



Episode 29:



Amberly Dressler
Managing Editor, Website Magazine

Dana Dobson: Hello everyone! Welcome to Episode 29 of the Media Pro Spotlight podcast. My name is Dana Dobson, and this podcast is for you if you want to know more about how to get exposure for yourself or your business by understanding how the media works and how to build solid relationships with journalists, each of whom has the ability to share your message with their thousands, even millions, of readers, viewers and listeners.

My guest this week is Amberly Dressler, who for the last six years has been the managing editor of Website Magazine, a print and digital publication catering to Web professionals. It covers everything from search engine optimization and social media to website design and development. Amberly is responsible for managing editorial content, contributor relations and social media efforts. Prior to Website Magazine, she worked as a sports reporter at both the national and local level, covering high school sports as well as the NFL. Amberly has also held editor roles at a variety of magazines and several freelance copywriting positions over the years. She lives in beautiful Southern California with her husband and two young children.

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If you choose to write a quick review, I will send you a free, digital copy of my new book, "How to Reach Millions with Artful PR." Send me an email to let me know you've left a review, and I'll send you my book along with my deepest appreciation.

Also, you can download a complete transcript of this interview and view additional links and resources on the podcast page of my website, danadobson.com, click on Podcasts, and then Episode #29.

So now, onto the show. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like you to meet Amberly Dressler

Dana: Hi Amberly. Thank you for coming to the show today.

Amberly: Hi, Dana. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Dana: Ah, it's my pleasure. It's great to meet you. So, what I usually like to do here to get things rolling is just to be very general and say, so could you tell us who you are and what you do?

Amberly: Sure. So I'm the Managing Editor of Website Magazine. It's a print and digital publication that covers everything it takes to run a successful website from the acquisition and retention of website visitors, to how to optimize a website for conversion, performance, and search engine placement. It's my responsibility to manage the editorial, our contributor relations, as well as our social media channels.

Dana: Do you have a good handle on your circulation and how many people read your stuff?

Amberly: Sure. I believe we have about 40,000 print subscribers and a couple hundred thousand visitors each month online.

Dana: Oh my goodness. That's a big audience.

Amberly: Yeah. So our Editor in Chief, he's the founding Editor in Chief. He developed quite a following before I joined about six years ago. And so Website Magazine celebrated it's 10th year last year and I've been lucky to be a part of it the last six.

Dana: Wow. So you've been around a good 10 years. What did you do in your career before that?

Amberly: Sure. So, prior to Website Magazine I was an Editor at a magazine group and then I was doing a lot of freelance work as well. But starting right out of college I was fortunate enough to get an internship with a media management company, and they were responsible for the websites of athletes. And so I had originally been interested in more breaking news type journalism and then I found my way into sports, which happened accidentally for me, which can be frustrating to people who've tried to break into sports for quite a while.

But one of my first paid writing positions outside of college was covering the San Diego Chargers training camp for a national publication. And so from there I did a lot of sports reporting on both the local level and the national level with lots of interesting tales in between.

But then my husband ... He'll be 18 years in the Navy this year. And so, he was re-stationed somewhere along the way to the Great Lakes region. And so we packed up and headed to Illinois, and within a week of being there I started with Website Magazine. So I went from covering sports to covering tech, somewhat quickly.

Dana: Yeah. I mean, did you have any big technical online experience before that?

Amberly: With the exception of my own marketing experience, no. And so that's where developing trusted sources came in and being able to ask the right questions to the right people. So I really relied on a lot of very knowledgeable PR professionals early on with Website Magazine.

Dana: Yeah. Oh my gosh. So, how did you get involved in journalism in the first place?

Amberly: Sure. So, I started college as a nursing major because my senior year of high school I did nursing assistant because I thought I wanted to be a nurse, and so on. And even though I entered college as a nursing candidate, I ... Working as a nursing assistant I was like, "I don't know if this is something I want to do."

So I took a social problems course in college, social problems class, and it really opened my eyes to some of the situations that people face as part of larger institutional system. In that class they mentioned journalism quite frequently and how it played such a big role in exposing a lot of people's stories, and I wanted to know more. So I quickly changed my major, got involved with the school newspaper, and each time I got to pick up that new issue each week that featured one of my stories, I got a little bit more hooked each time.

Dana: So, could you explain what a Managing Editor does and what a day in the life is like for you?

Amberly: Sure. So, one of the big responsibilities I have with the addition of writing my own stories and editing my colleagues' stories, is that of managing our contributors. And so we rely on industry professionals to contribute what they know as well for guest articles to our website and in our print publication. And so I weed through those to make sure that they're vendor neutral, that they're non-promotional, and that they really have some merit to go into the magazine. And so I spend a lot of my time going back and forth with either public relations professionals or the contributors themselves too, to make sure that the product that they're pitching to us and that ends up into our publication is worth it. So, yeah. So, that's a big part.

And then each month we have our print publication. So I take what we have and work with our designer to make sure it looks good, and sounds good, and reads good. And that it's consistent with our style guidelines and a number of different elements to ensure that we have a good issue that goes out each month, and of course on time.

Dana: Right. Do you guys have an editorial calendar?

Amberly: We do. We do.

Dana: And I would assume that that's online? I'm on your website right now and I do see you've got all kinds of places to go to look to see what kind of topics you cover and stuff.

Amberly: Yeah. That brings up a good point with our channels. We cover a variety of things because it takes a lot of people and products to run a successful website. And so we have, I believe a dozen different channels. And so usually when we're getting pitched articles we hope that they fall within those channels, but it's amazing how a lot don't still.

Dana: Yeah. So I imagine you get pitched a lot, and you get pitched all the time. Are you pretty well busy looking at pitches and things?

Amberly: I am, but I also organize my day in a way that someone used the term, being ... I'm going to get this wrong. They said, "Productive rather than proactive." Proact ... I'm going to get that phrase wrong. So I've organized my day that way. I'm not just getting pinged all day and going, "What's that? What's that?" and being distracted with pitches for 10 hours.

So what I've done is I broke my day down into the four main components of what my job entails; writing, editing, the social media management, and then emails. And so usually at the end of each day I focus on what I'm going to write about the next day when I check my emails. So that way in the morning I can get kind of the most difficult thing done and right, and then later in the day I can look at those pitches in a dedicated period of time. Because if I'm replying to each one of them, or exploring them more in detail all throughout my day, I will have time to do some of my other responsibilities.

Dana: Oh my gosh. You are so disciplined. That's great.

Amberly: Yeah, it's worked for me. I've created a silly acronym for it. Weezer, write, edit, social, emails, repeat. So that way when I'm getting

distracted I'm like, "Okay, what should I be working on? Okay, I should be writing, or I should be editing, or whatever it may be."

Dana: Yeah, that's good advice. You've saved your email to a specific chunk of the day, and that way you avoid distractions and you can get into the other important parts of your job without constant interruption from that. That's really good advice to follow.

Amberly: You can get sucked into the rabbit hole, so to speak, of these pitches. Because there's some great technology start ups that come through our email inbox and it's like, "Oh, what do they do?" And then all of a sudden you're on their Twitter page and then you're reading something unrelated to what you started. So I really found that breaking my day down into those four components helped a lot.

Dana: Yeah, that's good advice to follow. I think I'm going to stick to that late afternoon thing. So what makes a good pitch for you? How would you advise people who would love to write for you to present their story ideas? Or their expertise?

Amberly: Sure. Well two of the characteristics that make a good source that I've found is someone who's reliable and relevant. And so you can't prove your reliability until you prove your relevancy. And so of course pitching to an editor with what they already cover is good advise, but that's kind of the basics. So I would suggest follow the person's work for a while, see what they tend to write about, and reach out to them with something that can help them understand a story better, help them provide a more well-rounded perspective, and in turn you get the coverage as well.

So for instance, if you are a retailer you could offer a blogger five exclusive tips for summer style. Or if you're a software company, offer an editor exclusive commentary on a recent, relevant event. Recently we had this company called Ten Pearls submit a byline we hadn't been working on together, but it was relevant to a Google Docs phishing scheme that happened recently. And so it's neutral, and it's interesting, and it's insightful, and we ran it. So they got coverage with a byline and linked that to their website. And often a

lot of the relationships that I've established over the year have started with some sort of exclusive tips or byline.

And from there that person is deemed relevant and then they've proven their reliability. And often those relationships tend to grow when I need a source for something quickly or I know their expertise. So they've kind of proven their expertise with a contributed byline and then in time I'm working on my own stories. I'm like, "Oh hey, they know a lot about this because I just read a 750 word article that we ran about their expertise on this topic."

Dana: Yeah, so they've just kind of got to earn your trust and approach you in a professional way.

Amberly: Definitely. It-

Dana: Yeah, so ...

Amberly: Sorry.

Dana: No, go ahead. You're the one that's supposed to be doing the talking here. I just get all excited when I'm talking about this stuff. Now I'm sorry, I've got off track and thank goodness I have an editor, right? So, what are some of the big mistakes that people make that they shouldn't make that's a turn off to an editor?

Amberly: Well you talked a little bit about the professional relationship and I think that as you're with ... As an editor is with a company for a long period of time, they have their trusted sources and people that they've met in real life, which tends to bring down some barriers a little bit. People they maybe had dinner with, there's a lot of relationship building that happens over the years, but still ... it still needs to be based on the foundation that this is a professional, media PR relationship. And so I think people who are able to establish, or keep those boundaries, are very successful. Otherwise I start to get a little, "Uh, I don't know. Maybe they're trying to take advantage of the relationship."

For instance, I have kind of a horror story. A lot of times when we go to cover these events all of a sudden the marketing side of the company has access to our personal email addresses, and cell phones, and more personal contact information that we don't want to be pitched on. And one time, I believe it was after an event, a PR contact who I'd love to collaborate with again and again just happened to have really bad timing.

She called me on my cell phone while my daughter, who was three months old at the time, was being admitted into the hospital. Yeah, and so it was like, "You want me to write about what? Nope, this is a terrible time." And I wasn't upset with her because she had no way to know. But I felt mortified for her because we had a relationship that was over my work email and my work phone and then the barrier had been broken to call me on a different contact number at a very bad time. So I think it kind of starts to irk me if relationships become not as professional as I'd hoped them to be.

Dana: Yeah, wow. Do you like getting phone calls or do you prefer email? What's your preference for getting contacted?

Amberly: I tend to prefer email, but if my voicemail's linking I'm like, "Oh hey, what's going on?" And I like that the person that's followed up over phone calls, which I know is contradictory. But I respect kind of the hustle of contacts following up over phone until they get an editor.

Dana: Okay. That's good to know. As long as it's pertinent, right?

Amberly: Yeah, exactly.

Dana: Are you active in social media? Do you use social media in your job to find content or sources?

Amberly: Not really as much. I manage our social media channels so I publish out a lot. But in terms of inbound, one of the ways I guess I use social media as an inbound channel is that I can see what's popular based on what people are sharing from Website Magazine. So for instance, if people are sharing an article over, and over, and over again I'm

like, "Maybe I should revisit this and kind of update it, or re-spit it, or ask other people's opinions on it."

And so that's one of the ways I use social media. But not necessarily for outreach, with the exception of if you kind of think of the Help a Reporter Out, HARO, as a form of social. Because it's out there. I've used that in the past, but I'm not sure if you're familiar with it ... HARO. For those who don't know, you can go and see what editors are working on and pitch your relevant response to hopefully become a source in their news story. And I've used it before but the responses are kind of a mixed bag, and so it's often easier for me to go through and have the contacts that I know who they are and who they work for, to quickly get an answer that I know is reliable and accurate.

Dana: Yeah, I was wondering when you are a reporter and you're looking for a source in HARO what kind of a response you get to that. I guess it must be an avalanche sometimes.

Amberly: Yeah, it is. So, it kind of depends on the ... well, it definitely depends on the story that I'm working on. So for instance, we've gotten some really good replies from HARO when it's a roundup-type article. So a very definitive statement, and this is how you should answer 100 words or less, whatever it may be because it provides a perspective that we may not have gotten from our contacts that we use regularly. If we're asking about SEO trends, for example, some smaller businesses could apply and their perspective may be different than an SEO agency that we would have reached out to.

And so I've gotten some really good sources from them in the past, and also one of my strongest contributor relationships relationships came from HARO. He had pitched a really great answer to one of our questions, and then he's since become a weekly contributor. And I think that's been going on four years or so. And then because he is a weekly contributor I know that he's a great source for topics X, Y, and Z. And he's someone that I use for my own stories as well.

So I think as an editor perspective, you have to be very specific about what you want from your HARO responses. It should be X amount of

words and be as specific as possible. And then from a business or marketing perspective they have to follow those guidelines set because it's so easy to delete those pitches.

Dana: Yeah for sure. Well listen, you have a lot of talent in a lot of different areas and I know that you've been working with Leadpages a little bit. Are you okay talking about Leadpages and what you think makes a good one?

Amberly: Sure. So Website Magazine, they own a few different companies and so I'll work on their copywriting free landing pages for some of the other companies as well as Website Magazine. And this is advice that we also provide our readers as well. So effective landing pages, for sure a strong call to action of course. A visitor has to be able to find something to click on, and it has to be mobile friendly because we aren't sure what device that they're on. They could be on their desktop, or they could be on their smartphone. And so having a large call to action that makes sense for what is being offered.

For instance, if you have a white paper that you want someone to download, the call to action would likely be more effective as "download now," rather than "learn more" because a lot of people won't fill out 10 entries of a form just to learn more. They're expecting something out of it. So the "download now" is more actionable than the "learn now" because they're not sure what they're getting from it.

Keeping the copy of course concise and clear is important. Lead generation forms, I don't believe, are the place for marketing jargon. Just be as clear and concise as you can possibly be. And a lot of advice out there is about if you have the capability of testing different elements. So sending half your audience to one landing page, and sending the other half to the other and seeing what works, and then adjusting from there.

Landing pages are important across industries and it's often also advice to keep them ... If you have a form for lead generation, to keep it as short as possible because people don't want to waste their time if you can offer social login. So someone can login with their

Gmail account, their Facebook account, Twitter account, LinkedIn account, depending on what you offer and what makes sense to your audience. For instance, LinkedIn sign on may not work very well for a local merchant, but it would for a software provider.

Having shortcuts to fill out information quickly or remember that if they've visited before, a way to populate what they've already filled out from a previous visit, there's a lot that can be done on landing pages for lead generation. And one more thing going back to the point about keeping the forms short is that hopefully you can collect more information later. So if it's a company that is requiring something to be filled out in order to get something and they have a form, keep it name, address, organization, and title. And then hopefully you can gather more information as that person comes back to the website, as they interact with emails. You can even send out an email to them saying, "Hey, we don't want to spam you with emails. Set your preferences now." And then they go and fill out some sort of profile information so you're gathering more, but not at that initial lead generation form. So you increase the chances of conversion initially.

Dana: Right. Yeah, so don't make them fill out too many fields or they'll bounce.

Amberly: Exactly.

Dana: Now I'm looking on your website. You've got so many great resources up here. And you've got a very comprehensive white paper section. Who writes all of these white papers? Where do they come from?

Amberly: Some are from our own editors. For instance, I have a social media one that was written last year but is still very much relevant. We write them for that reason. If someone comes across it six months from now, it's still going to be useful to them. So our other editors write them as well, and then our advertisers do additionally. And so if you see that something has been sponsored by someone, then that's one of our advertisers.

Dana: Okay. So when somebody's decided to put up a lead page it might be so that you download a free white paper. So you've written white papers before. Do you have just a couple of tips for what goes into a good white paper?

Amberly: I would say organization first of all, even before content because white papers tend to be a lot longer than your average article that people would read online. And online you know that people are skimmers. And so organizing and designing the white paper in a way that people are interested as they scan through, because unfortunately they aren't likely to read everything, is a good way to start.

And so lots of headers and subtitles and graphics and then just packed with really good, useful information that's more evergreen content. That way if someone comes across it in six months from now it's still relevant because white papers tend to take more time to develop than other types of content. And so you really want to make sure that it's going to stay relevant for the long run so you can get the return on investment back.

Dana: Right, and I'm going to give the listeners links to some of these places on your website. But I really encourage people to go in and visit if you've been curious about what a white paper is. There's been a lot of talk about lead magnets out there lately. If you want to see what a good white paper is, this is a great place to go and look around. Is this year seven steps for smarter social media marketing?

Amberly: It is.

Dana: Ooh, I'm definitely going to download that one. So if somebody wants to reach out to you, introduce themselves, or contact you about a story idea, how can they contact you?

Amberly: Sure. I'd be happy to give my email address. It's adressler@websitemagazine.com. Just put "podcast" maybe in the subject line so it's called to my attention. I'm also on Twitter @amberlydressler and then we publish every day at websitemagazine.com.

Dana: That's great. Well you've given us so much great information and I want to thank you again for being here. And you're not on Twitter right? Are you on Twitter or no?

Amberly: I am.

Dana: You are. Can we have your Twitter handle?

Amberly: Sure. Just @amberlydressler.

Dana: Okay. I'm writing down instead of talking. That's probably not a good idea. Oh anyway, thank you so much for being here today. I appreciate your time and I wish you continued luck at Website Magazine.

Amberly: And to you as well. Thank you so much.

Dana: Oh thank you. Don't hang up yet. I forgot to tell you that I do edit these things so a couple of fumbles for me but I just wanted to make sure that we go through this and make it very smooth.

Amberly: Okay, great.

Dana: Guess I didn't mention that to you before. Thank you so much. Is there anything else that you would like me to add to the show notes that maybe we haven't talked about or mentioned?

Amberly: No, I think that's it. Hopefully I was able to provide some good information for you.

Dana: You're just awesome. And again I thank you so much for your time. Let me tell you what your episode number is going to be on here before I go. I believe your number ... Let me make sure. Episode 29. Typically they go up on a Tuesday. I'm a little bit behind putting up episodes. Unfortunately my editor's dad passed away so I've got another studio putting these together. So it will be in the next couple of weeks and I will definitely shoot you a note when it's ready to go live.

Amberly: Sounds good. And thanks for reaching out this morning. I was a little panicked. I was like, "Oh, I don't know who to contact."

Dana: Oh, no. No, it was great. I hope you have a wonderful weekend.

Amberly: You too, thank you so much.

Dana: Thanks Amberly. Bye bye.

Amberly: Bye.

Dana: I hope you enjoyed today's interview with Amberly as much as I did. I'm continually amazed at all the different hats today's editorial managers have to wear and Amberly certainly does a masterful job of pulling all of the many moving parts together to make Website Magazine such an in-demand resource for thousands of web professionals.

Remember that you can download a complete transcript of this interview and view additional links and resources on the podcast page of my website, danadobson.com, click on Podcasts, and then Episode #29.

And if there's a media outlet or journalist or big-time blogger you've been trying to work with but haven't been successful, shoot me a note at dana@danadobson.com, and I'll do my best to have them on the show.

So have a great week, thanks again for listening, and I'll see you next time. Until then, go get 'em, because your public awaits.