

SHOWING PEOPLE HOW TO DO THEIR OWN PR WITH JANET MURRAY

Hello and welcome back to another episode of She Means Business! In this episode, I was joined by the lovely Janet Murray. She's the founder of Soulful PR and she took us behind the scenes of how she turned from being a schoolteacher to then becoming a journalist to then creating online courses. There is so much goodness in this interview. I really hope you enjoy it. Also, at the end, I share how you can win a copy of her book Your Press Release Is Breaking My Heart, a totally unconventional guide to selling your story in the media. So definitely have a listen out for that.

Janet, it's so good to have you here. Welcome to the She Means Business podcast!

Thank you for having me.

I am so excited to talk to you and to hear the behind-the-scenes of your journey, of how you built your business. I can't wait to get started. In this, we're going to pretend that there's a movie coming out called She Means Business starring Janet Murray. This movie is all about your entrepreneurial journey and how you basically got to where you are. I really like to set the scene first for everyone listening and let them know what kind of movie this is going to be. What would the vibe of your movie be?

God, that's a toughie. The vibe of my movie would be maybe gritty, maybe a little bit dark in a few places, but also a nice happy ending.

I'd love to talk about it all. The movie begins and this is the first scene. This is you right back at the beginning of your entrepreneurial journey. What is the scene? What is going on? Why did you embark on your entrepreneurial journey?

I started out as a schoolteacher. I used to teach high school English. I did it for 3-4 years. I didn't hate it or anything; I just felt like there was something else I needed to be doing. That something was journalism. I always tossed up between teaching English and being a journalist. I decided to go back and retrain as a journalist. Everybody told me "You'll never be able to get to the nationals. You have to know people. You have to be Oxford or Cambridge-educated to get published in the nationals." I was really, really determined. I went off and did a journalism course. I managed to get published in the nationals —*The Guardian, Telegraph* and *The Independent* and places like that— within about 6 months of coming out of my journalism course. I really, really loved journalism. I've written and edited for most of the national newspapers in the UK, magazines as well and also internationally. It was great. I really, really loved it. I loved writing, I loved meeting people, travelling around and research, but it didn't really pay very much money. So, I decided I wanted to freelance because I just decided that I didn't want to have to get up and go into an office every day, sit in the same chair and be with the same people. It was a lifestyle choice. So, I was basically working article per article and getting paid per the word a lot of the time. It was OK and I was doing OK, but you have to write a lot of articles in order to make a living as a freelance writer. I was doing it, it was fine, but I was quite tired. I was looking for other ways to make money. Something that I noticed straight off as a journalist who would get press releases from people in my inbox, I just spend a lot of time looking at them "Why on earth would anybody send that? Why would anybody think that a journalist would be interested in that? What is going on here?" Because I was a small business owner myself, I just look at them and think hang on, sometimes, that would be a small business owner like me who was paying a PR company to write that kind of drivel for them. I was like "This is just terrible. This is just not on." I thought if there are people out there —PR companies, in particular— who

don't know how to sell a story into the media, why don't I teach them how to do it? I started a side business, a bit of a side hustle, and started running training courses in London where I'd get a lot of press officers in the room, often they'd from big brands, people like John Lewis and big banks and things like that. Myself and another journalist, we used to teach them pitching. Then we thought "Actually, we're filling out our workshops. Why don't we start running conference-style events where we get loads of journalists in to come and talk about what they're looking for?" We started doing that as well. Gradually, I realised this was more fun. I was starting to get booked to do consultancy. Big firms were inviting me in to advise them on press. I didn't want to go into PR. I didn't want to be that person that was ringing up and pitching to journalists and being turned down. I don't want to do that. I just really enjoyed teaching people. I got to the stage where I started a blog. If I want to get booked to do speaking and training and that kind of thing, how are people going to find me? I thought maybe I'll start a blog. I didn't know about content marketing. I had no idea what it was. I just thought maybe if I write a blog, then people will find my stuff and then they will book me. That kind of worked. I started to build up an email list, again, not really knowing what I was doing, just thinking about how I can get more of this nice and juicy contracting work that would help pay the bills. Gradually, I just realised that I was enjoying it more than my journalism. While it was quite a prestige attached to being a journalist, I write for the Guardian and winning awards, it's just like working in a factory essentially. You get an assignment, you have to write an article, you interview the people, and then you just move on to the next thing. I just started to really enjoy the buzz of running my own business. So gradually, it turned from a side business into a full-time business. Since then, the blog started to build an audience for me. I built an email list. I started running other kinds of events. Then I realised I really wanted to work with small business owners because I get lots of corporate-type clients. Actually, there are a lot of people out there who need to know about this. They need to know how to get articles in newspapers, magazines, radio and TV so I started to pivot my business to serve all sorts of people. I

wrote a book. I still ran 14 events in London last year, teaching people about this stuff. Yeah, it all gradually happened really. Does that give you an insight?

I love that because it just goes to show you just start in one place and you just never know where you're going to end up.

Yeah, totally.

I think that's the point, isn't it? So often, people are searching for the answer and what they should be doing for the rest of their lives when really, it's just taking the next step that feels right and letting the path unfold.

Yeah, definitely. I didn't have any big plan. When I started my blog, I didn't really know what content marketing was. When I started to build an email list, it was more like this would probably be a good idea. I gradually started listening to podcasts to start to understand what it all meant. That's part of the thing that I love about being in the entrepreneurial world. You have an idea. You just think "Hi, I'm going to put an event on. I'm going to fill a room with 80 people and 8 national journalists." You just make it happen. Even if you haven't done it before, you just work out how to do it. That has been my journey pretty much the whole way.

How did you deal with it mentally? Did you ever find yourself feeling like "What the hell am I doing?" Did you have doubts and worries or did you just focus on "This is what I'm going to do and I'm going to make it happen." How were you feeling emotionally?

I think I struggled a little bit with the ego side of it because when you're a journalist for a national paper like *The Guardian* and I was being asked to stand in for editors. I probably would have gotten quite a nice, easy job that would have meant regular hours, not having to do extra work, salary and a pension and that kind of thing. When I introduced myself "I'm a journalist. I write for *The Guardian*." "Oh wow, that's really interesting." When I

introduce myself now, “I teach small business owners how to do their own PR,” people are like “Oh right, yeah.” So I struggled a bit with that side of it. Also, I don’t know if you’re aware of this but journalists and PR people — they generally hate each other. Journalists talk about going over to the dark side. A lot of journalists do go into public relations and that’s often referred to as the dark side. I still bristle now because sometimes, people call me the PR lady. I hate it because I don’t do PR for people. I teach people how to do it themselves and I’ve got loads of reasons why I do it that way. It still makes me bristle. It still rubs my ego up the wrong way, but I love being an entrepreneur. I love it so much more. I enjoyed working as a journalist; I still do a little bit of it, but I enjoy what I do now so much more. There were just a few ego issues to grapple with there, I think.

How did you deal with figuring everything out? Obviously, you talked about building your email list and doing all that kind of thing. Funnily enough, I was just on Facebook and I saw someone ask a question “What’s everyone working on right now?” So many people were like “Building my email list. Building my email list. Building my email list.” It’s like a big thing. When you start a business, there are so many different things you realise you have to figure out how to do. Did you go out and learn? Did you take courses? Did you fumble your way through?

Initially, I used to just send out emails from a Gmail address and I send them out in batches. I started doing these big conference-style events, which I mentioned. I’d get 8 journalists to come along. They’re quite high-profile journalists. I’d sell tickets for people to come along and hear what they have to say. I would basically scrape the emails. I don’t really know what I was doing. OK, this is public information. This person works in this place. The email is here so I’ll write it on a spreadsheet. I used to literally send them one by one or 10 by 10 because I knew that having people’s addresses, instinctively I knew that that was a really good thing to do and that was obviously where I was going to make money. I didn’t really know how to do it. Gradually, I started listening to Pat Flynn’s

Smart Passive Income podcast. Then, I discovered people like Amy Porterfield and Chris Tucker so actually, this is a thing — email list building. Then, I started with Mailer Lite — that was the first email service I used. Now, I use InfusionSoft, which is a lot more complicated so I hired somebody to help me with it. I just figured it out as I went really. I made loads of mistakes over the years as I'm sure most business owners have. I wasted money on things. Email list-building isn't something that I probably have wasted money on and I wasted money on plenty of other things that didn't work out. I started off just by adding opt-in boxes in my blog and trying them out. I was a total geek. Everything I could get my hands on about where to place your opt-in box. Would you get more sign-ups if you place it at the top or the bottom or the middle or wherever? I love the whole email marketing. It's one of my favourite things because I just love working out — obviously, it's the journalist in me— but I love working out really great subject headers and write copies that really engages people. I love geeking out all over the stats and stuff like that. A lot of it is trial-and-error. I had to get a lot of things wrong to get things right.

I think that's really liberating to hear. So often, we're so afraid to make mistakes. So often, we feel like we should have all the answers and we should know everything. Especially when people mess up, it throws them back so much that some people never keep on going. They think "This is never going to work for me." It's really nice to hear the honest—

When I first started out with email marketing, we first started using Infusionsoft. It's really, really complicated and we made a massive mistake where we basically which at the time 6000 people with something really irrelevant. I remember a lady sent me an email and she said, "Well, your business is going to fail clearly if you can't get sending out an email right. Clearly, your business is going to fail." How horrible is that? That's just so mean, isn't it? But this is accompanied by 20 emails from people who said "Oh gosh, I know what you're going through when you move to a new email service. This happens. Don't worry about it. It's no problem at all." I think being able to come through those

things. Nowadays, I just send out an “Oops, sorry” email. At the time, I felt like my world was going to end. This woman had sent me this knocky email.

I know it's really hard to deal with those emails when they come through. You think “Why are you wasting your time sending me this?” I remember one time someone's email said because I put like “Hey [name]”. She was like “I'm not your friend. That's not how you refer to someone who isn't your friend.” Whoa, chill out. The use of smiley faces, that offends people and obviously, the use of pink on my website, that also offends people. Don't look at the website then if you don't like pink. Don't come to it. When you start an online business or when you start any business, you start to have a voice and people hear it. It's funny how those people crawl out of the woodwork and they want to judge you or they want to add their 2 cents into it all. It's funny.

Yeah. It's surprising how mean people can be when they get behind the keyboard. They can be so mean. Now, we laugh about it. I think because I come from the journalism background where I'm used to people writing rude comments at the bottom of my stuff, it hasn't affected me as much as it might do other people. It still hurts.

Yeah, it does. What have been some of the key things that have really helped you grow the business to get it to where it is now?

People often ask me this kind of thing. I say there is no magic secret, really. I think it's turning up every day and taking action. I launched my blog about maybe 4 years ago. Since that day, I've just basically been creating regular content on my own website. I got a podcast as well now — a Soulful PR podcast that's been brilliant for my audience. I have just been posting regular content on social media and learning more about how to do that more effectively to start conversations. I feel like there's no magic secret. It's just literally turning up every day, taking action learning as much as I can, getting stuff wrong and learning from it, and then improving on it. If I look back in my early blog posts or my

early opt-in boxes or the first 10 episodes of my podcasts where I say “Ouch, that’s not quite right,” I think it just keep coming back. One of the things that has worked really well for me recently is investing Facebook advertising and investing in a strategist to help me with that. But that is only something you can do once you start to build up a little bit of revenue. That has been a real game-changer. The thing that’s probably made the most difference in my business is community. I have quite a large Facebook group, which has now 7700 in it. I have conversations with people in there every day about what they’re finding hard, what they’re struggling with, and what I can help them with. It’s essentially my own market research, which is amazing.

I love that you just said that. I feel like we’ve moved in this new era for businesses where community is at the heart of it. Especially for the online businesses, gathering together a group of like-minded people who want to hang out and want to have conversations is so powerful. Now, we got those tools like Facebook groups where we could do that create those communities for ourselves. For my book launch, a huge part of the success of it was having a Facebook group for people who bought the book. It was insane. I presume when you do launches and you’ve got something new to share, you go in there. You can share it with them and they’re supportive, so engaged and interested to want to know about it. They trust you from being in that group. With the book, people were taking screenshots of the Amazon tracking. I couldn’t believe it. It really blew me away the level of support that you can now get when you cultivate and you nurture a community. So, I love that you just said that.

That’s the thing. It’s about turning up every day. Somebody just asked me in my Facebook group this morning. They said, “What’s the quick way of getting engagement on social media apart from Facebook ads?” I said even Facebook ads aren’t quick. Just because somebody’s opted into a Facebook ad doesn’t mean they’re going to immediately going to buy from you. You actually need to build a relationship with them. For me, I tend to

build that relationship in my Facebook group. When I look back at my opt-in ads from my Facebook ads, I tend to see that it takes a little bit of time to like and trust me before they feel the need to buy. Why shouldn't they be? A lot of people start an online business and they think it's going to be an overnight success. It's just these secret things that they need to do. But actually, it is about turning up, listening to people, building relationships. I think you mentioned the word nurturing, which is so important. I spend a lot of time just talking to people and listening to their questions. That really does work for me.

I have to ask you this question: what would be your top PR tips for people looking to get more media exposure?

OK, my top tip if you want media coverage for your business is to stop talking about your business, basically. People often think, "OK, I'll just write a press release about my business." Nobody really cares about your business apart from you. If you've got something new to launch, in your case, you've got a book. It's a business book and people cared about it. For most of us most of the time, we're just running our business and nobody really cares that much. Often, it's about finding ways to talk about your business by pitching stories that aren't about your business, if that makes sense. Some of my best pieces of press coverage for my business have been about the fact that I worked in a shed at the end of my garden, one of these fancy chic sheds. Everybody's very interested in that. I've been featured in the *Metro*. I've been featured in the *Daily Mile*, various national publications talking about this shed. In it, I get to talk loads about my business, but the article isn't about my business. I've also written opinion articles for the national press. One that worked really well for me was I wrote a piece about why women need to stop working for free. I was fed up with people emailing me "We'd love you to speak at this event." "Oh great. What's the speaking fee?" "Oh, we thought you'd do it for the exposure." That article, I wrote it 2 years ago for *The Guardian*, just delivers for me again and again. They just were pushing out again for International Women's Day. That was all over the place. People were coming back to me. The other thing is there's a huge appetite in the media now for practical how-to pieces. Instead of telling people about

your business, you teach them something. I've written a whole range of articles for *The Guardian*. I've written a piece about how to write press releases, which is ironic because I don't really like press releases that much. But it's an entry point. People know about them so it's a way that you can grab them and you can say "Here's how to write it, but actually this is the best way of doing it." When I had my book out last summer, I knew as somebody who knows about how to get press coverage that my book's a niche business book. It's called *Your Press Release Is Breaking My Heart: A Totally Unconventional Guide to Selling Your Story in the Media*. I knew that wasn't going to be like that that wasn't going to be like the *Grazia Magazine*. I knew it wasn't going to be *The Telegraph* or whatever. I really focused on the places where they would be interested in that kind of content. I focused on ways I could get to talk about my book without actually talking about my book. Does that make sense?

100%. When I was doing the PR for the book, I really had to take a step back from it all and think what stories I'm going to share that would be interesting to people. Well, I could talk about this as an angle and this as an angle and pull little stories from the book to share. You're right. People don't want to hear about "I've got my book out." That is of no interest to anyone. It's the same with everything we're doing online. You've got a new cause that you've got out or when we're launching a member club, you talk about the stories of the impact that it's having. That's what people hear. Me saying "Well, you can get this training and this training," that's not going to be as powerful as me telling a story.

I've got a range of products to go with my brand. My brand's called Soulful PR. One of my most popular products is "PR is simply about story-telling." It really is. It's just about telling stories.

Thank you for sharing that advice. In the beginning, you said this movie of yours might cover a few dark moments in it. I wanted to ask you whether

there have been any tough times along your entrepreneurial journey, things that you didn't necessarily expect to deal with perhaps.

One was having to sack all of my staff. I think I started on the wrong foot. When I decided to cut down on the journalism and do more business, I hired an office. I hired some staff; my dad was one of them. I rented out this office, had these people on the payroll, had some interns and stuff like that. I was just so, so miserable because I felt like I was paying for this really expensive office. At the same time, my husband left his job and came to work for the business as well. I was going out doing all these consulting and training to basically pay for everybody else's wages. I was really miserable with what I was doing. I wanted to be creating online courses. I wanted to be working with small business owners, but I was renting this really expensive office. I was going out and travelling delivering writing training to colleges and universities and things like that. I just thought what am I doing? This is just awful. We were making a lot of money, but because the overhead was so high, we came to a month where I just looked at the figures and I thought you know what? I can't afford to pay myself this month. I paid everybody else and didn't pay myself. It was like a massive turning point for me. I don't want to do this anymore. I hate working in this office because I like working on my own. I don't like working with other people. I do like other people, but I like working with other people remotely. I got rid of the office. I got rid of all the staff, including my dad actually. He was coming up to retirement anyway. I basically scrapped everything and started again. That meant actually making do without as much money for awhile. It meant taking a bit of a leap of faith. I know who I want to work with. I know I want to work with small business owners. I know I'm not quite working with the right people at the moment and saying no to stuff that was quite lucrative but didn't really float my boat. That was quite a difficult period to come through. But things have been so much better since.

It's interesting. What a brave step to have to do that. I think in business, you do have to make those difficult decisions where you shed stuff that isn't working and you have to let go. Sometimes, it's so hard to do because

you're afraid "If I let of this, what if what comes next doesn't work out." We have to be so courageous to break through and get to the new level.

Yeah, and I often really pay attention to how I'm feeling inside. I'm not a particularly woo-woo person. If anything, it makes me feel heavy in my stomach. If I keep putting that in the bottom of my to-do list because I don't want to do that, then I know that's what I shouldn't be doing.

It's so interesting hearing all this from you. I love hearing inside people's stories. You mentioned that you worked with your husband. Do you still work together?

No. My husband still helps me a lot. He helps me with my website. He's a designer. He's a journalist by trade, but more on the design side so he still helps me a lot. It just didn't really work. He wasn't really interested in my business so he's now got his own clients. He's got his own contracts and he's quite happy. We work completely separately. That was something that was quite difficult to get used to. You imagine I've got an 11-year-old daughter. Up until the point my husband went self-employed, I'd always struggled with child care. I was always running around trying to work out how I was going to manage each day and week trying to get help. Suddenly, he was there all the time. You would think this was an amazing opportunity. Actually, it was quite hard because when one of you has been going out to work and coming home with some news —my husband used to work in a music magazine so it was a cool job— he used to have some nice stories. Then suddenly, you're just both there all day. It actually wasn't as brilliant as you thought. In a way, we were a bit bored with each other. That was quite tough as well. I know some people can work well with a partner, but I just think my husband is not really that interested with online marketing or business so he gets bored. It's not a good fit.

Well, at least, you tried to see whether it will work. That's the thing, isn't it? It's all about experimenting, trying different things, seeing what works

and what doesn't. Do you still spend your time working at the end of the garden?

Yeah. We swapped. I got an office indoors as well. I'm podcasting today so I'm inside and he's at the end of the garden. We don't even stop and meet for lunch. We just do our own thing. We communicate via Facebook Messenger quite a lot of the time.

Oh, I love it so much. It's been so amazing listening to you talk about your story and hearing about how you made it happen. It's inspiring. It just goes to show what is possible and taking the next step, building a community and taking action. It's been amazing to hear all of that. Thank you so much for coming and sharing it.

Thank you for having me.

On a very, very exciting note, if you would like to win a copy of Janet's book Your Press Release Is Breaking My Heart — I can't remember the last part. What was the last part?

The Totally Unconventional Guide to Selling Your Story in the Media.

I love it. If you would like to win a copy of that, all you need to do is head over to the blog. Go find this post, leave a comment and let us know what your biggest takeaway has been from this session. We'll be picking winners and we'll send you a copy of the book — very exciting. Thanks again, Janet. I hope you have all loved it so much. I can't wait to hear your feedback on it all. Where can people go and find you?

You can find me on my website, which is JanetMurray.co.uk. I also have a fab Facebook community — The Soulful PR Facebook community. I'm also on Instagram janmurrayuk and Twitter at jan_murray.

Amazing. Thank you for that. I hope you have all enjoyed it and I will see you next week for another episode of She Means Business.