That's great. And that's [DiannaHuff.com](http://DiannaHuff.com), correct?

Dianna Huff: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: That's great. I just subscribed to your un-newsletter there, by the way. I hope everybody listening does too. Well, thanks so much for joining me today, Dianna.

Dianna Huff: Oh, thank you for having me.

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) and subscribe by email. 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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