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ACCELERATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS PODCAST

EPISODE
88

Cheryl Snapp Conner

Show Notes at: <http://www.aesnation.com/88>



John Bowen and Cheryl Snapp Conner
AESNATION.COM

Episode #88

Dear Fellow Entrepreneur,

We are thrilled that you have joined us here at AES Nation, where we're dedicated to accelerating entrepreneurial success—your success.

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Best of success,



John Bowen
Co-founder, AES Nation

John Bowen: As entrepreneurs, we want to get our messages out there. Well, how many of you would like to have communication as a strategic weapon to give you an unfair advantage over your competition? We're all for unfair advantages in today's world. I mean that's such a big deal. Well, I've got the expert here today, a fellow entrepreneur who is extremely successful. She is not only an entrepreneur and owns her own PR agency, but she is an author, speaker, a Forbes contributor. In fact, one of her articles has had over 10 million views. Can you imagine that? 10 million views. Would you like that? I'm John Bowen. We're at aesnation.com. We're here to accelerate your success. You want to stay tuned because we're going to show how you can grab that strategic weapon for yourself.

Cheryl, I'm so excited to have you joining me here today.

Cheryl Snapp Conner: I'm excited to be here. Thank you, John.

John: Yeah, we're introduced I think through Joe Polish of Genius Network or I'm not ... I can't remember exactly how I found you, but I looked at your website and was blown away by an eBook that I want to come back to. I've certainly met a number of good PR people along the way, and they're extremely talented, but they don't always execute on everything that they're doing. They don't walk their talk. When I read your stuff I go, "Wow, you walk your talk." I'm so excited to have you to share your insights. Before we go into that, give me a little background of how you really started on the PR track and helping so many clients have success.

Cheryl: Well, I've been in PR actually since the 1980s. I was the internal PR director for Novell. I always had ideas, just great ideas how I cut loose, what I do, and have just loved the opportunity to innovate new ways to communicate ever since. It's been a good ride, a good thing, but for anyone who studies PR, it changes. You could think you've studied, you've got all the methodologies down; really we're still reinventing it under our feet every day as we go along.

John: Well, what caused you ... I'm in Silicon Valley, very familiar with Novell and the track that it was, and you did ... It was a lot of great PR that came out of there. What got you to be that ... There are number of large corporate PR people, but to go out and start your own agency and then to really walk the talk and implement it, not only for your clients, but for yourself; what caused you to do that?

Cheryl: I have three little boys, and I realized that becoming an entrepreneur, it gives me more ownership over my own schedule, my own work. It seemed like a great thing to do. Loved that corporate life that I honestly say there were parts of it that were not great. I had a hard time striking a balance. People talked about the traffic jam at 5:00 pm. I've never seen it. I couldn't have told you what was a mile north of my house, because I haven't seen it in

daylight. Not a good thing, but when I started my own business, it was an adventure in another way, but that's really how I got into my first agency, first consultancy; never looked back.

John: It's great. I mean one of the things that so many fellow entrepreneurs have been in corporate life and they've done some amazing things and then they decide to do the entrepreneurship and they take those skills, the management skills, the driving success that they had in the corporate, and are able to help other fellow entrepreneurs. It creates ... I know the one line is that we get to work half time as entrepreneurs is ... Half time is half of the day, the 12 hours a day type thing. One of the things you and I are all about is, "How can we be efficient?"

What I'd like to dive into, Cheryl is, how can we use ... There's a whole communication process, what do you see as some of the best practices of the industries that you've had the privilege of working with, and among your clients, what do people do in a kind of hit it out of the park as we ... We told them we're going to show them how to get an unfair competitive advantage?

Cheryl: Right. Well, the clients who are able to give freely, to give interesting information to be good corporate storytellers and really think of their audience first, that's it. That's the secret weapon, and those who are doing that well are hitting it out of the park. It's building their businesses.

John: Yeah, it's so funny. I mean one of the things that a lot of us do is we start holding things in. We don't want to share because there might be some secrets that we're getting out. I always like this concept of the free line that we've got to give out about 90% of the content for free, whether you are a widget maker, whether you're a professional service firm. However you're doing it, we've got to be able to give out and provide some great insights along the way.

Cheryl, how do you see that when you talk about giving freely? What are some of the things that ... Because what we all want ... I mean I don't want 10,000 people to read every article. Out of 10 billion people, and they react, gosh, that's so exciting. It's not just about the numbers. It's really building a relationship, and you've done that well.

Cheryl: Well, I tell people that I guide, and I really work myself to find that information that the readers are genuinely interested in and want to hear. For example, no matter what your business is, guarantee, there are some things that you know that you are expert in that other people would like to know, that would be of benefit to them. When you can put that hat on, how am I going to serve these readers? For example, marketing expert that I really like to call, Joe Polish, he had a carpet cleaning business. He started to put out ... This has been a while ago. It was newsletters and direct mail.

He realized that instead of sending coupons and hyping his service, he started telling people things like ways to extend the life of your carpet or the questions you should ask before you let a service provider come through your door. A funny thing happened. He ended up being so successful as a business, he was selling his marketing strategies to other competitors. He ended up then getting out of the carpet cleaning business and selling his marketing advice instead, not only to them, but to other market sectors. Wow, and it sounds that simple, but instead of hyping and self-promoting, he provided expertise in an interesting way about things people honestly wanted to know. That made him their trusted source, and they wanted to go further. Where would they go? That's where they go.

John: I mean Joe is a very good friend. I'm in his Genius Network Mastermind Group. Joe and Dan Sullivan of Strategic Coach incurred me to create this AES Nation, Accelerating Entrepreneurial Success, to create that audience. We've had a lot of success. You and I are sitting together with really 10,000 of hopefully my friends, fellow entrepreneurs, and being able to share that information in today's world is just pretty amazing. We created this about four months ago. I think, Joe, as he tweeted now having well over a 100,000 downloads, the articles ... He's doing this huge.

It used to be in the old days, Cheryl that we didn't have this access to our audience that really no matter what size your business is, you can have access to your audience now. You don't have to go through the media. One of the things that's so great is, we can create our own platform, unlike the old days where we had to rely on media. I mean, PR you talked about earlier, has changed dramatically, and the classic sending out through the fax machine, all these PR releases ... There's still room for PR releases, but not the fax machine any more. The opportunity that every entrepreneur here has to be that expert, that thought leadership create their own platform like Joe has, I've done it in a couple of industries, others do it. It's never been easier. I mean this is where that strategic weapon that we're both talking about is just so powerful.

Cheryl: You're absolutely right. Journalism has changed so much in the past years that really every company that is successful is learning to be their own journalist, their own publisher, to tell their own story so much better than others, but that's an opportunity to take advantage of in every case.

John: Yeah, I know. It really is. One of the things that I found in doing this is the challenge is not so much creating content, although that a lot of people struggle with that, but it's not only creating content, but it's getting out there and engaging your audience. Let's take each step through; and first, creating content. I mean, Cheryl, you have a regular column contributor at Forbes, very high profile. You've got an eBook that you've written on. You've a website that we're going to come to. You got a new book coming out with Forbes.

I mean, you've got a whole bunch of things. You're doing this for your clients. I know when I talked to my fellow entrepreneurs ... I've written a lot of books, I do quarterly at least an eBook, usually a full traditional book over 18 months, people look at me and like, "How could you ever do that? You don't need to do that," I'm just kind of a little weird, but how do you create content, help your clients create that?

Cheryl: Well, it's surprising how many people are interested, but they're scared. They're afraid that they're going to fail. They're afraid that they don't have enough to say. With a little bit of coaching and brainstorming, we can come up with a lot of good topics. Sometimes that's all it takes. It's just, "Let's think it through. Let's come up with a list of 10 or 20 or 50 topics." That gets the creative juices going, and we can roll from there.

In other times, people need more direct assistance than that. That's okay. The important thing is that what gets generated is genuine to that individual, but it's not contrived. You can't go hire somebody. In fact I did a column on ghostwriting, "Is it ethical or not?" Well, what most people caught ghostwriting is really collaboration. Collaboration is good, but to think that you can hire somebody and just say, "You know, I want to be a national columnist. I'm going to pay you this money, make it so." That's not going to be successful.

It's surprising once you get started how easily the content you create will take on a life of its own. Things that interest you, let that curiosity play through, interview other people. You don't have to be the expert on everything. In fact, let people join in that wonder with you as you interview somebody interesting discover something new, let that reader in on that discovery with you. It's easier than you might think.

John: I think we get stuck. I go back to my college English classes, and I was a math finance guy and definitely my English teachers at high school and college would be amazed at the quantity. One of the things that I am a big believer in, and this is kind of along with your article you wrote on ghostwriting is that I believe we should be the author, entrepreneurs, not the writer. This has helped so many fellow entrepreneurs because when we break it out that way what happens is it's so powerful because you have ... If you've been in the industry, whatever industry you're in, you so much insights. You have so many relationships and network that you can provide so much value, but you may not be like best writer.

In some cases, even if you're a pretty good writer you should hire it out because it's not ... We can do a \$10 work, we can do a \$100 work, we can do a \$1000, and many can do \$10,000 or 100,000 an hour, what you want to do is kind of that bridge and that's where I love collaboration. I have actually probably, I don't know ... About eight writers that work with me, and they're phenomenal. They're better writers than I am, but they're taking my ideas, my thoughts, and putting them to pen or in other kind of properties. It's just so valuable.

Cheryl: Yeah, that's a great thing. In fact writing is strategic. It's one of the best fields to be in these days. Also remember that writers who write for a living or who write regularly, they can help you come up with something that's even as important as a great headline. That can make or break a story. The headline can do it or not, or organization, and I've learnt myself there's no greater test bed than to go out in front of 65 million viewers a month and in 5 minutes if they're with you or not, you can try different headlines, and see in 15 minutes what is resonated with the readers that you speak to.

I've learnt the hard way. I used to always put in this background about how I met the source that I'm interviewing, it's like a press release. It's like a joke, like telling a joke backwards. Start with the punch line. Then you can fill in the complexion of the story, but get straight to the punch line first.

John: Yeah, cut to the chase scene in the movie type thing.

Cheryl: Yes.

John: What's in it for me? Everybody ... There's all kinds of studies on the quantity of this I'm going to use one, I don't know if it's true, but the average affluent person certainly entrepreneurs on average are very affluent, typically definition of affluent is a million more of financial assets outside the business. They get hit up. It's not that you see all of them, but about 4,000 messages a day. You've got to ... Whatever you're trying to bring out, you've got to actually make that something that jumps out at them and inspires them to action to at least read this.

We're talking about creating content, and you're saying, Cheryl, there's just so much that knowledge and working with someone I love creating content and working collaboratively. I use a mind math to scope out what I'm looking to do and so on. We produce a lot of that. Let's say we've got the content, it could be an eBook, it could be an article, it could be a full-blown book, it could be a webinar presentation, all of those are content, a podcast. Then we've got that. Somehow you've helped the client break through. They're created some good content or let's say even it's called a, "Great content." How do they get it out, and so that it inspires clients, it engages them?

Cheryl: Well, I would like you bring that up because there are so many pes prospective clients who come to us and say, "Can you make me a national columnist?" That's it. I need to have that credibility on the headline of my LinkedIn profile and my resume. That's the ticket. It's anything, in fact one out of a million people maybe shouldn't be a national columnist, but there are some ways, your own blog that even easier than that LinkedIn has just opened its platform so that fairly well anybody could write a full length post.

If you're good at networking, and you've got a decent following on your LinkedIn profile, try some great columns there. If they're mediocre, not so good, but if you write something good ... Someone wrote his first column last week and 2,500 people viewed it. A lot of them responded, first time out the gate, you wouldn't get that even as a national columnist and these were all people aligned with him, who know him. It's something that will directly build his business that fast. Your local newspapers, what are the publications that the people you know and speak to will read, get there, don't think about a national masthead as the first step out the gate.

John: No, I want to go to the LinkedIn. I was just talking with Ted who wrote the book, I'm having a mental block on his last name now, *The Ultimate Guide To LinkedIn*, and I talked to him about a week ago, and he was telling me about the new posting and he was just shocked that the response they are testing among the lot of his clients, this is ... It's not likely, I have to spend a ton of money, getting our word out, wherein the past it would be huge expense to get it and have it read by 2000 people that you want, that you connect that part of network, LinkedIn is making a basically free, you can create the content, you can hit it couple of buttons it goes out.

Cheryl: Right.

John: The same, you have local and one other things that I think, I have seen that is so valuable is this whole concept with the internet now, where in the past I use, yourself Cheryl you write for Forbes, I write for The Huffington Post and the problem with Forbes is the magazine only thick and Huffington Post, there is no thickness, there is no ... It's all digital. I remember meeting with Arianna Huffington I have been with her a couple of times and scale is not an issue, if you got something value, they are going to put it in, they are going to measure how the responsiveness and put it out and the same with Forbes any more. That opens the door tremendously with all these different platforms, not only we can create our own platform, but we can work and leverage iTunes here on a podcast.

Cheryl: Or worst, you can be a guest poster, maybe you got a guest editorial, you are not up to something every week, but just be a guest or have a story that you work collaboratively with an author on and can be well ahead, thus can be great opportunities.

John: What do you see on, I might go with like local TV and so on, what's been your experience in working with clients, does that perceived as valuable and today's world or local radio kind of that use to be the main stay, the local TV, radio and if didn't, you start local and then build to national used to be the methodology.

Cheryl: It could be highly useful and in fact it could be more useful than you might think but there are a couple of caveats. First off, people tend to think well I will start local like it's a

smaller thing, you may be surprised if you put out a great story locally, AP or someone will pick it up considerate it national or even global, even if you are doing it locally. Now, if you serve a local audience of customers highly beneficial now you are more targeted than before, that's a great thing to do. For example, if your goal of goals was to appear on CNN as an expert source, they are not going to consider you, if they can't see somewhere you have been on broadcast before, what if you freeze up like a deer in the headlights.

They need some kind of assurance, that you are going to be an interesting guest, when you get there, so appearing locally can be highly beneficial that way, that segment is going to going to live on line, you can show it, someone can show it or its even findable as a video result, so consider that. Then the things that you write for the local newspaper or you get covered in a local newspaper, I have seen plenty of national global stories, start that way.

John: One of the things that I use to, I did ... Let's say would be in the early 90s I wrote some books and I did the local than national and did all the major New York shows and so on. It was a great experience. I hadn't really thought about the backend. I am going to come to that, okay you are on all the shows, so what, your parents are proud of you. That type of thing. We are creating content. We're getting out there. The opportunity to get out there has never been better. Local shows, particularly when you TV putting a link on your website, the credibility is way better than it should be. Then if you want to go national, nobody is going to let you on. I did some ... I think I did North Dakota one time, my first book before I did all ... There were multiple CNN channels, I was doing in a day and some of the ABC and NBC affiliates in New York. I had to go through a whole ringer, to get there and its.

Cheryl: I bet, it was worth it, I bet it was well worth it.

John: I would say that, there was one part it was worth it but the return on investment wasn't as high as it should have been and the reason for that was, we hadn't thought out, "Okay, what are we going to do with this publicity? What's the call to action?" I think you create content, you get it out there, one of the things entrepreneurs go through that aren't clear on what they are going to inspire people to action. I am not talking about where you really not giving away freely you are kind of masking it as an infomercial or on the whole piece. I think that doesn't work, you got to have a clear path of what you are looking to accomplish or the PR doesn't get the full value. Cheryl, I mean you can invest a lot of time, energy and money on PR and you can great content, you can get it out there but how do you realize that full value?

Cheryl: Well this is a whole science called content marketing it's a bigger deal than ever before, 71% of marketing teams are spending more this year than they did last, 71% spent more before the year prior as well. It is a big, big area that if you create good thought leadership material, make it true to its purpose, don't try to self-promote give it to that team.

Now, they've got credible and authoritative material to work with that you can put it into a newsletter that you can share in ways that now engage people. That can now lead them towards an invention or a call to action that has metrics behind it and as a way to get the full value, not by trying to stretch your thought leadership material and your self-promotion. Then you failed on all fronts. Let every form of communication be authentic as to what it says that it is, to do its job well.

John: I totally agree, we do a lot of content here and we use marketing automation, we make it available and we do each quarter a minimum of one research project and it goes out, there is no promotional things at all, however it start the conversation, we also do webinars on those, we do videos and again marketing is so much about just starting a conversation and what you want to do is track those people who are the right perspective clients that you can serve well to you, I mean that's why I love content marketing.

We are in that 71% every year, we raise the budget and it's just such a big part. Where do you see the people who want to start this content marketing, so they are creating content, they are getting it out there, they are inspiring people to action, where do you see the opportunity to kind of accelerate it even more.

Cheryl: Well, I think two things; one of them would be start a newsletter and email newsletter and make it fun, make it informational consider that maybe more than half of your audience is on a mobile device. They are not going to wait through deep material but they love to be channelized by, I'd call it, "Tasty tit-bits." It doesn't have to be articulated by you. Maybe the first up is by you, but if you are providing value and something interesting even a little bit fun and entertaining that's great.

Then the final thing in that newsletter maybe every other week could be just an invitation or call to action maybe offering eBook that people can download if they want. That is a great thing, that's directly measurable and takes most people's content, strategies to another level right there but another is the concept of employee engagement. I am betting you are familiar with this concept.

John: I am executing a lot of the things that you are saying and the reason is they work and with today's technology you can track everything so it's no longer wishful thinking but go on, this is good.

Cheryl: You were into this before there was a name for it, you just thought you know I got all of these people on my team, why not uplift them too, why got get us all working together. There are solid metrics that show. If you create this kind of a program and people tend to be afraid of it. They are afraid if I let employee speak on my behalf. What if they mess up or give

them some guidelines, give them some material allow them to offer themselves but give them guidelines to do within.

These days your personal brand and your business brands are the same thing, people can be invited in, there are few people who will say no just that's off limits, that's fine. Those who invited and want to participate it makes them experts as well, it gets them following, it shares your brand, everybody wins, in fact 19% increased revenue is the stats I have seen, if you participate in employee engagement direct revenue just as a result of the people already there and they were able to progress faster as well.

John: I like to take stress off me trying to create all of it and in many cases they are better than I am, they are a little more colorful, they have different angles but we are all aligned and that's where the real power is. Let me go to another segment here, Cheryl. This is the book of the day and you are coming out with a book at the time of this recording right after it's going to come out, so tell us a little bit about the book?

Cheryl: This is the Forbes book it is called Beyond Words, how to communicate like a champ in the digital age, February 25th looks to be the published date, that everything that I learned about thought leadership, I put into these books so for entrepreneurs, I write for the entrepreneurs channel. For business people, even for just getting by in the world, day to day, how can you make communications, your strategic weapon, you have been communicating since before you had language, how can you put it work for you and have it run your business better for you.

That's the book, it came about as a result of that most viral column that I had, that's kind of a freaky experience I will tell you when you got people that lining up your text and say, " Oh my gosh, turn on the radio, the host is reading your article right now, it's Rush Limbaugh, it's Glenn Beck, it's all of these things." One of my friends walked into a doctor's office in Atlanta and screamed, she saw my article printed out in the receptionist desk. Somebody had been reading it.

The source of that article, this is a great thing, she's a got a book too, it's actually becoming a best seller, *The 13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do*. Her name is Amy Morin. If you walk into any airport, Waldenbooks, there it is. It's the seventh highest selling. It's been a great thing. Yeah, you got all of these opportunities to go to a level that you never had before and it's all communication, how do you it?

John: Well, that's going to be a great book and as always aesnation.com, we have all the show notes, the transcript and we have the links, so that you can go ahead and get the book, we go to the next segment. This is the app of the day on your smartphone as a fellow

entrepreneur, how do you ... What would you recommend other entrepreneurs consider adding to their phone?

Cheryl: My very favorite right now is the 5K Runner, one caveat, because everybody needs to get their health, they need to get their exercise in the matter where you are, you can do that, you got your music right there in your phone, I will say don't photo shop the ... Don't shop the music while you are running because I tricked, I crashed a couple of times, just because I was looking at my phone instead of my feet.

John: I am going to recommend that they just put the podcast on, they are usually long enough, it will be a good run, you get your 10, your 5K for sure, if you are really fast, you might get your 10K in, but.

Cheryl: That really works, the app will let you do that, you could be listening to a podcast or to music and it says, "Okay, now walk," it gives you instructions of what to do and it will just come over the program and give you that, you actually can listen to the podcast while you go for a run.

John: I will definitely download that and give it a try, I haven't heard of that one before. Let's go to the next segment.

This is resources and Cheryl I want to pull up your website and I know you are in the process of updating, we all are but you are closer than most of us here, but tell us a little bit about what's on the website particularly The Thought Leadership book if you would.

Cheryl: Yes, there is an eBook that you can get right now from our website, that's snapconner.com but it is the definitive guide to thought leadership, what is thought leadership, what isn't thought leadership, what are the ways to do it, what are the things to watch out for, that could trip you up and then what I like most some case studies of the actual companies who really accelerated their success through thought leadership and there are some good ones, so I recommend everybody it's a short read, but pull that down for free, take a look at that, you probably find something good.

John: Well, I will tell you that you will find something good because I did download and that's when I reached out to you, Cheryl because I was just ... It was like "Wow, kindred spirit here and communicating," and I hadn't seen anybody that was executing as well as you are for their clients so I mean it was some great stuff. Let me go to ... Also you had, I am going to put up on the screen, Cheryl, one of the resources you are offering our viewers and listeners is prscorecard.com, tell us ... I just put it up on the screen, what's here?

Cheryl: This is a tool that we have still in beta. Forgive us, if it doesn't work flawlessly, but you could learn quite a bit from that. It's free. By answering a couple of questions, you can have this tool come back and assign you a score that tells you how your PR is doing. It divides things into six categories, which is pretty instrumental I think. You're do press releases, are you close to media, do you blog? Those are easy things that everybody could do and everybody could control.

Then what comes back to you from the internet would be brand inventions or reputation ... When the core fundamental thing is do you have a strategy, is there a core message behind the work that you do, think that through before you start to go out to all of these mechanisms that if you did only that, you would be only 95% ahead of the rest of the world.

John: This is why we are doing, this podcast, so that you can accelerate your success you can have the strategic weapon that you can go. I would encourage you to really download the eBook, use the PR Scorecard. These are very powerful tools. Let me go to the last segment here and this is key takeaways. Number one is really position yourself as a thought leader. Today the world, there is so much noise out there and whatever industry you are in, you've got to rise above the noise, you've got to be ... Kind of two things; one, an authority that means you got to have expertise to bring. Second is, you also have to be a little bit of celebrity. In today's celebrity world, people want you to have somebody kind of implied endorsement by where you are being out there in the internet, no matter what channel. Second thing though is to give freely.

Cheryl talked this a lot, and it's ... When you try to really make it to your sales piece it doesn't work, or you want to put all kinds of link back that doesn't work, by giving and using some of the tracking software, the marketing automation, Eloqua and Marketo and Salesforce and so on, I mean we are getting a lot of technology, but there are so many different ways that you can do this that by giving freely you build these great relationship and engage. That's the third part; it's engaging your audience.

Our goal should be as entrepreneurs, is to inspire people to action. The way we do well is by creating tremendous value for our clients, by doing well, we get to do it extremely well. You can scale it up with today's technology. Cheryl, I want to thank you so much for sharing your insight and your proven success with our audience. I am going to encourage everybody out there to go out, your current clients, and all those future clients, who are going to reach by using this strategic weapon are counting on you.

A Second Opinion on Your Finances

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Founder and CEO
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