

American Writers & Artists Inc.

Wealthy Web Writer

A New Take on Breaking Into Copywriting

Speaker: James Chartrand

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Rebecca Matter: Hi everyone, welcome back to the Wealthy Web Writer Teleconference Series. This is Rebecca Matter, and today I'm joined by James Chartrand owner of the popular blog "Men with Pens." Hi James, and thank you for joining me today.

James Chartrand: Thanks very much for having me, pleasure to be here.

Rebecca Matter: Excellent, so before we get started I just want to give a quick bio for our members. James is a

thirty-something copywriter; pro-blogger; and online entrepreneur, that is a mouthful, from Quebec, Canada. She's a member of the Professional Writers Association of Canada, and a member of faculty at Solo Practice University where she teaches copywriting, branding, and blogging.

Her work can be found across the blogosphere and is frequently featured on top sites such as CopyBlogger. James loves the color blue, rock music, her kids, playing guitar, ice skating, and riding horses. And with that, welcome again James.

James Chartrand: Thanks very much.

Rebecca Matter: So to start I'm sure that people are very surprised to hear that you're a woman and not a man, but we're going to get into that in just a little bit. Because many of our members might not be familiar with you, I'd love for you first to share your story about how you actually got into copywriting.

James Chartrand: I used to have a very good corporate job. I worked for 12 years for the same company and I was a pretty high-level executive, but eventually the company moved to a distance that was too far for me to travel. I just wasn't interested in commuting and I decided to go home with a nice severance package.

I bobbed around at home for a little bit. I kept myself busy and got into some jobs that I found fulfilled me personally but, weren't very good income wise. And after awhile, I stepped out of that and realized I had no income left.

It's a low economy area that I lived in. Jobs aren't easily available; winter was coming; I had two kids; I was alone; I didn't know really what to do, and someone suggested I should come online and see if there was any

writing work because I was fair hand with a keyboard. So I did and my start was one that was \$2 for 500 words—

Rebecca Matter: Oh my.

James Chartrand:—and I thought that was—yeah, I thought that was pretty spectacular at the time. My first paycheck was \$8, and I thought that was amazing. I could earn money online. And I quickly realized there's a lot of money to be earned if you play the cards right and you treat it like a business, and I just never looked back from there.

Rebecca Matter: Excellent so how did you actually find co—is that how you found copywriting specifically?

James Chartrand: I started out with articles. A lot of them were those article mills that just bang out any kind of content and quality doesn't really count. But, I started to find where the jobs are. I browsed craigslist. I checked on Elance and I realized that there wasn't that much difference between writing an article and writing for WebCopy or doing some blogging. So I just expanded my skills a little bit and started going after those jobs.

Rebecca Matter: Excellent, and so when and why did you decide to change your name?

James Chartrand: That's a long story. I'm going to try and nutshell it for you. In the beginning when I did article writing work, there are people who want mass volumes of articles, lots and lots of articles. And I realized that if I hired other people to work with me I could branch out my business, make more money, get more work coming in, capture more clients.

So I needed other writers to work with, but I was already familiar that at that level of the writing world; it's a little catty; it can be difficult; there's a lot of

in fighting that seems to go on, and most of the writers were women. So that makes it a little harder.

I decided I didn't want to be associated as a woman. I wanted to be a little bit anonymous, and I wanted to gain the respect that my clients seem to receive and they were mostly males. So I chose a male name to hire some writers. And the reaction was phenomenal. The respect was instantaneous, and I realized that if I can get this much respect just from changing my name, what else can I do with it.

So I started using the male name with clients and the same thing happened. More respect, more credibility, people listened to my ideas. That wasn't happening when my name was a female one. So I just pursued it. I didn't see any reason not to take advantage of the fact that there is gender bias out there and it was easy to go around that perception online.

Rebecca Matter: Now when you were saying about the cattiness, do you work in a specific niche? Or are you a general copywriter?

James Chartrand: Right now, I specialize in web copy. I write for websites. People who have small businesses, medium sized businesses, solo entrepreneurs, this is what I do for them. At the time that I started out, I was just specifically in article writing and that was my strength.

Rebecca Matter: Okay and so how has using the name changed your business? Can you give any specific examples? Are clients surprised when they talk to you on the phone? Anything like that?

James Chartrand: Nowadays, there's a lot less surprise because people know about it. In December when the story came out it was spread widely across the internet. And I was interviewed by some major media out there like AOL

online, McClain's, Newsweek, Huffington Post. So people are much less surprised now. Those that don't know about it, they pause for a few seconds, but they just pick up and carry on, business is business.

Before the news came out, I did find that people did react to it. They would pause and think a little bit and then they'd usually burst out laughing and say, "What a brilliant idea, I'd never thought of that," and of course, "it makes sense." So there always was a reaction to deal with.

Rebecca Matter: And for now, I actually read your story through a blog post you wrote on Copy Blogger called "Why James Chartrand Wears Women's Underpants?"

James Chartrand: Yes.

Rebecca Matter: And so I'm assum- was that around the same time?

James Chartrand: That came out in December, yes.

Rebecca Matter: In December, okay. So what happened with that? What was the- can you give us a little bit of background as far as the timing for that article and why it was posted on someone else's blog?

James Chartrand: The timing was just that I had found that someone had begun to leak the news about who I really was, and that could affect my business in a very large way. I didn't want to be someone who hid back and waited for the rumors to damage my business. I did this, I'm going to take responsibility for it, and I'm going to grab the biggest microphone I can to tell my story.

That was the smartest, best way for me to go about doing some damage control number one, and number two, showing to people: "Look, gender bias exists and this makes a difference." So CopyBlogger was the natural choice

at that time. It's a huge blog; it's read by both writers and by business people. And I'm good friends with Brian Clark and he had long ago said, "If you ever tell, you come to me." So that's what I did.

Rebecca Matter: Excellent, I love that. You turned a potentially bad situation into an opportunity, and basically leveraged from it. That's pretty impressive.

James Chartrand: Absolutely, I mean when you own up to what you've done, whether it's good or it's bad, you're only demonstrating self-confidence and the ability to stand up for yourself. And I think that's what I did and that's was integrity.

At the same time I preferred to keep it off my blog because I do run a business, I don't want any damage, and if there's going to be any domino effects from it, I'd rather that someone else have to worry about that and deal with that. I could keep going on and it was business as usual but my blog clients who came to see my site didn't have to see a big fiasco going on. All they saw was the site offering copy and web design.

So it just made sense to have that away from me in a place where it could easily managed and spread but still kept me nice and safe and just trekking along.

Rebecca Matter: Excellent, and you're breaking up just a little bit, I'm not sure if you're on a cordless phone or a cell phone?

James Chartrand: Oh sorry about that. I have a landline but it is a cordless phone.

Rebecca Matter: Okay, now you sound fine. You were just breaking up there for a second, but we were able to get everything. But it's interesting...

James Chartrand: Okay.

Rebecca Matter: ...you say that you kept it away from your own site because it kind of goes back to where this whole thing started and that is the cattiness in the industry. I think it's interesting that...

James Chartrand: Yes.

Rebecca Matter: ...in my mind you handled like a stereotypical, how a man would handle it, and it's just not dealing with it in your business space. You dealt with it, where it needed to be dealt with, and continued on with your business as usual.

James Chartrand: Yeah, to me it wasn't anything personal. It wasn't anything that needed to be dragged out and beaten to death, or cried over, or laughed over. I'm not here to be a circus act. I'm here to earn business. So it's business as usual. That's the best way to deal with anything that goes wrong or that goes well is to just ride the waves and wait until it's over and you go from there.

Rebecca Matter: Excellent, excellent. Hey, that's great advice for everyone on the call right now. If something does happen like that, bend into an opportunity for yourself. Own up to things that you do and decisions that you make, and this is a great example of how you can really benefit from doing that. But now...

James Chartrand: Yes, absolutely.

Rebecca Matter: So let's just talk about your day. I know that you do a lot of different things. What does your typical day look like? How much time do you actually spend writing?

James Chartrand: Oh, that's a very good question. I write off and on in the day. Let me give you a little bit of my daily routine.

Rebecca Matter: Okay.

James Chartrand: I'm usually up between five and six A.M., everyday. First thing I do is I run through email that's come through in the night. Since I'm online, I have a global market, which means that I have a lot of email from people in Australia or the UK. I look through what I have to do; what I have to respond to; take some time to wake up with some coffee.

And I deal with the email; I delegate jobs to my team; I look at what I would have to work on in the day. I usually save my writing work just after that period somewhere around nine to eleven A.M., seems to be my best time and my most creative work.

So I set to writing a couple of blog posts or doing some web copy at that time. In the afternoon, I usually take a little break. I'm a little slower so I go on to Twitter; I talk a little bit and do some marketing; just have exposure around different places.

In the afternoon, I clean up email again. I deal with what's come through during the day. I might write a little more, polish, edit. The evening is more exposure and marketing and there you go. My day usually ends at about ten P.M.; I have long days and work long hours.

Rebecca Matter: Interesting, and so are you believer then in the whole—in the email—as far as productivity goes, checking email twice a day. Is that—

James Chartrand: Not necessarily, my email is generally open twenty-four seven and I use two screens. So I work on one screen on writing and whatever I have to do, and the other screen always has my email open. That way I can glance over, I can see if anything needs to be dealt with right away.

I found that responding to customers as quickly as possible is the key. The more customer service you can

offer them, the better it is. They appreciate a speedy time. They appreciate someone who responds; who shows that they're present and alert, because the thing too is that online the time perception is very different than an offline world.

In an offline world, if you leave a phone message, it's okay if it's twenty-four hours and you don't hear back. In an online world, if it's been one-hour people start to wonder, "Well, what's going on? Is there anyone there? Is there somebody working? Am I going to get an answer?" So the faster I can hop on that and deal with it quickly, the better it is.

But, I generally do trust the email so that I can answer in runs which helps me keep high productivity the rest of the time. I deal with what's important right away and I leave the rest for a couple of hours later.

Rebecca Matter: Excellent, that's a really good point as well. The more customer service you can provide, the better. I definitely think, especially in this space, that that is so important. As it's for keeping your clients-

James Chartrand: I've noticed clients will often say the reason we got the job is because we were there, because we were present. A lot of them, of course, they hire us because we're one of the best and that's par for the course, but I do know that when we've been put up against competition that has equally good quality and that offers equally good services very often our speed of response is what will land us the job.

Rebecca Matter: So you all do more than just write in the copyright, you also do the web design and other aspects of-when we think of web copy we think of specifically landing pages and the copy itself, but you're more involved in the entire online business, correct?

James Chartrand: Yes, that's right. I don't want to limit myself to being the only person who can do the work. It just didn't make sense if I ever wanted to stop doing this and do something else. If I wanted to take a vacation or a break. I wanted a business that was sustainable. And one good way to have a sustainable business is to have many branches, many sources of income, various types of passive income.

Another reason that I have a business that does offer different services is because clients like that. They have a one-stop shop. When they come for copywriting, it's usually because they need it for a website. Well, if we can offer both services: the web design, the maintenance, and the copy; well, they only have one person to deal with. So it makes it more convenient for them, more likely to come back to us.

Rebecca Matter: That makes sense, and so would you recommend that most of the people our web writers our copywriters who are part of Wealthy Web Writer they are—

James Chartrand: Yes.

Rebecca Matter: —open to learning other opportunities. So video marketing and things like that. Would you then, recommend that people learn beyond just writing and/or maybe partner with some other people for their own business?

James Chartrand: I highly, highly recommend teaming up and partnering up. I don't necessarily recommend learning skills that are outside what you enjoy doing or where your strengths and talents lie.

I find that there's so much to learn these days that you can get bogged down in learning new things, which takes away focus from earning income and doing business, which is what you're there for in the end.

Rebecca Matter: Right.

James Chartrand: We had written a book with Mason Hipp of FreelanceFolder, it's called the "Unlimited Freelancer," and the whole book is specifically about tapping into ways to be more efficient; to partner up with others; to develop passive income. So that there are many different ways that you can capture that kind of business and bring it into you.

And when you team up with others, you can partner with people who have fantastic skills, top skills. And you just make yourself better; you share the client base between you; you share the work between you, and you both become bigger because of it.

I find that it's only the loners and the ones who definitely only want to work alone that tend to stay small. The minute people start to branch out and team up, big things can happen.

Rebecca Matter: Well, I think you hit the nail on the head there that an individual person might be a freelancer, but what you have is a sustainable business. You're running a business as opposed to a worker for hire.

James Chartrand: Yes, absolutely. We really want to try and avoid being considered freelancers even though that's what we are. We are freelancers. We don't work for a company, but the mental association is that freelancer means alone. So we really want to have the perception that we are a business, an agency, a boutique. It's a much better association to have especially when you're trying to find clients that have more budget and money to spend on the kind of work that we do.

Rebecca Matter: That makes a lot of sense. So I'd like to talk about your blog a little bit, "Men with Pens." How

long into your copywriting career, did you wait to launch that?

James Chartrand: The blog, if I remember well it was very early 2007 that we launched the blog and it took a couple of months for it to gain some ground. If you look back through our archives in our earlier posts, you'll see that they're not very good posts and that they don't have a lot of comments. Some don't have any comments at all, but within three to six months, we had gained some attention. And we found that there was demand for the kind of information that I could share with people. And it just took off from there, quite wildly in fact.

The rise to fame was rapid at that time. It's a little harder now to gain that kind of steam and to become a popular blogger and it takes more hard work, but that's mostly because more people are coming online. There's less opportunity to stand out from the crowd.

I was a bit lucky in that I was one of the first people to develop a blog like Brian Clark. Brian Clark was even earlier than I and he has a resounding fame with CopyBloggers today. So timing does have a lot to do with it, but hard work persistence pays off.

Rebecca Matter: Another good piece of advice. And how has the blog impacted your business?

James Chartrand: In various ways. At the time that it began, the blog was crucial to showing off: expertise, gaining exposure, clearly conveying to people that I had the skills, and I knew what I was talking about. So it was an integral part of my startup. I used guest posting as well, extensively. Guest posting and blog commenting to help bring people back to my blog where they could see: that I was an authority, and that I had something to say, and that I had expertise.

As time goes on, of course, a blog that grows in size demands more attention, demands higher-level copy, more articles. You have readers to maintain. So, after a while, it becomes more of a task and less of a pleasure or something that's enjoyable to do.

Now it's a statistic marketing strategy and we have to plan a little bit more on what we do with it, how we do it, what we're trying to do with it, and it pays to take those blog readers and turn them into customers.

Rebecca Matter: So your blog is not necessarily just—did you start it in the hopes of attracting customers originally or was it—did you start it for your clients and to attract more clients?

James Chartrand: A bit of both. We did want readers but we mostly wanted the readers to help attract customers.

Rebecca Matter: Okay.

James Chartrand: There's a big social proof that goes along the more readers you have, the better you must be; therefore the higher number of readers you have, the more clients that will come to you thinking that you're an authority.

Rebecca Matter: That makes a lot of sense. So I have a question from one of our members.

James Chartrand: Sure.

Rebecca Matter: And this is from Henry who I think that you know. He was saying that, "I know at Pens you're probably best for blogging but, you're also web designers and copywriters, you sell ad space and e-books and you seem to personally have a hand in all of it. Do you have any productivity tips for getting that much work done in a week?"

James Chartrand: He wants all my secrets that's it. Productivity tips, I have to say that having two monitors is a godsend. And in fact, I would have three if I could simply because I save time. I don't have to bounce between programs or remind myself to check certain things. I have everything that I need right in front of my face at all the time and it really has been a productivity godsend. I really recommend investing \$200 even on a crappy monitor just to get that extra real estate in front of your eyes.

Another tip that I recommend, and one I actually only discovered recently is to take breaks. Take a lot of breaks, take frequent breaks, even if it's just 5 minutes to get up and walk around the house. That time is incredibly refreshing and it gives your brain a small rest so that you can back and perform at your top almost all the time.

Getting sleep something that, a lot of, people today shortchange themselves on. Getting a good eight hours is crucial. It's amazing the number of people I know that just don't sleep. They think they have to burn the candle at both ends, to make ends meet, but the truth is if you get eight hours, you can do twice the work in half the time.

Eating, another thing, very simple but another often forgotten factor. The more brainpower you have, the better you can produce. And brainpower comes from food but when we're online often we don't think about that. We forget to eat; or we eat the wrong food; or we get hungry, and we get up and grab whatever's there. You really have to take time to take care of yourself first and the productivity that comes from that is it's really phenomenal. It sounds common sense and stupid but I really want to stress its importance.

Rebecca Matter: No I don't think it sounds stupid at all I think it's something that it might be obvious, but it's probably overlooked because it's so obvious and I know that-

James Chartrand: Yes, I think people try to say, "Well, we know that, we know that." Well, if you know it, do it, and do it for two, three weeks and the results that you'll see are pretty amazing. Like I said, I didn't always do this myself. So I stand on both sides of the spectrum, but I can say it really has a major impact on the productivity.

Rebecca Matter: I think that there's also people feel like they have a bragging right if they do burn the candle off both ends. "I put in an eighteen-hour day yesterday," but really it isn't for anyone who has done it this way. You kind of feel sorry for them.

James Chartrand: No, absolutely. There was an article recently in Canadian business about the bragging rights that go along with sleep, and I read about some people who will sleep at their desk at the office in a shameful way because they won't go home, and just keep working and if they nod off it's a terrible thing. But what's more terrible to me is that brilliant people who can do amazing things and who have talent and creativity just cut off their own feet, because they're trying to show how productive they can be. Productive isn't a badge anymore. Staying healthy, staying sane, and doing your best work, that's a badge of honor to me.

Rebecca Matter: I like that. Staying healthy, staying sane. Okay, so before we wrap this up, what advice would you give to someone who is just starting out? They know that they want to be in this space. They know that they want to write. Where would you recommend they go? What would you recommend they do?

James Chartrand: I would recommend that they disassociate themselves from their work. People who are creative tend to be personally and emotionally wrapped up in what they do, and it is one of their biggest roadblocks, and creates a whole bunch of self-limiting beliefs, and self-sabotage that keeps them small; and keeps them hurting; and keeps them doubting their abilities and themselves.

Disassociate, business is business, work is work. If a client doesn't like your copy, don't worry about it. It's okay, that's fine. They didn't like it, you're still worthy of what you do you still do good work. This is huge. I see so many people succumbing to self-doubt that simply stem from that. They have too much of themselves wrapped up in their business.

Once you have that settled and you understand, it's just work. It's not about you. It's not personal. Go out and keep trying, keep trying, keep trying. Determination, persistence, sticking with it. It's going to be hard for at least three to six months but you can do it.

Don't worry too much about learning what you don't know. Stay on top of improving your skills, but what's going to pay off is that: you were always there, you were always trying, and you never gave up.

Rebecca Matter: James, those are too huge pieces of advice. I mean being on this end of it, being a client, but also then being part of AWAI and talking to our members on a regular basis. The roadblock of that personal-taking everything personal about their writing.

James Chartrand: Oh, it's just huge, just huge.

Rebecca Matter: I hear it all the time.

James Chartrand: There are days I want to—I know I have a copywriting blog and it's all about doing better business, but there are days that I wish that I could get into the psychology that's behind it all. Simply because I think that's really a huge part of why people have so much trouble succeeding when they want to do this so much.

Rebecca Matter: It sounds like it might be a calling.

James Chartrand: There you go.

Rebecca Matter: Well, James thank you so much. This was a very, not only a interesting informative interview, but very, very useful. You've given some really useful advice.

James Chartrand: Oh, I really appreciate the opportunity. I'm glad you guys asked me. And I really hope that some people get some value out of this and feel good about themselves and feel a little bit more able to take control of their lives and stick with it and succeed where they should succeed. Everybody deserves that and anybody can do that.

Rebecca Matter: I know that they will get a lot out of this. So definitely, I thank you and I hope to talk to you again soon then.

James Chartrand: Great stuff. Thanks, Rebecca.

Rebecca Matter: All right thanks, James. Bye everyone.