

Power Teaching Master Class
Transcript of interview with Sonia Simone of *Copyblogger*
By Pamela Slim of *Escape from Cubicle Nation*

Topic: Writing Sales Letters that Sell

PAMELA: Well, welcome. This is Pamela Slim, and I am delighted to welcome you to a master class about writing sales letters that sell with our very special guest, Sonia Simone. Sonia is the senior editor of [Copyblogger](#), the recognized authority for how to sell online, and she has been the force behind multiple six-figure launches. She's a founding member of [Teaching Sells](#) and also [Inside Third Tribe Marketing](#). I'm trying to think of when I first met Sonia, it was somewhere, probably tripping over Twitter or on the Internet, and I was immediately struck by her intelligence and heart, but also because she was not what I would consider to be somebody who was a typical Internet marketer, and we'll talk specifically about that in a [few] minutes. So Sonia, welcome to the call.

SONIA: Oh, my goodness. Thank you.

PAMELA: Well, you wrote a blog post - it's about three years ago now - that was titled, "[Is Your Tribe Holding You Down?](#)" It was on Copyblogger. I'll never forget because it made such an impact on me when I read it. And at that time, you were talking about two tribes. One is the Tribe of the Cool Kids, who are part of the conversation, people who are trendy and cool and have blogs and basically are totally broke, living in their parents' garages or basements sometimes. And then the other side, which was the Internet Marketing Tribe that are driving Lamborghinis with models draped over them and using all kinds of slick tips and tricks. And obviously there was some tongue-in-cheek in the way that you were describing these two tribes.

PAMELA: But what really struck me so much - and this again was about three years ago - [was] where you were identifying that many of the things that people were doing in trying to get attention online, trying to sell online, that was coming more from the culture of blogging, sharing information freely was actually not really leading to direct sales. And then there were folks who were doing very, very well, selling effectively but sometimes were not using techniques that were really effective in that post, you were describing that for you personally, you really wanted to open your mind to learn about what were the best things that you could take from each of these different tribes and create a very powerful, authentic, generous kind of online marketing persona, but at the same time really make money.

PAMELA: So I wanted to start our conversation that way - thinking about, first of all, for you, what drove you to write that post, and then what did you learn, in creating that discussion, about some fundamentals of really good online marketing.

SONIA: Yes. That was an interesting post, and it came out of people asking us, "Well, I don't get it. Whose side are you on? I mean, you're this big blog, but then you sell things. I don't get it." So it was tongue-in-cheek, because do we really have to choose? I don't think we do have to choose between having an ethical, honest conversation and having a business. I think that those two things are very compatible. But that seemed to be something that people wanted a little more guidance with - where's the line. Because in all persuasions - asking somebody on a date or your seven-year-old trying to convince you to take [him] to a particular movie - from a certain point of view, it all can be seen as manipulation in some way.

SONIA: You're trying to get somebody to change their behavior, and I think that there are ethical ways to persuade people and legitimate, cool ways to persuade people, and then of course there are unethical

ways. But one thing I think might be exaggerated is, I think a lot of people who are really, really allergic to persuasion and copyrighting and selling, they have this idea that there [are] magic words we can say that are going to hypnotize people, and they're just going to go out and they're going to turn over their credit card. I have never really found that.

SONIA: I don't think there [are] any magic words you can say that's going to turn your viewers into zombies. I almost want to say, "Wouldn't that be nice?" if it was that easy, but I haven't found it. So it's really about combing your hair and brushing your teeth and making yourself the best self you can be and then putting forth a good argument for your cause. And some people will say, "Yeah, I buy that. I'm going to go ahead and join you." And some people are going to say, "Not for me," or "Not this time," or whatever, and that's all good.

PAMELA: I love that. Well, one of my very favorite stories that you told me - it could have been we were having a conversation about selling that I was doing for Copyblogger or Third Tribe or something - is where you described how, starting out in your business career, you were not somebody who felt like you were naturally comfortable selling at all. In fact, if I remember right, your grandmother would not buy cookies from you, which is probably ...

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: ...the best example that I ever heard.

SONIA: [It] was just more than I couldn't spit it out. It was just too hard. It was too hard to ask for that sale. I'm not a natural salesperson. I get that awkwardness that we get when it's time to move the transaction forward. If I have to do it in person, it's still uncomfortable, or [even] over the phone, it's still uncomfortable for me. One of the reasons I probably gravitated to the online world is I can process that discomfort on my own. I can write one thing, and it sounds kind of wimpy. And I can make it less wimpy and kind of edit out all my hemming and hawing and put forth something that sounds confident, so I can present the best version of myself.

SONIA: I'm not a great salesperson. Although, to my own shock, I actually can do it if I have to. I stood up on stage at the Dan Kennedy conference a couple of years ago, and I sold quite a lot of some DVDs that I created on marketing and blogging and social media marketing techniques. And I was able to stammer out my call to action and stammer out what people should do next. And I wasn't particularly graceful, but I had given enough information that people were able to make the decision. And that's really all that matters - have you given people enough information that they can decide to go further with you.

PAMELA: Exactly. And knowing you and knowing you work, I'm sure that the content that was on those DVDs was really good, was very solid, because that's a core value for you - creating things that are really effective and well written and well designed and useful. So I'm wondering if that helped with some of the discomfort that most people feel the first...

SONIA: It does.

PAMELA: ...time that they're doing something like that.

SONIA: Yes it does. I do know people who [have] a mindset of, "Oh, nobody ever does anything with this stuff anyway, so who cares?" That's not me. I wouldn't get any joy out of it if that was me. I really love when somebody in the Third Tribe or Twitter or on Facebook says, "Oh, I tried this thing, and it's

just working great. Thank you so much." I love that feeling. And I'm also like you are; I'm super-passionate about the people who want to make that leap into being self-sufficient and to having their own business and not relying on some other company to take care of them. I am so passionate about helping those people because the biggest - I'm sure you found this - one of the top three problems is, "How am I going to find some customers?"

PAMELA: Yes.

SONIA: So if I can help people out with that and help them take their passion and make it into reality,[then] that is pretty awesome.

PAMELA: That's wonderful. Well, and it's a nice segue into looking at some of the meat of this conversation, which is specifically...

PAMELA: ...talking about components of a good sales letter. And by sales letter, I mean the common thing we see on a website, where there's a page that can fully give that well-designed argument, as you were saying, as to why somebody would want to buy a product or a service. For the first time entrepreneurs, and the first time that people do this, it can feel very, very overwhelming. Everything - from how to structure to what to say to what colors to use, et cetera. So I want to start at the higher level of breaking down what are some good fundamental components of an effective sales letter, no matter what it is that you're selling.

SONIA: And that's a good point because sometimes you're not selling a product or service for money. Sometimes you're doing something like selling your email newsletter in exchange for somebody's time. So sometimes the sales letter is not about money. Sometimes it's about time, attention, something like that. And it really is always sort of the same. If you're asking your audience for something, then the structure will be the same depending on whatever you're asking for.

SONIA: The first thing is, if you're going to ask somebody to make a decision, you need to respect the global cultural ADD that we all have, and you need to focus their attention. So that means you want to form out a page that doesn't have all kinds of things they can bounce off and do. All of our blogs have some more things they can check out and some articles and links to cool things. And that's all great, there's nothing wrong with that, but don't put those on your sales page. Just make it very clean, remove the distractions and give our poor fragmented attention spans some kind of chance of focusing on this for five seconds.

SONIA: So that's just from a high-level [perspective]. Keep people focused, and keep things clean. Use your white space, break up your paragraphs, and use a couple of techniques like subheads. Just make it really user-friendly. It doesn't mean you have to dumb it down, but just make it nice and readable. Because [sales] pages – [remember] when I talked about giving that presentation, I had to give people all the information they needed - they can get long, because sometimes you have a lot to communicate.

SONIA: So think about how you can chunk your information up so it's nice and easy to scan, and the person can zero in on [what interests them.] They'll look through your page, and they'll say, "Okay, I get that, I get that, I get that. Wait, wait; here's the section that I need to really understand." You make it skimmable so they can zero in on the things that are worrying them. Maybe your guarantee, or maybe what's in the CD package or what does your service cover and what's not covered, whatever it might be. Every customer is going to have different questions about what's worrying them. So if they can scan the content, they can find that.

PAMELA: And do you have-

SONIA: And then if you want to...

PAMELA: Well, maybe we can take one piece at a time, because I love this, with some general...

SONIA: Mm-hmm.

PAMELA: ... design principles of keeping things clear, removing distractions like sidebars, et cetera, breaking...

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: ...things up, having white space. Is there anything from a font color perspective? There's the famous yellow highlighter or red headline sometimes that people may see often and what they may consider to be a little bit more of a hard-sell Internet marketing sales letter. But is there truth sometimes to colors that you might use for headings or subheads that can help people to make a buying decision?

SONIA: I think mostly what that stuff is used for is to point your eye to the important part of the page, because these pages do get kind of long. And very often there are some things that you want to stand out a little more. You know we have [this] software - Premise Landing Page software - and it allows you to create landing pages pretty quickly. And we include this huge library of little things like little arrows you can [use]. If you want somebody to enter their email address in a box, you can put a little arrow, and it seems funny, but that little arrow helps people unconsciously know what to focus on.

SONIA: So graphic elements and images do draw the eye. So make sure they're drawing the eye where you want it to go. And color draws the eye. [But] you don't want to make it a mess, because if people are focusing on everything, then they can't focus on anything. I really want people to get this point. I like to use a little box that's kind of shaded; so you've got a little box with an outline, and then it's shaded maybe a light yellow so it's readable.

SONIA: If I have a really important point, I like to put my super-important points in that. Just like in a magazine, you might have an important part in the article that's in a little call-out box. It stands out a little more on the page, it pulls that reader in. So it's basically about directing people's attention to what you think are the most important message points.

PAMELA: Okay, that's really helpful. Do you have an opinion about a red headline, just because I know for some people it really turns them off, and other people use it very frequently?

SONIA: Yes. My guess is, it depends on how many traditional Internet marketing sales letters people have seen. [For example,] YourSpace and MySpace [are] about giving business advice and education, and most of our customers have seen these kinds of Slick Willy ads, and they use red headlines, and they use a blue headline underneath that. They have a look that our audience, if they've seen them before, might be somewhat turned off by.

SONIA: But if your topic is helping people train their dog or helping people find jeans that look good for their figure or something like that, that has nothing to do with what we do, those people probably are not that worried about it. It's nice if your page can be nice looking, pleasing looking. It doesn't have to look

like it was coded in 1997. It's okay to have a little design sense, make it look a little bit good. But you also don't have to go out and spend five grand on some kind of super-flashy Web design. The main thing is, is it attractive, and is it easy to read, easy to read being the number one.

PAMELA: Wonderful, yes. So let's start to go through some of the sections.

SONIA: Mm-hmm.

PAMELA: It really starts with the headline, right? What's important when you're setting it up in terms of what the first thing is that people read for - maybe the headline and then the subhead on the sales page?

SONIA: The main thing we found on headlines is [this:] you always tend to go with the clever headline or the cool headline or a headline that makes a cool joke. Those almost always do less well [than] something that is just very clear that gives people a benefit. Say, "You can do this more easily, more quickly" - whatever the benefit is. And that cost-to-benefit is really important in selling; [explain] why somebody [should] work with you instead of working with somebody else. They have all these options open. Why are they going to choose you? What do they get out of working with you that they don't get out of working with another solution, whatever that might be?

SONIA: You want to think about putting that benefit into the headline, so somebody knows why [they are] even reading this page. If I go to getpremise.com, [I see] "point-and-click membership sites" and "landing pages". Point-and-click is a benefit because [I think], "Okay, this is going to be easy. I'm not going to have to learn how to be a programmer." Membership sites and landing pages are two things that people who are our customers already kind of know [about]...

PAMELA: Mm-hmm.

SONIA: [Our customers think,] "I want to build a membership site," or, "I want to build landing pages." And then we've got a little graphic on there using WordPress because WordPress is our ecosystem. So immediately there's a lot of information, and there's really nothing clever. Then as we go down the page, "here's how Premise takes the pain out of digital sales and lead generation." It's very clear. It communicates well. It's attention-getting because it's pointing to something people want, not because it's cute or clever. Clever headlines are very pleasing to write, but they often don't really convert.

PAMELA: That's really important to know, right? Sometimes I get very...

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: ...excited by the cleverness and cracking myself up...

SONIA: Oh, yes.

PAMELA: ...but remembering that what you want is for people to clearly know what you offer and what the benefit is to them. Wonderful. So just very clear, a compelling headline that speaks directly to what they need or want. Then what about the first few paragraphs? I've seen often that people might start with, "Is this you?" or, "Do you struggle with?" What do you think is a good place to start with your copy?

SONIA: I think those are both good. So there [are] a million formulas for doing these sales pages. But they all come back to some underlying basics, some bones, the first one being, "Here's who I am."

Somebody has to know who you are. If you're a well-known blogger and you have an audience and they get you, you may not need to cover that in very much detail because you might be sending people from your email list where they've already gotten to know who you are. But you need people to know who you are.

SONIA: The first big structural component is, "Here's what I've got for you. Here's what I have. Here's what my thing is. Here's my service. Here's my product." For example, I'm a chiropractor," or, "I'm a dentist," or, "I'm a life coach," whatever it is. "Here's what it'll do for you." So we're translating into what we call benefits, and that's what we talked about before. What does the person get out of dealing with you? It's amazing how many businesses just totally forget to do that stuff. They talk about, "Here's what I've got, here's what I've got, here's what I've got, here's what I've got," and everybody's just asleep. "Here's what it will do for you," is much more interesting to your customer, and then, "Here's what you should do next."

SONIA: So that first introductory, "Is this you?" or "Do you struggle with?" is really getting your person to know they're in the right place, which is a great idea. Getting your person to know, "Yes, I do have lower back pain," or, "Yes, I am looking for high-quality daycare for my kid. And yes, I do stress out about the options I have available to me right now." So whatever it is, that is a great place to start, just figuring out where people are. If your introductory content says, "Do you get stressed out leaving your kids at daycare?" and the person doesn't have kids, they're going to go away, which is awesome, right?

SONIA: So the first thing you're doing is making sure, "Am I talking to the right prospect?" If I'm talking to a prospect who doesn't know me for what I do, we're wasting both of our time. Let's just let that person go off and go somewhere else.

PAMELA: Right. Okay, so that's really useful. So taking each step then of that framework, as you said, you can lead with some questions that might allow somebody to know they're in the right place and make sure that...

SONIA: Right.

PAMELA: ...you have a little bit of rapport with them so you understand what some of their problems are.

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: What do you need to talk about in terms of who you are? Sometimes people get stressed out about this. Do you include your entire resume? What's important for people to know in order to know you and like you and trust you enough to give you their money, essentially?

SONIA: I think the most important thing to remember is this really is about your prospect. So when you talk about yourself, it's through that lens of "How do I help this person I want to help?" Most businesses, and particularly most small businesses, are in business to help someone with a particular issue or problem. And if they're talking about that person's problem and then how you can help, [that] is the most interesting way you can talk about yourself.

SONIA: So, "I've been in real estate for 25 years in our city, and I know every single neighborhood, and I know all of the ins and outs, and I can protect you against anything unforeseen that might crop up because I've seen it all." So [if] I've been in business for 25 years, who cares, right? That's bragging. But

[if] I've been in business for 25 years,[that] means I can help you navigate some of the weird stuff that comes up when you do real estate deals. That's much more interesting to me.

SONIA: All of a sudden, I'm starting to get what's in it for me. So you want to talk about yourself in that context of, "Here's how I help people." If you can tell stories, stories are wonderful, case studies are just wonderful or little quickie testimonials. [A] testimonial can tell a story [like], "I had all these problems, and I worked with this person for a couple of weeks, and we were able to resolve 90 percent of everything very quickly, and it was a fun process." Those little mini stories are great.

SONIA: The other nice thing is then you get other people to talk about you, which is less hideous than talking about yourself all the time.

PAMELA: Mm-hmm. So [think about] your experience in the lens of what's important to them and how does your experience directly relate to your ability to understand them and deliver value. So if you're somebody teaching a busy parent how to cook healthy meals, you might want to mention that you're also a parent or you spend a lot of time...

PAMELA: ...cooking and a lot of your customers were busy parents and you really understand that. So that's really helpful, to filter it through and not include information that wouldn't be relevant. Sometimes I say in talking with folks about background and experience [that] it's a wonderful thing to be humble and really want to be serving and not, as you said, be bragging on yourself. But if there are some significant things that can help people have confidence - like maybe you went to Harvard, or maybe you're trained a special place...

PAMELA: ...or you got a certain kind of award, that that can actually be something that instills confidence. So I like it within your filter of relevance if it relates to people understanding that you really are effectively trained or you have gotten some recognition in the market, then you can go ahead and include that.

SONIA: Yes, and sometimes it can help us have the confidence to do this by remembering that we may have some very well-meaning competitors who might not have the knowledge that we have. And so they're not going to do [as good a job.] I think most of us have people in our field who are doing more harm than good, because they just don't have the training, or they don't have the certification, or they don't have the knowledge. We all see people and wince a little bit, [thinking], "Oh, that person's not helping our clients here," because they might be lacking something that you have.

SONIA: So if you think [to yourself] "It's important to my clients that their personal trainer is certified so they don't get hurt, and I'm tired of seeing people get hurt. I want people to go to trainers like me who know how to keep their clients healthy and injury free." When you care about people and protecting them and taking good care of them and helping them solve their problems, it's easier to figure out what to leave in and what to leave out.

PAMELA: Yes, that's wonderful. I had a funny thing that ended up being a little swipe on me, but it was maybe a little poorly intentioned. I had done an interview on Forbes, and there was a guy who had tweeted the article, and he said, "Great. More advice from a non-entrepreneur." And, of course, I got a little huffy and puffy about it. Maybe he would have thought style-wise a little bit differently about it. He actually was the CEO of a whole number of different startups that had all kinds of employees and had been spun off and sold and so forth.

PAMELA: So I think he kind of missed an opportunity to lead with an insult, but he has a particular definition of what it means to be an entrepreneur, and we had a little discussion and he kind of apologized for his tone. But it could be an example, if he really wanted to reach people, of giving entrepreneurial advice, that we're in the startup world for the kinds of companies that would get VC funding and eventually be prepared to be sold.

PAMELA: That would be a really good distinction to have. So after being insulted, I kind of backed down and thought, "Okay, that's interesting."

PAMELA: I'd coach him a little bit around style...But you know, hey.

SONIA: Let's say he had a book out about how to navigate the first hundred days once you get VC funding. Well, if Pam Slim writes that book, it's going to be a little weird, because it's not your sweet spot. So if that's what people need to know, then it's important that he tells you, "I've done this four times." Another thing you can talk about, that people get nervous about talking about, is mentioning, "I made every mistake there was to make, and that's how I know the right way to do it."

SONIA: "Because I've been there." You put yourself in the seat with your audience. "I did all the wrong things. I hired too many people, I got too fancy an office, I made my VC partners mad at me. I did all these things and so benefit from my painful experience, and let me teach you the right way to do it." If that's true in your case, whatever your field, and you've had painful mistakes and you've learned some things the hard way, that's awesome to share with readers, because they would rather not learn the hard way. They would rather learn the easy way by talking to you.

PAMELA: Definitely. Yes, and the only nuance I'd say to that, which you've probably seen too, is just making sure you demonstrate that, "I made all those mistakes, but then once I learned from them, I ended up making good decisions and getting good results." Sometimes it goes into the "too much information" thing where you think, "Wow. You lost millions of dollars and made all these poor decisions. But wait a minute, how are you doing now?" So I love that.

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: I love humanizing it, but at the same time really instilling confidence in that you know you made the mistakes but you really learned from them, and now you have a better way.

SONIA: Yes. And it is so interesting because different people have challenges in different arenas. Some people have a challenge in being human. They think they're supposed to be perfect all the time, and they think they're supposed to sound like a big company, and they puff themselves up too much. And then other people have the challenge of knocking themselves down too much, and nobody has any confidence in them because they're so humble, that they kind of look a little bit pitiful. So it's finding that balance, and knowing yourself. Know, "Okay, I have a tendency to be a bit of a boaster," or, "I have a tendency to" - which is probably more common for your people - "not toot my own horn, to be afraid to actually talk about my accomplishments."

SONIA: And so if you know that,[then] you know your first draft will be wimpy, and you'll make whatever your mistake is, and then you'll look at it, and you'll rewrite it so that it's more confident or more humble, depending on what you need.

PAMELA: Exactly. I love that. I love that. So that's really in that first section of the framework of, "Here's who I am." For the second piece, "Here's what I have," [we need] more of a concrete description of product and service. I know it's a general question, because it can depend on what you're selling. But what are some good, important things to cover when you're describing the specific offer?

SONIA: I think that the mistake people can make here is they don't get specific enough. They don't tell people what's in the box, and I'm using "box", you know, quote-unquote. So if you have a coaching package, they don't describe everything that's included in your program - the initial meeting, whatever it might be. You want to make sure that somewhere people can see it, they understand what it is that they'll be paying for. Or if it's an email opt-in, what am I going to get when I opt-in for this email newsletter? What does it consist of? How many messages? How often do they come? Let people know what they're going to get out of it.

SONIA: For those of us who sell information, you can do really cool things. Anytime we sell a course, we put the complete course description on the sales page. So the sales pages are like 47 pages long. We actually put them into e-books because there's a lot there, because every single lesson is described. But that helps people really visualize, "When I become a customer for this, I can really picture what I'm going to get and all the things I'm going to have access to." So, if you're a massage therapist, that's going to be kind of brief. It's a 50-minute Swedish or a 90-minute rock massage. You might elaborate on it and make it sound good, but it'll be straightforward.

SONIA: For some of our businesses - maybe you're a financial planner or an herbal Chinese medicine specialist - your process is probably more complex, and you'll want to let people know what they're going to experience when they come and become a customer.

PAMELA: Yes. Do you think that it's helpful if you have a tasteful graphic too? Let's say you have more of an information product, where you're going to have audio recordings and videos and PDFs, [should] you have little graphic images? Does that help to let people know what it is that's covered?

SONIA: Yes, it helps people visualize. For a while it was super, super popular. So if you had an e-book, you would have it done as a graphic so it looked like a little book, you know, a little paperback. And it had dimension and it had a little shadow, and that was really popular for a while. And now I'm seeing it less, which makes me think it might be somewhat less popular, or people might have said, "Where's my book? I saw a little picture of a book. I got no book."

SONIA: But I think that it helps people visualize. If you've got five PDF reports that come with your coaching program, and you have five little icons of a paper report, it helps people visualize the volume of material that they'll be getting. You don't want to pad it, but if you're providing a ton of material, don't bury that. Make sure people get it.

PAMELA: Definitely. So really clearly describing the specific things that are covered, and if you're using these design principles of having everything clearly formatted, with white space, et cetera, and some good subheads to break up text, let's say somebody doesn't want to go into the detail of that, you make it easy for them to scan through and maybe jump to the price or jump to the guarantee or things like that.

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: Is that right?

SONIA: Yes, exactly.

PAMELA: So sometimes people get overwhelmed by a really long sales letter, but is it just that...

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: ...if it's very relevant and useful and you make it easy for people to skip through, is that the kind of thing people should worry about, or not?

SONIA: I wouldn't worry about it, but I would go through and ask yourself, "Does the prospect need to know this information to make a decision?" It doesn't have to be every prospect. But as you said, as long as it's skimmable, people will just go ahead and naturally say, "Okay, I don't need to really look at that in depth. I'm just glad it's covered. That's great." And a lot of times they will skip over what's in the box while they're scanning around your page and figuring out what you do. And then they might go back in and read it more carefully if they're getting close to the decision to buy. So just make it easy for them to navigate.

SONIA: There's an old selling maxim, "The more you tell, the more you sell." People do need to have all the facts before they can make an informed decision. So you don't want to leave stuff off just because somebody told you, "Oh, you know everything on the Web has to be ultra-brief." That's true until people actually have to know something, and then they want the facts there. They don't want to have to go chase after them.

PAMELA: Yes, definitely. That's really helpful. So the third section about "Here's what it will do for you", this can cause a lot of consternation for people, particularly when they're new, where they might not be totally sure about what they can actually promise or not. Some specific examples could be things like, "Guaranteed to double your income," or, "You will make six figures within three months of this program." How do you make sure that you are describing something that your program will do for somebody else that is feasible, that you feel confident in delivering, but at the same time that's a big promise?

PAMELA: I was interviewing Chris Guillebeau for another master class, and he was talking about the importance of really having a big promise that gets people excited, [like] his book, "The \$100 Startup." We did \$100 business for him as a class. There can be compelling parts to that, but it can be a little bit dicey sometimes, to not over-promise or under-promise, and really have a not very compelling win.

SONIA: Yes. I'm doing some major de-cluttering, and so I'm looking at some of my resources, and I've got a little binder that says, "30 Days to Mass Control Millions." That's a promise that works really well on some audiences. But a lot of people are going to look at that and just roll their eyes. If the promise is disproportionate, especially that promise of getting a disproportionate reward for a very small input, a lot of us are going to narrow our eyes and think, "Eh, it seems a little blotchy to me."

SONIA: And \$100 startup is interesting because it is a really audacious promise.

PAMELA: Mm-hmm.

SONIA: I think another person would not have been able to get away with it. I think the reason that Chris Guillebeau can get away with it is, he's known. People already understand that he's not talking about \$100 startup to make the next version of Microsoft Word. He's talking about a little, solo business

that starts small, that's not going to start making a million dollars. It's going to start maybe being a little side business, and it can be grown.

PAMELA: Mm-hmm.

SONIA: So they have a context, and they also have a high level of trust that Chris is not going to try and sell them total snake oil. So yes, you have to balance. The only thing I can tell people is we're finding on Copyblogger that if we tone down the promise just a little bit, we seem to do better in terms of click-throughs and things like that. Just today, we ran a blog post [on] a five-step plan to improve every blog post you write. That was originally a five-step plan to dramatically improve every blog post you write.

PAMELA: Hmm.

SONIA: We stepped it back just a tiny bit because we're finding that the more, quote-unquote, "realistic promise," does better. The "hypie" words sometimes make people less engaged. So think about that. It is a question of balance, and I don't think there's a hard and fast rule. Of course, you have to be able to keep your promise and even exceed it a little bit. To me, a diet book that says how to lose four pounds in 30 days [is] much more convincing than how to lose 30 pounds in 30 days.

SONIA: Four pounds in 30 days I can see as being humanly possible. 30 pounds in 30 days [makes me wonder], "Am I going to cut one of my legs off or how is this going to work?"

PAMELA: Right.

SONIA: [It doesn't] seem like a good idea. Now, are there books that sell every day of the year on how to lose 30 pounds in 30 days? Yes, there are. So the big promise can work. But I think many of us, first of all, are looking for a more ethical sales process. And secondly, we don't want the customer who's building castles in the sky. That person is a gigantic pain, you know? The person who has got way disproportionate dreams and they don't want to put anything into it. That person's a painful customer who will wreck your life, and your support people will just want to shoot themselves. Make a real promise you can really deliver on and set people's expectations that they're going to need to put something into it.

SONIA: They're not going to cure their back pain in 30 days if they're not willing to do the exercises. It doesn't happen just by visiting the office and magically "anti-back pain fairy dust" comes raining down on you. You have to put something into it. And incidentally, that'll help you out with the Federal Trade Commission, which gets very cranky about big "hypie" promises that seem to imply no work and huge results. They get cranky about that whether it's financial health, [or] whatever. If you clearly say, "Well, this person got the results because this person put in the work that I showed them how to do," it just works better. You get a better customer. You get better results for your customers. And it looks more believable.

PAMELA: Yes, that's really helpful, because we know that it doesn't happen that way. So I really like that balance...

SONIA: Right.

PAMELA: ...of somebody who might be wanting instantaneous results is not going to be your ideal customer down the road, because, truly, change doesn't happen that way. But if you have something really good that's very helpful, you can help them to make some significant incremental results. So here,

in this section, you're describing specific, tangible things in terms that they can relate to. One of the things I talk about often in selling is looking at the five ways of creating value, which I learned from Skip Miller. These are: reducing their risk or saving them time, giving them a better return on investment, doing positive things for their brand and doing it according to their motivational direction toward pleasure; what's going to happen that's great in their life, what pain will be reduced. Using some of those elements can just make people feel a lot more clear about the benefits.

PAMELA: So I like that, and that's so interesting to hear about how you're testing and having it slightly be a little bit less of a promise that's converting better. That's just really cool data to know, because I know you all really focus on the data side of testing things. So...

SONIA: Right.

PAMELA: ...that's neat to know. What about the call to action? The fourth piece you mentioned is, "Here's what you should do next."

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: How do you do that? How do you say it in a sales letter?

SONIA: This is cool because it's almost like a pro tip; a lot of people don't know to do it, and it's so easy. So you can really immediately improve your conversion, and it's just incredibly easy, which is just telling people so clearly what they should do next. One of the interesting things that we've looked at is data showing that telling somebody to "click here" in a link makes it more likely they'll click there. Now, Web usability people just want to jump out the window because [they think] "It's underlined; of course it's a link. Everybody knows what you do to a link; you click on it." But they don't. They know, but they don't click.

SONIA: If you use the words, "Click here to get signed up," or something like that, you'll get more clicks. It's the goofiest thing, but it's [true]. So just go ahead and tell people what to do. Go ahead and tell people. "Enter your information in the form below, and we can get started." Just spell it out very clearly and tell them exactly what to do. That's why, if you look at infomercials, you'll see calls to action done very well. "1-888, CALL NOW to order your free kit," - that's a great call to action. I think the reason that a lot of people [who are] a little bit new to copywriting, [when] they write a call to action, they just [think], "Oh my God, that sounds like an awful infomercial. It's so embarrassing." You just have to sit with that for a little bit and let it dissipate, because it's truly a direct call to action.

SONIA: It looks a little bit salesy, and that's okay. It looks salesy because what is effective in selling is to go ahead and explicitly ask for what you need. If everything else is ethical and you're providing value and you're coming from a place of integrity, you can't worry that people are going to know you have something to sell. They need to know that. Trying to hide that is actually a way to get yourself in trouble. When you pretend that there's nothing to sell and then you start selling, people get cranky with you because they entered into a relationship on one basis, and then you changed the rules, and that's not cool.

SONIA: If you let them know from the beginning, "I have a business. My business is a fee-based business. I don't have a nonprofit, where I'm giving everything away for free, and now it's time for me to see if you're ready to take the next step," [then] that's perfectly cool.

PAMELA: I love that. It just clears things up. I'm one of those people that gets very cranky if I don't realize I'm being sold.

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: Oooh, I really don't like it, and I don't mind buying things at all. I enjoy it, but yes, I like that clarity. So there's one specific question that's related. If you're giving very clear instructions on what you should do next, do you have any preference for the language on, "Buy Now," or, "Sign up Now"? Is there any science that you would recommend, or does it really matter in terms of what the button is, what it says on the button, what color it is?

SONIA: The only thing we've seen that does seem to hold up is that things like, "Buy Now" don't tend to do as well as some call to action that doesn't specifically talk about buying. Even "Enter Your Credit Card" works better than "Buy Now." But the best are things like, "Get Started," "Join Us," "Add to Cart." If you have a shopping cart, don't say, "Buy Now." Say, "Add to Cart."

SONIA: You just test better. The reason Amazon says, "Add to Cart" and not "Buy Now" is because "Add to Cart" converts better. For some reason the word "buy" has been shown to suppress your response a tiny bit. Now, it's not going to be a lot. But you might as well give yourself every little boost. So have a call to action.

SONIA: In terms of colors of buttons, you know you can test them if you want to, and sometimes people will see a better result with a green button versus a red button. But that's a pretty sophisticated level of testing. So if it's something you feel moved to test, you certainly can, and set it up. But if you are saying, "I don't have any idea how to do that," do not let it stress you because it's really not going to make more than a couple of fractions of a percentage point difference, if that.

PAMELA: Okay. That's really helpful. What about sometimes where you see that somebody has a call to action button sprinkled throughout what might be a longer sales page? Is that okay to do? What are...

SONIA: Yes.

PAMELA: ...the plusses and minuses of that?

SONIA: I think that's a good thing. The main thing is, don't be afraid to go ahead and repeat yourself a little bit with the call to action, because remember we're creating these pages to be skimmable. So if they happen to skim the part that has your call to action in it, you want to make sure they've seen it. You can make a little bit of a game out of this. Naomi Dunford and I had a sales letter, and the first one said "Buy Now," and it [had] a little button that said, "Buy Now." And then the second one [said] "Buy Right Now," and it was bigger. And then the third one was giant, and it [said], "No, seriously, buy, buy, buy."

SONIA: I think because it was a marketing crowd, and they knew that part of what we were doing was helping them get over this. So it was tongue-in-cheek, and it was kind of silly. But yes, go ahead and repeat your call to action. Don't assume somebody's reading every single word. I would put them at places that you think it would be natural for the person to be able to make the decision. Let's say after the, "Here's what I've got," sometimes you've got them at, "Hello." "Here's what I got", and the person says, "Okay, that's what I need. Let's just get it done. Don't keep talking, I'm ready to make this decision."

SONIA: So you can put it in there, and the buttons are nice because we've all seen them. We've all seen these "Add to Cart" kind of buttons and we know what they do, and we know to click on them. And I like to put that "Add to Cart" button or the "Get started" button and a link in text that says, "Click Here to Get Started." So I put them both in because, again, I'm using that "Click Here," call to action, and if it gets me a couple more percentage points, I'm all for it. It's not obnoxious enough that anybody's running for the hills screaming.

PAMELA: That's great, and I like that suggestion. Well, what about the P.S. that often you see in sales letters, the P.S.? Why is that there, and is it a good idea?

SONIA: These are very funny, and anytime you hear these things, you have to realize that some of the stuff is evolving. So it may not even be true anymore, but we're still going on the old copywriter's lore. But the copywriter's lore is, there are three parts of your page, the parts that most people see. The first one is the headline. So you know of course, it's at the top of the page. It's big. More people will see the headline than will see anything else in your page.

SONIA: The second is photo captions, and so if you can use photo captions and put a sales message in them, that's kind of cool. If you have a picture of a customer and you can say, "Mary Sue was pain free for the first time in 20 years after using my exercise program." Put that in a caption and link the picture to your order page, because captions under photos - we want to read 'em. We almost can't not read them. So put a benefit in there. And then the third one is the P.S. I don't know why. It's just a funny thing where people will read through it, and then they'll scroll down and see the P.S. Why is that? I have no idea.

SONIA: I would just put in there your strongest message, whether it's a super strong benefit or whether it's a great guarantee. Guarantees are good to put in your P.S. because they help people feel less like they're taking a risk, and that's always important, helping people mitigate that risk. I wrote a post called The Number One Enemy of Conversion, and the number one enemy of conversion is, people are afraid. They're afraid they're going to feel stupid. They're afraid they're going to sign up for your class or take you on. They're afraid they're going to sign up for the gym membership and not go to the gym, and they're going to feel dumb. They don't really care about the money; they care about feeling dumb.

SONIA: So maybe your P.S. has all the reasons that they're in no risk at all of feeling dumb if they - you know - and of course you don't use that language...

PAMELA: Exactly.

SONIA: We're going to talk to the point without using, "You're not going to feel stupid for buying this," because that might be a bit awkward. I haven't seen anything where somebody's tested it with the P.S., without the P.S., so, it's kind of lower. Everybody puts it in there just in case it still works. Brian Clark usually puts in a jokey P.S., [something] like, "Copywriting experts say the P.S. is the most widely read part of any sales letters, so we're going to remind you that it's a 60-day money-back guarantee and we can promise you that you're going to get this out of it."

PAMELA: Yeah, because he knows that for your audience, they're going to be very, very familiar with that, so that that works; versus an audience that's not as familiar with sales letters. They wouldn't get the joke because they would have no context for it.

SONIA: Right.

PAMELA: Yes. That's really useful.

SONIA: Yes, but if you're a Chinese medicine practitioner, don't do that.

PAMELA: Right. Well, I have two other questions that come directly from people who have submitted them for this master class. One of them is about video. So first of all, if you're really good at video and that's a really strong suit for you, how much text is really required? If you have a compelling video, is that something that can also be affected if you're explaining the components. And a separate person had a question about video that was kind of similar, "Is it required for a good sales page to have video these days?"

SONIA: That's a good question, and "it depends" so much. The Copyblogger audience is not big on videos, unless they [are] a how-to. They love videos if we walk them through how to use a product, "Here's how you do this, and then here's how you do that." They like that, but they don't want to just have somebody talking. That was a big fad in the Internet marketing world - basically the guru would talk his sales letter. He would go through all the things we just talked about, but instead of it being words on a page, it was words on video. It makes me nuts. I just [think], "fast-forward, fast-forward!" People use it precisely because you can't fast-forward. So if you are an awesome salesperson and you want them to hear the whole pitch, and there are some of those guys out there. They're wonderful salespeople and they have such a good rapport with their audience. I would think of somebody like, let's say a Tony Robbins.

SONIA: Their audience really, really admires them. And so the audience will put up with not being able to fast-forward, and they'll sit there on their butts and they'll watch the sales letter, and they'll order. I'll just tell you straight up. I don't like to do video because it [takes] way more time than I want to spend doing, like hair and makeup.

PAMELA: Yes, right.

SONIA: I don't need it. I don't need to put an hour more into my day so I can look okay on video, not to mention the fact [that] the amount of Spanx required is just excessive.

SONIA: It's not my idea of fun. We may start doing some more videos. We're a video culture. We're a TV culture. We're so used to getting information from our TVs and from YouTube. So we may start doing more video, but so far we're doing pretty well without it. It's great for some people. Maria Forleo would be out of her mind not to do video.

PAMELA: Exactly.

SONIA: She's so photogenic. She has a personality that comes through so wonderfully in her videos. It's working great for her. It work great for Laura Roeder. It's great if you're comfortable on camera and you really have something - a spark to convey. If you're a Tony Robbins, you're a charismatic leader in your segment, even if your charisma's a little quieter than that. Our customers, or 98 percent of them, when we give them audio and video, they say, "When's the transcript going to be here?" They're readers. Our customers are readers. So for us, we don't have the same urgency as it depends so much on your audience.

PAMELA: That's really helpful. I think that's really good advice on that. The last question is about testimonials. How important are testimonials on a sales page, and what guidelines would you suggest in order to present them?

SONIA: I think they're great. I think they are really good, because, again, they're like little stories that your customers tell about [the] experience of being your customer. Some people think they're overused. I don't think they're overused. I really think they're good. Sometimes I see the testimonials are all lumped together in one big [page] - and that's kind of impressive. You look at it and [think], "Wow, a lot of people have worked with this person." But I don't ever read them if there's ten of them all chunked together. I like to have them in the copy. So [if] we're going to make the marketing process less overwhelming, then I want to have a testimonial from somebody that said, "I was totally overwhelmed, and then I took this course, and I was able to move forward, and that was awesome." I like to have testimonials that speak to different kinds of messages and different points I'm trying to make.

SONIA: It's great if you have a photo. If you can put photos on your testimonials, that's really good. The only other thing I would say is, do not edit them to make them sound more grammatically correct. Leave them the way they came in. You can fix spelling mistakes. That's about the only thing I would fix. Those little imperfections or these quirky ways of putting things give them that realism. I trim them because a lot of times they'll come in and they'll be 28 paragraphs long. I'll just take out the three sentences to do what I want to do. And when we can set the page up where I can put a photo there, I love doing that. But I leave them unvarnished.

SONIA: And if they put things in kind of a funny way, that's good, because it shows the reader that this is a real person; this is not some kind of fake. The other thing is, the photos do not have to look like J-Lo. [They can] look like a normal person who might not be the most beautiful, most perfectly made up. Because the whole point of testimonials is they let the reader know, "Oh, well, this person's other customers are a lot like me. They're not rich and famous models. They're normal people, and I'm a normal person, so I bet this would work for me too."

PAMELA: That's wonderful. I appreciate this advice so much, and I would love it if you can let us know where is the best place to learn more from you and connect with you if people are smart enough to continue the conversation after today's master class.

SONIA: Well, I'm not too hard to get a hold of. [The] best place is to swing by Copyblogger.com. If you just click on the little blog tab, you can get the blog. I work with our wonderful editor, Robert Bruce, and between he and I, we decide what we're going to talk about and what kind of points of view we're going to put forward and what we aren't. I usually write there once a week. The other thing that you can do is, if you go to Copyblogger.com and look under the tutorials, if you look at the Internet Marketing tutorial, you can sign up for my newsletter, which is Internet Marketing For Smart People, as opposed to, you know, gullible people who want to make \$10 million in their underwear in 20 days. That's where I've tried to distill my way of doing things in a format that [is] adjustable and something you can act on and give you the course. And that's free. You just drop your email in there and click "Yes, I want to get this email," and you'll start getting it.

SONIA: So those are probably the two best places. You could always find me on Twitter at Sonia Simone. I'm there much more often than productivity would ...

PAMELA: Suggest...

SONIA: Yes, exactly. That's probably an easier way. If you want to ask me a question or get in touch with me, that tends to be a better way than email because my email box is scary, and I'm afraid of it. So I avoid it.

PAMELA: I feel exactly the same way. So yes, we're sisters that way. If we really need to get a hold of each other, it's Twitter or Facebook, little quick messages back and forth.

SONIA: Yes, yes.

PAMELA: So, well, wonderful. I so appreciate your time, Sonia, and all of your input. I know it's going to be really, really helpful as we help folks get their wonderful knowledge and wisdom out in the world and get some money coming in their pocketbooks. So thanks once again, and thanks, everybody, for listening. I really do encourage you to continue to follow Sonia and her work. She's been hugely influential on me and always the first person I turn to when in a conundrum for knowing how to market effectively. So thank you, Sonia. Thanks, everybody. Have a great day.

SONIA: Oh, thank you so much. It was fun.

PAMELA: All right. Bye-bye.